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Your Privilege Is Trending: Confronting Whiteness on Social Media

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Abstract
Social media activism provides an important space for dialogue and consciousness-raising. Racism, privilege, and inequalities have received considerable attention in social media discussions. #WhiteProverbs was one attempt to confront this issue, focusing particularly on White privilege. The tweets show how social media is a site where "serious games" are played, as agents are constrained by the "rules" but still able to make choices and push boundaries. This article explores the #WhiteProverbs tweets that came from Australian users to better understand how Australian social media users understand and confront whiteness. Through the use of humor, specifically irony and sarcasm, Twitter users identify a number of key ways that White privilege is reproduced, including justifications for racial inequality, questioning claims to racial differences, and constructing an exclusively White national identity.

Keywords
Aboriginal, Australia, privilege, race, social media, whiteness

Introduction

The Internet is not a value-neutral space. It comes laden with the baggage of cultural and social norms. As Jessie Daniels (2013) argues, this baggage includes race and racism. Racism is a form of symbolic violence which is prevalent on social media platforms, assisted by the ease of anonymity (Cleland, 2014; Daniels, 2013; Nakayama, 2017; Recuero, 2015). In addition to new forms of racism, the Internet offers new modes of challenging racism. Social media offer opportunities for discourse about such issues on a global scale. Social media platforms allow for citizen journalism of protests as they unfold, without the lag and editorializing of traditional media, as exemplified by #Ferguson and #BlackLivesMatter protests in the United States (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016) and during the #Egypt uprising (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012). Social media also provide a platform for users to have ongoing discussions that contribute to their sense of identity as members of a community (Florini, 2014). This is an important work that movements need to undertake, and social media allow for this collective identity-building to be more constant and widespread. In this way, social media users can develop and/or maintain a sense of themselves as an activist, part of a broader movement of like-minded people who are trying to change society (Petray, 2013).

In addition to using social media to converse with each other about collective identities, activists can explain the issues they face to outsiders. Social media allow "many people to tell their story as the story unfolded," enable real-time interactions and transcend the limitations of physical location (Berlatsky, 2015; see also Jackson, 2016; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015). The global conversation tagged #WhiteProverbs, which trended in the United States and Australia in early January 2014 (Meads, 2014), is one example of a serious, challenging topic that was confronted on social media. #WhiteProverbs satirically drew attention to racist and ethnocentric comments used to justify or mask White privilege. Beginning on 5 January 2014 with @Selintifada's tweet "It's not about black or white—#whiteproverbs," the hashtag trended globally and consisted of thousands of tweets from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and beyond.

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In this article, we look at the #WhiteProverbs meme[1] as an example of how social media users challenge racism. Racism and White privilege manifest differently depending on socio-historical contexts, yet most scholarship focuses on the United States. To add nuance to this field of research, we focus our analysis on Australian contributions to #WhiteProverbs. Although racism and White privilege are very serious issues, the tone of the hashtag was primarily sarcastic and ironic—it was a playful discussion of a very serious issue. The inclusion of the "context indicator" (Wright, 1978) #WhiteProverbs tells readers that the person tweeting was not expressing his or her own thoughts, but presenting a reverse discourse (Weaver, 2010). This is not to suggest that those involved in the conversation take the topic lightly. We use Sherry Ortner's (1996) concept of "serious games" to understand the way that activists use social media as a tool of agency. This article has three aims. First, we argue that social media allow for playfulness in the discussion of serious issues such as White privilege and racism. Second, we analyze the text of the tweets to better understand how White privilege is viewed by social media users in Australia. Finally, we discuss the importance of this kind of social media conversation for anti-racist social movements.

Whiteness and Privilege

Among racial categories, whiteness is often the invisible default (Case, 2012). It is considered normal and neutral, the yardstick against which other races are measured (Carr, 2016). In Australia, statistics and policy-discussions around race use the categories "Indigenous" (who make up 3% of the population according to Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2016) and "non-Indigenous." This first of all homogenises Australia's First Nations peoples, who more accurately come from two distinct groups: Aboriginal peoples, who occupied the mainland of Australia prior to European invasion, and Torres Strait Islander peoples, traditional owners of the islands and surrounding sea between the north of Queensland and Papua New Guinea. Within these two broad categories there are more than 500 nations (Australian Government, n.d.). Both groups are also often referred to (and self-identify) as "black," though skin colour does not always reveal Indigeneity in Australia (Paradies, 2006). The Indigenous/non-Indigenous binary also suggests that Indigeneity is a race, and white people are thus race-less. This binary risks ignoring other non-white Australians, such as migrants and their descendants. Almost half of Australians were either born overseas (27%) or have at least one parent who was (20%) (ABS, 2013). In the mid-20th Century, migration from southern and eastern Europe was prevalent; this shifted in the 1970s as migration from Southeast Asia became more common (ABS, 2013). Despite this multicultural history, the "Aussie" identity typically refers to those with white skin from Anglo backgrounds (cf Goggin, 2008; Heiss, 2012; Maddison, 2011). Moreover, even those who do not fit into this narrow definition at times "willingly and unwillingly, knowingly and unknowingly, participate in the racialized social structure that positions them as 'White' and accordingly grants them the privileges associated with the dominant Australian culture" vis a vis Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia (Kowal, 2011, pp. 327-328; see also Maddison, 2011; Perera, 2005).

Throughout this article, we use the term "White people" rather than "mainstream Australians" or "non-Indigenous people" because, despite the advantages that sometimes are granted to anyone who migrated to Australia in the 229 years since colonization, whiteness is still largely an exclusive category. People from non-Anglo/European backgrounds are subject to racism, and their contributions to #WhiteProverbs illustrate their perceptions of that racism. Where the White proverb applies to a range of racial groups, we use the collective "non-White people." This is an imperfect solution to a highly complex issue; we do not seek to homogenize all non-White people but recognize that this terminology does. Primarily, though, our focus is on the unique experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The field of critical whiteness studies has attempted to make visible the practices and effects of whiteness. As a practice, "whiteness involves the marginalisation, discrimination and oppression of non-white groups and individuals and the privileging of white groups and individuals" (Gunstone, 2009, p. 1). White privilege is distinct from institutional racism and overt discrimination, although both these forms of inequality are underpinned by privilege (Pulido, 2000, p. 536). More specifically, White privilege "refers to the hegemonic structures, practices, and ideologies that reproduce whites' privileged status" (Pulido, 2000, p. 537). Sullivan (2006, p. 2) refers to whiteness as an "environmentally constituted habit" that constitutes one's very being. Furthermore, Pulido (2000, p. 536) argues that White privilege may be unintentional, but because White people are unaware of their privilege—since it has been made invisible—and because their privilege leads to the marginalization of non-White people, the outcomes are the same as intentional racism. This privilege allows for the perpetuation of institutionalized racism and overt discrimination that is used to maintain the power of White people, and it furthers the stark inequalities that persist between White and non-White people around the world.

Challenging White privilege is difficult to do. It can be "deeply unsettling" for White people to identify their own privilege and the benefits they have accrued at the expense of non-White people (Walter, Taylor, & Habibis, 2011, p. 7). It is common for those who point out White privilege—or even simply identify whiteness—to be branded "reverse racists," because society is now supposedly "color blind" or "post-racial" (Song, 2014). If one believes in color blindness, the act of identifying whiteness is problematic because it reinforces racial categories. However, color blind ideologies ignore non-White realities of ongoing racism. It is thus necessary for White people to acknowledge and confront their

privilege to truly move beyond White supremacy (Carr, 2016; Case, 2012). Doing so might enable White people to "perhaps use our privilege to make personal, community and systemic change" (Maddison, 2011, p. 114). Conversations on social media, like the #WhiteProverbs discussion on Twitter, are one way for activists to point out common instances of White privilege and supremacy and thus allow allies to do the work of identifying and confronting their own privilege—an important step in critical anti-racism (Carr, 2016). The public nature of social media conversations also open up the possibility that those outside of anti-racist networks might learn about White privilege.

Tweeting #WhiteProverbs

The Twitter meme #WhiteProverbs referred to statements used by White people to (usually unconsciously) justify their privilege. Omi and Winant (1994) suggest that micro-level "racial projects" are "maintained in part through everyday commonsense assumptions about racialized others" (Pérez, 2013, p. 499). Many contributions to the meme were accompanied by commentary explaining the contexts in which Twitter users heard these White proverbs. For example, @CultureIsLife tweeted, "'You're an Aboriginal teacher, yeah?' Yep. 'Do you need a degree for that?' #whiteproverbs Fellow teacher on my 1st day of teaching, 2006." The #WhiteProverbs meme consisted of tweets from primarily non-White users which illustrate their experiences of racism and perceptions of White privilege in Australia. The discussion of whiteness in this article, as in the meme, will necessarily rely on generalizations because we are discussing whiteness *as a category*. As @CultureIsLife points out in response to the critique that he is generalizing, "It's like arguing you can't say 'birds fly' because not all birds fly. #whiteproverbs isn't 'all', but it is 'only'." These generalizations will not apply to all White people, but all White people do benefit from White privilege.

#WhiteProverbs trended in Australia and the United States and attracted the attention of BBC Online magazine *#BBCTrending* (Meads, 2014). It was most popular on 6 January, and although it has remained in use continually since then, contributions are intermittent. Our research focuses on tweets from the initial use of the hashtag, posted between 5 and 12 January 2014. In addition to labeling actual White proverbs, the hashtag was used in tweets *about* the conversation. For example, those sharing links to the #BBCTrending article used #WhiteProverbs, as did those recommending the meme to friends and followers. Another group of tweets in the discussion are *responses* to #WhiteProverbs. These include those opposed to it, who suggested that White people were unfairly targeted by the meme. Many of the responses to #WhiteProverbs are themselves White proverbs, but they were posted unironically in genuine protest of perceived "reverse racism." As @brhaspati108 points out, "#WhiteProverbs render white privilege visible in more ways than one." However, this article focuses only on those tweets which meet the original intent of the hashtag, ironically stating something that White people say or do to uphold their privileged status.

Methods

This research stems from personal involvement in the hashtag. Petray followed, retweeted, and contributed several White proverbs. These included comments she has heard about Aboriginal peoples, as well as things people have said about her Native American ancestry. Furthermore, the research is part of a long-term ethnography of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activism on Twitter. This Twitter ethnography involves several years of following social media users who tweet about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice issues. Many of these Twitter users are involved with anti-racist activism more broadly, both online and offline. Rather than a systematic sample of all #WhiteProverbs tweets, the research is based on this qualitative approach. Tweets were collected for analysis from users who post about Indigeneity in Australia. This ethnography involves following Twitter users who participate in relevant hashtags (e.g., #Itriedtobeauthenticbut, see Sweet, Pearson, & Dudgeon, 2013) and those who interact with "central nodes" in Indigenous Twitter networks (like @IndigenousX, an account featuring a different Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Twitter user each week). In addition, a form of "snowball sampling" included users who were retweeted or replied to by those already part of the ethnography. Furthermore, we searched within Twitter's search function, reading both "Top" and "Live" posts, using the keywords #whiteproverbs Australia, #whiteproverbs Aboriginal, and #whiteproverbs @usernames of those who appeared in searches for the hashtag alone. This gave us 200 tweets from 37 users. Many contributions to the meme (though not all) were from users who self-identify as non-White. Location and racial or ethnic identities were gleaned from Twitter bios and the broader content of a users' Twitter stream. All Twitter users who are identified here agreed to be included, and in some cases challenged the analysis, which has helped to shape the arguments presented.

We expect that there are still tweets we have missed, and thus make no claims about statistical significance or generalizability. Instead, this is a qualitative study based on ethnographic methods. We have also collected some individual threads within the discussion, allowing us to explore the (sometimes lengthy) conversations which were sparked by some of the #WhiteProverbs tweets. All tweets that we include within this article include the original spelling, capitalization, syntax, and punctuation. To avoid interrupting the flow of the article, we have avoided the use of [sic] to highlight errors.

Playfully Confronting White Privilege on Social Media

We contend that social media activism is an important way for activists to practice agency as resistance to power and

domination. Sherry Ortner's (1996) concept of "serious games" derives from her work in feminist anthropology and builds on the practice theory of Giddens, Bourdieu, and Sahlins. This concept involves individuals as social actors, living within defined structures, whose actions also define and recreate these structures. Ortner (1996, p. 12) proposes

> a model of practice that embodies agency but does not begin with . . . the agent, actor, or individual . . . I find games to be the most broadly useful image. But because the idea of the game in English connotes something relatively light and playful, I modify the term: "Serious Games." The idea that the game is serious is meant to add into the equation the idea that power and inequality pervade the games of life in multiple ways.

Agency is restricted by structure; however, individuals are able, somewhat, to transcend or redefine the "rules of the game." Looking at social media as the game space, we know that social media were not designed specifically to provide a platform for discussing social issues—the name Twitter, according to a quote from one of its founders, means "a short burst of inconsequential information" (Sarno, 2009). Its "rules," for instance, Twitter's 140-character maximum, limit the depth of conversation that users can have. However, as we see in the #WhiteProverbs discussion, users find playful ways to hint at in-depth analysis of social issues within the constraints of the platform. Talle (2007, p. 351) explains this further, suggesting that "games both structure and are structured by people's actions." Agency, in serious games, is not individually willed, but rather the product of particular structural and cultural contexts (Jakimow, 2012; Ortner, 1996, 2006; Talle, 2007). This theory provides a framework for understanding the ways that forms of power, or structure, shape livelihoods and determine how individuals can maneuver within these constraints (Jakimow, 2012, p. 1275).

The theory of serious games is useful, too, because of the playfulness that does characterize social movements and social media. The best example of this is the hacktivist group Anonymous, who often act as an online "trickster" and "do it for the lulz" (Coleman, 2010; Stoehrel & Lindgren, 2014). Their tactics combine playfulness and more serious approaches like doxing, and they are often involved in heavy social and political issues, such as revealing cover-ups in the Steubenville rape case (Woods, 2014). Activists have long embraced humor as a tactic (Hiller, 1983). The prevalence of humorous Internet memes, like LOLcats, is another example of the playful nature of social media. Even when discussing very serious issues, it is not uncommon to see jokes, irony, and humor come up in responses. In the case of #WhiteProverbs, most tweets were presented as tongue-in-cheek; instead of calling out individual White people who need to "check their privilege" (a common phrase in online spaces to draw attention to privilege), #WhiteProverbs tweets allowed readers to laugh out loud (LOL) while their attention was drawn to the very important concept of White privilege. This is an example of how irony can disrupt power and intolerance, and correct naiveté (Jacobs & Smith, 1997). #WhiteProverbs tweets are satire, the playful distortion of reality that requires "cognitive effort" to make sense of the joke (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009, p. 216). The "humor" of #WhiteProverbs is an example of humor as a relief outlet, a liberating act, and a "reverse discourse" (Pérez, 2013, p. 481; Weaver, 2010) which is a form of agency as resistance (Ortner, 2006). In this article, we risk ruining the humor by explaining it and pointing out the serious games being played by Twitter users, which may "spoil its effect" (Wright, 1978, p. 524).

Australian Twitter users adopt sarcastic and ironic tones throughout their #WhiteProverbs tweets. But in some cases the humor is made more explicit. This can be done by tweeting in slang or to indicate an accent, like @ObscureSermons who tweets, "Get outta me country! #AussieBogan #whiteproverbs," affecting a "broad" accent most commonly associated with lower class White identities, in Australia referred to as "Bogans" (Gibson, 2013). This is an example of the serious game being played in a way that works within the confines of the structure. The largely textual nature of Twitter seemingly limits sarcasm, which is often conveyed through tone of voice and facial expressions, but the inclusion of #WhiteProverbs and additional commentary allows the textual limitations to be transcended. Humor is also made explicit by including emoticons, as in the following thread:

@Msloulou77:	Aboriginal people would've died out if not for Cook. #whiteproverbs
@BrigadierSlog:	@Msloulou77 And they never said "thanks" :-P
@ShannanJDodson:	Aren't we all have meant to have died out by now?! @Msloulou77
@Msloulou77:	@ShannanJDodson Yes, I think so. We're stubborn though;)'
@ShannanJDodson:	I guess the whole extinction theory is defunct cos we're still here baby!!! @Msloulou77

In this exchange, winking and playful faces are context-indicators which make clear the humor used to point out the very serious topic of Aboriginal erasure. The playfulness of this conversation is a good illustration that serious games are pervaded by power and inequality—in this case, the history of colonization and ongoing racism—and that "while there may be playfulness and pleasure in the process, the stakes of these games are often very high" (Ortner, 1996, p. 12).

The risk of irony is that the audience will not get the joke. Humor based on race "walks a fine line between challenging racial inequality and strengthening hegemonic notions of race" (Pérez, 2013, p. 482). Moreover, irony is relational and context-specific, and it relies as much on what is not said as what is (Jacobs & Smith, 1997). When ironically tweeting White beliefs about non-White people, there is a real risk that others will see the tweet, misunderstand the hashtag and the

irony, and focus instead on the stereotype. See, for example, the response to the initial White proverb in this thread:

@DrSRP1:	I work with Aboriginal people, they're amazing sources of information #whiteproverbs
@stevencumper:	I read that & thought: what if you replaced Aboriginal ppl w/ Gay ppl +was about to become enraged when I detected irony
@DrSRP1:	Mate, the #whiteproverbs is ironic, but "wisdoms" routinely expressed to Aboriginal people. Save your rage.

Many users did not detect the irony, however, and responded with comments like "not this white!," or accusing those tweeting #WhiteProverbs of "racial prejudice," "racism," or "reverse racism."[2] The ambiguity of ironic tweets like those in #WhiteProverbs lead the audience to see what they want to see, which may not align with the Twitter users' intentions (LaMarre et al., 2009).

Another method for pointing out the humor is by actually commenting on the White proverb in the tweet. @ObscureSermon' inclusion of #AussieBogan is one such example of this "commentary hashtag" (Shapp, 2014). For lengthier responses to the White proverbs, jokes and hashtags were too limiting. For example, @CultureIsLife responds to two proverbs:

@CultureIsLife:	"But it was 200 years ago!" #whiteproverbs 1. Jesus. 2. The Universe "was" 13.8 billion years ago? No, it started then. Hasn't finished yet.
@CultureIsLife:	"We gave you the right to "x"#whiteproverbs—being forced to stop denying ppl rights is not quite the same thing as "giving" ppl rights

These quite extensive commentaries on the proverbs indicate the seriousness of the game, despite the overall playfulness of the meme. This reduces some of the risk of irony that the audience will not understand, although in doing so it reduces the humor and makes the discussion heavier (Jacobs & Smith, 1997, p. 74). Other Twitter users point out their own sarcasm, like the following commentaries:

@joolapalooza:	how aboriginal is he? #whiteproverbs or bullshit as I like to call it
@joolapalooza:	or Is he a real Aboriginal ? #whiteproverbs . . . Which I like to reply with "are you a real dickhead?"
@cuz888:	I couldn't care less if you were black, white or brindle #whiteproverbs Ps. Has anyone met a brindle person?

In these responses, we see explicit examples of the kind of reverse discourse that makes humor a liberating act for non-White people (Pérez, 2013; Weaver, 2010).

Whiteness in Australia

The tweets that we have collected and included in our analysis are illustrative of the nature of whiteness in Australia. A number of common themes arose, which we coded and grouped into three categories. The first, which makes up the vast majority of contributions to the meme, are explanations or justifications for White privilege. These include explicit things that people say to explain inequalities, as well as more ambiguous ways of justifying non-White disadvantage, such as assuming all Aboriginal people are the same. The second major theme in the Australian tweets is around authenticity and claims to culture. This is primarily focused on Indigenous people and includes attempts to "measure" the "level" of Aboriginality someone possesses and stereotypes about what an Aboriginal person "should" be. The third theme centers on the Australian national identity, from the erasure of Aboriginal people from Australia's history and culture, to nostalgia for the (imagined) past when Australia was "unified." We will now look at these three categories in more depth, allowing us to unpack how Twitter users characterize White privilege in Australia. This is useful in understanding how social media can be one space where the serious game of anti-racist work is played.

Justifications for White Privilege

The most common theme of White proverbs, justifications for White privilege, covers a broad landscape. For example, simple ignorance is one way that racism is perpetuated: "'What is NAIDOC Week[3]?' Seriously a white lady said this to me only last year #whiteproverbs" (@Worimi_). The response within the tweet indicates that this is not an exaggerated parody tweet. Comments like "Do you speak Aboriginal? #WhiteProverbs" (@FF_notes) or "So what country are Islamics from? #whiteproverbs" (@ObscureSermons) point to ignorance about diversity within non-White groups. There were around 250 distinct languages across Australia at the time of colonization, not a single "Aboriginal" language, and *practitioners* of Islam can come from any country; homogenization like this is illustrative of the ignorance which underlies many White proverbs.

Sometimes homogenization is framed positively, as with the "compliment" of exceptionalism. This is a "less extreme and more double-edged" manifestation of White privilege (Song, 2014, p. 115). Positive stereotypes were pointed out by @cuz888, who tweets "'They're all so naturally gifted' or 'It's because of their genetics' #whiteproverbs Ps. Because that's all it takes to be an elite athlete." The explanation given for the success of a perceived low-performing group is "their

genetics" rather than training and persistence. Furthermore, positive stereotypes are still stereotypes which assume homogeneity. They are no less harmful than negative stereotypes, like "I just don't get why Aboriginal people drink so much #whiteproverbs" (@ShannanJDodson).

A common topic of #WhiteProverbs was that non-White people, especially Aboriginal people, earn substantial benefits by virtue of their race, such as "He only claimed to be aboriginal once he knew he'd get some cash for it #whiteproverbs" (@luke_ablett). The suggestion that Aboriginal people exploit benefits has two key implications: first, that individuals who succeed have not really earned it and, second, that White people are disadvantaged due to lack of access to these benefits. @jesstap tweets the following example of assumptions that Aboriginal people do not need to work as hard to get ahead in employment or education: " . . . So did they let you into your degree because you're Aboriginal? #whiteproverbs."

"Good intentions" are often used by White people to excuse problematic behavior. Lack of intent is also used to claim that problematic behavior is not racist: "'It's not racist if there's no intent. Quit being a victim'. #whiteproverbs" (@azlanpetra). Scholarly understandings of racism, though, do not require intent: "Racism is often habitual, unintentional, commonplace, polite, implicit and well meaning" (Desmond & Emirbayer, 2009, p. 343). Refusing to acknowledge racism makes it impossible to confront. Mirroring tweets from users around the world, a common White proverb in Australia is "I'm not racist, some of my best friends are aboriginal #whiteproverbs" (@luke_ablett), or references to non-White family members or loved ones suggest that White people think that racism is experienced only at the interpersonal level as discrimination and segregation. The "forceful denial" of structural racism as demonstrated by these White proverbs allows White supremacy to persist (Cabrera, 2014, p. 31).

Racism is also excused by blaming "political correctness" or even claiming "reverse racism," for example, "what I said wasn't racist, stop being so PC, you're just trying to take away my free speech #whiteproverbs" (@IndigenousX). The accusation of reverse racism is leveled at programs targeting non-White disadvantage: "You want to talk about racism, well Abstudy[4] is racist! Why can't my kids get it?? #WhiteProverbs" (@FF_notes). It is also used to shut down conversations about White privilege, racism, and inequality like the #WhiteProverbs discussion: "'Check my privilege? Stop trying to silence me!' #whiteproverbs" (@LanaDelNeigh_). Reverse racism rests on White people's belief that they are victimized by decreases in racial discrimination (Norton & Sommers, 2011) and the assumption of "racial equivalence" despite "very different motivations, histories, and social experiences" (Song, 2014, p. 120). Cries of reverse racism are a form of defensiveness that arises from conversations about racism, but "our defensiveness gets in the way of the kinds of conversations we most need to be having" (Maddison, 2011, p. 108). This illustrates another interesting dynamic that the serious games theory allows us to explore: the interplay between multiple agents (Ortner, 1996). By pointing out the justifications used for ongoing White supremacy and claims of reverse racism, participants in the #WhiteProverbs discussion are also pointing out the attempts by White people to keep the rules of the game working in their favor.

Authenticity, Culture, and Identity

The Australian contributions to the #WhiteProverbs discussion resist the rules of the game by pointing them out. For example, rules about who is defined as "Aboriginal" have been made by White people since colonization, first relying on "blood quantum." While the current three-part definition—descent, identity, and acceptance by a community (Gardiner-Garden, 2003)—is more nuanced, the rules of the game are still defined by White people. Some #WhiteProverbs contributions pointed out one result of this, which is ongoing questions about authenticity. This can be directed at individuals: "'Yeah, but you're not black black/proper black/Aboriginal/a real Aborigine' #whiteproverbs" (@jesstap). It can be related to someone having mixed heritage: "Why do you say you're Aboriginal when you're Mum is white? #whiteproverbs" (@ShannanJDodson). It can be caused by beliefs that culture is static, and that certain practices are essential to Aboriginality, such as playing a didgeridoo (@DrSRP1) or being "initiated" (@jesstap). By denying contemporary and urban Aboriginal people a unique cultural identity, White people maintain ideologies of color blindness. Assuming that Aboriginal people are not different to White people because they are not "authentic" denies the need to change the rules of the game, for example, by recognizing their rights as the First Nations peoples of this continent (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014).

Related to the questioning of authenticity, White people often interrogate non-White people about their skin color and about the "amount" of a certain race that they "possess." A non-White appearance often attracts questions like "'Where are you from? No, I mean *originally*' #whiteproverbs" (@LanaDelNeigh_), "well where are your *parents* from? #whiteproverbs" (@jesstap), or "So when did u come to Australia? (Said v. slowly & loudly) My answer: I was born here. (said in my strongest Aussie accent) #whiteproverbs" (@donayrials). The doubt comes from an expectation that Australian equals whiteness and that someone who is not White does not "look Australian" (@KatThornley76). This White proverb came up often and was tweeted by users around the world and is not unique to Australian whiteness. The reverse is also true: if one does not look "dark" enough, there are White proverbs to question their claims to being non-White. Both @ShannanJDodson and @VictoriaGrieves separately tweeted the White proverb "you don't LOOK Aboriginal," with the same emphasis on LOOK. @nakkiahlui and @ShannanJDodson both tweeted White proverbs about how they "aren't dark." Australian whiteness relies on

the contradictory belief that to be Australian one must look White, but that looking too White calls into question one's claim to non-White status. As Anita Heiss (2012, p. 124) observes, "Australians are very good at one minute giving someone an identity and the next minute taking it away." Again, this is because the rules of the game are determined by the structures which give power to whiteness, and Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and other non-White Australians have little say in setting those rules.

Australia's National Identity

As the above White proverbs regarding where someone is "really from" indicate, being Australian is synonymous with being White. This belief is upheld by a sense of Australian history as racially pure, simultaneously erasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the national history and ignoring the important role that non-White migrants played in nation building (see Ganter, 2006). The erasure of Aboriginal people is supported by stories like "#whiteproverbs Truginini[5] was the last Aboriginal Tasmanian. One of my all time favourites" (@jody_currie), implying that Aboriginal people have been effectively wiped from Australian history. Other White proverbs attempt to excuse the violent history of Australia: "People have been invading and colonizing for 'millions' of years, it's just human nature. #whiteproverbs" (@DrSRP1). Alternatively, they suggest that Australia is "not that racist" because "some European countries are far worse" (@azlanpetra) or because of "how many immigrants 'we' have let in" (@DunneBreen).

More often, though, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander erasure comes implicitly through suggestions that Australia was "discovered" by James Cook in 1788 (@LanaDelNeigh_; @nazeem_hussain). Aboriginal people are not just excluded from the past, however; they are also actively excluded from contemporary mainstream Australia. @jesstap points out this practice of whiteness which attempts to exclude Indigeneity: "(Re; reporting on Indigenous issues) 'Don't you guys have your own media?' #whiteproverbs Yes, but ATSI issues are Australian issues too." All this forgetting feeds a White Australian nostalgia for an imagined past which was free from the racial tensions of contemporary multiculturalism. "Our way of life" becomes something that needs to be "protect[ed]" (@nazeem_hussain). In fact, Australia has relied on diasporas, particularly from Asia, since the early years of colonization, despite attempts at purity through the "White Australia Policy" (Ganter, 2006).

In addition to the erasure of Aboriginal and other non-White people from Australia's national identity, whiteness in Australia ignores the way history shapes the rules of the game in contemporary Australia. In many of these cases, the "historical" event occurred within living memory, such as the practice of removing Aboriginal children from their families to be raised in homes or adopted by White families, which continued until the 1970s (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997) and carries on today as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are removed from their families at high rates under child safety policies (De Bortoli, Coles, & Dolan, 2015). Despite the fact that many people still reel from the effects, the history is written off as unimportant: "Why are you lot still carrying on? The stolen generation[6] was years ago #WhiteProverbs" (@janecat60). The exclusion of historical causes for current inequalities enables victim blaming, such as "Imprisonment rates directly reflect criminal behaviour, I don't see the issue? Maybe if they stopped committing crimes?! . . . #whiteproverbs" (@FF_notes). Denying ongoing inequality by focusing on individual blame is one key way that White people rig the game to maintain their privilege (Hastie & Rimmington, 2014).

Conclusion: #WhiteProverbs, Activism, and Serious Games

The discussion around #WhiteProverbs was not overtly a form of activism. It was not tied to a specific social movement, although (at least in Australia) many participants are involved in movements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander equality, refugee rights, and anti-racism more generally. But the conversation was general, rather than directed at any specific power-holders; it did not include suggestions for changing the power structures (aside from "checking your privilege"); and it did not explicitly mobilize social media users to participate in broader online or offline activism. On the surface, it seems like another example of online activism which is "quite *in*active in terms of sustained social change" (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016, p. 399). However, activism on Twitter is aggregative, an easily amplified social awareness stream (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015, p. 10; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2016, p. 400; Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012, p. 268; Petray, 2011; Sobré-Denton, 2016). Thus, it is important to see #WhiteProverbs as part of broader discussions of anti-racism and White privilege, building toward more explicit forms of resistance. Moreover, because the hashtag was identified as trending in the United States and Australia and was covered by mainstream media through #BBCTrending (Meads, 2014), the tweets were more visible to a wider audience (Florini, 2014). A hashtag is not a movement in itself, and some contributors to it may not consider themselves activists, but #WhiteProverbs contributes to a broader anti-racist movement.

#WhiteProverbs and the jokes, irony, and snark contained within its discussion illustrate a move away from respectability politics and toward activism which centers "the voices of those most often at the margins" (Jackson, 2016, p. 375). The use of humor is one way of pushing the boundaries of acceptable conversation while remaining within the rules of the game. While directly calling out inequality is often rejected by those with privilege (as the tweets above point out), jokes and satire are more acceptable means of drawing attention to marginalization (Jackson & Foucault Welles,

2015, p. 942). Moreover, humor is firmly embedded within the "rules" of social media, so #WhiteProverbs challenges the rules of racism and whiteness while simultaneously following the rules of social media.

This Twitter hashtag is an example of how social media can be used as one site in the play of serious games. The theory of serious games points out the multiplicity of games that are played in life (Ortner, 1996). Confronting White privilege on social media is just one of those games that anti-racist activists play. #WhiteProverbs tweets highlight the rules of whiteness and race as currently played in Australia, and by making these rules explicit begin to shift the game space, because social justice requires "White people to be understood as being fully part of the racial equation" (Carr, 2016, p. 54). Our article focused on tweets from Australia, many of which are White proverbs about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They demonstrate that whiteness maintains its dominant position in society by normalizing justifications for racism or inequality, by questioning the identities of non-White people, and by constructing a national identity which is exclusively White.

This research also shows how social media can contribute to important conversations and broader discussions. We can see that people not only use social media to post light, funny, and flippant things but also use it to discuss serious and complicated issues, such as White privilege and inequality. Flippant and serious issues are not mutually exclusive. Twitter is one site within the serious game of White privilege and inequality that enables people to intentionally and actively respond to this oppression. Serious games "must be played with intensity and sometimes deadly earnestness" (Ortner, 1996, p. 12), but this intensity can take the form of sarcasm and irony. In this way, agents can push the boundaries of the game without breaking the rules too egregiously.

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Data

The tweets collected for this research are available in JCU's research data repository and can be requested via http://jcu.me/theresa.petray.

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Notes

1. #WhiteProverbs is an example of a hashtag meme—a participatory idea that circulates and replicates via social media (Shapp, 2014). Including the hashtag labels the tweet as a contribution to the meme.
2. We have anonymized these tweets because they are so common and it seems unproductive to single out any single bad responses to the hashtag.
3. NAIDOC Week is a celebration held since 1955 across Australia to mark the "history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples" (www.naidoc.org.au). Activities vary in different cities and towns, but usually include awards ceremonies, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag raisings, and marches.
4. Abstudy is a welfare payment targeted at Aboriginal students. The payment rates are identical to those of Austudy, the welfare payments for all Australian students (www.humanservices.gov.au).
5. Truganini was a Palawa woman from Tasmania who died in 1876 and is popularly thought to be the "last" Aboriginal Tasmanian. In fact, there were other survivors of the attempted genocide in Tasmania, and their descendants still identify as Palawa people (Perera, 1996). This popular belief harkens back to the idea of blood quantum as a proxy for identity.
6. Between 1900 and 1970, between 10% and 35% of Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families under Protection and then Assimilation policies. They are now referred to as the Stolen Generations (Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997).

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