



## Semiotics of Transgression: Authentication and Denaturalization in Youth Language

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**ABSTRACT.** High school students often use language in creative and satirical ways that shape their identity and group belonging. Drawing on Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) work on language and identity, I ask what youth language scholarship can teach about young people's understanding of identity, belonging and power. I review literature from the years 1989 to 2019 on youth language, asking two questions: How can youth linguistic practice authenticate dominant racial hierarchies? How can these same practices denaturalize social identities and racist hierarchies? In the conclusion, I apply these concepts to the current political moment to consider how authentication and denaturalization help us understand and resist white youth's engagement with white identity politics in social media.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Les jeunes étudiants utilisent souvent un langage créatif et satirique, comme site de production d'identité et de solidarité. En s'appuyant sur les travaux de Bucholtz et Hall (2004) sur l'identité et le langage, notre recension examine la littérature sur le langage des jeunes entre 1989 à 2019. Nous posons deux questions : comment les pratiques langagières des jeunes, transgressives, multilingues, et satiriques, peuvent-elles authentifier les hiérarchies socioraciales ? Comment ces mêmes pratiques peuvent-elles dénaturiser ces hiérarchies et recréer des solidarités ? Dans la conclusion, nous appliquons ces concepts d'authentification et de dénaturalisation à une nouvelle question critique : soit comment comprendre et résister l'engagement des jeunes blancs dans les réseaux sociaux identitaires.

**Keywords:** *authentication; denaturalization; semiotics; youth language.*

### INTRODUCTION

With playful and transgressive language, young people challenge teacher authority, build friendships, construct themselves, but also tease and exclude others. This literature review explores transgressive and creative youth language practices. This heteroglossic, carnivalesque, multimodal, popular, playful, language is often understood in opposition to a dull classroom standard, the white, middle class language of academic meritocracy (Bucholtz, 2001, 2011; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa, 2016). Current research on student multilingualism and translanguaging (Blackledge & Creese 2009; Garcia & Wei, 2013) or transglossia (Dovchin, 2015; Dovchin, Pennycook & Sultana, 2017) highlights the liberating possibilities of youth language, the ways in which it can create new transnational identities or challenge social hierarchies (i.e., Rampton, 1999, 2006). However, much current research on creative, multimodal language ignores the abusive possibilities of transgressive, playful, or mock speech (Hill, 1998; Ronkin & Karn, 1999), especially online.



Youth language, especially those practices which are creative, playful, multilingual or transgressive, is too easily seen as challenging power as it challenges linguistic norms. However, transgressive language can repeat, as well as resist, social hierarchies. A critical review of the research on youth language can help us better understand how transgression can both challenge and perpetuate dominant ideologies of race and gender. Understanding this may be increasingly important with the rise of playful, provocative speech in the online alt-right.

Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou (2003) defined youth language as language spoken between late childhood and the early twenties, which is used to build identity and, in opposition to academic language, is socially oriented. It can be often creative, vernacular, or transgressive. Youth language play is contrasted with official, correct, standard, or classroom speech, and can involve slang (Bucholtz, 2011), stylization and mock speech (Bucholtz, 1999, 2011; Rampton, 2006), multilingualism (Garcia & Wei, 2013; Paris, 2007; Rampton, 1999), heteroglossia and popular culture (Blackledge & Creese, 2009) or multimodal and digital transglossic speech (Dovchin, 2015; Dovchin, Pennycook & Sultana, 2017). Youth creativity crosses linguistic boundaries. While it can challenge social norms, it can also reflect how young people understand and participate in social categories and hierarchies.

To understand social categories, I draw on Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) work on language and identity. Their work defined identity as produced through multiple *tactics of intersubjectivity*, active and political ways of constructing identity and difference. In particular I focus on two, which are further elaborated in the next section: *authentication* and *denaturalization*. Authentication involves practices that ascribe natural, essential, qualities to social categories and justify social hierarchies. For example, authentication might be calling white Protestants innately hard-working. Denaturalization, in contrast, refers to practices which challenge the idea that social categories are essential, innate, or natural. This might draw attention to the linguistic, political or social construction of categories like the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant).

In this critical review I apply Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) work on identity to the topic of creative youth language. I use tactics of intersubjectivity to analyse how creativity and transgression are alternately reproduced to resist racial hierarchy. I reviewed literature from 1989-2019 on youth language and with an eye for:

1. Practices which reproduce, authenticate or normalize dominant modes of social organization, in particular, the category of whiteness and white supremacy.
2. Practices which denaturalize or resist dominant modes of social organization, in particular, the category of whiteness and white supremacy.

Following Omi and Winant's racial formation (2004), whiteness was theorized as both a cultural representation and a logic of social organization. This review explores transgression in youth language to ask how youth boundary-pushing practices challenge



or repeat whiteness, dominant representations of racial groups and hierarchical modes of social organization.

To this end, I first situate this review of transgressive youth language within the broader literature on youth cultures and identity. Then, I elaborate the concepts of authentication and denaturalization and the broader analytical framework of Bucholtz and Hall (2004). Next, I explore how these concepts are shown in literature on youth language, first how creative practices reproduce or authenticate social difference, and then how these practices challenge or denaturalize these categories and hierarchies. Finally, I look at how these concepts of youth identity and language appear in literature on digital media. I conclude with a call to address critical gaps in the study of language play, media, and identity—especially the language of white identity politics.

### **TRANSGRESSIVE LANGUAGE, YOUTH CULTURES, AND IDENTITY**

Literature on transgressive language and youth culture has emphasized how young people create identities often against socially powerful identities that are structured as unmarked norms. Scholars have understood linguistic practices as creating social groups or political and relational identities within semiotic systems that are structured by racialized oppositions (Bucholtz, 1999). Speakers utilize these practices to construct new group and ethnic identities (Rampton, 1999) or contest social identities ascribed by teachers and other linguistic gatekeepers (Rampton, 2006). To describe how such linguistic practices obscure or highlight the political nature of social categories, this review uses Bucholtz and Hall (2004)'s tactics of *authentication* and *denaturalization*. Authentication essentializes and repeats existing social categories, while denaturalization highlights their constructed or political nature.

Studies in youth language are informed by subcultural studies (Hall, 1981), the study of how young people learn their place in a social hierarchy. Related studies illustrate how youth style defines group belonging (Hebidge, 1979), resists power (Hall & Jefferson, 1983), and reproduces hierarchy (Wills, 1979). Studies of youth vernacular mainly focus on adolescent language play, especially that of high school students, although the studies may focus on older speakers using a language associated with their youth (e.g., Rampton, 2011). They most often draw on ethnographic studies of social divisions in high schools (Bucholtz, 2011; Eckert, 1989), racial identity formation (Bucholtz, 1999; Rampton, 1999) and on work that looks at agency and identity (Nygreen, 2013). Here I focus on language as youth vernacular which has been closely studied in connection to identity, belonging and social power. Language is a key site where racial hierarchies are reproduced because it reflects many other aspects of youth style and identity (Coupland, 2007), such as music (Alim, 2009), cinema (Shankar, 2008) and dress (Bucholtz, 2011; Eckert, 2000). Rather than attend to technical questions of language variation, this review uses work on language to interpret youth identity as a semiotic practice that creates belonging and social power.



## Semiotics of Identity

To understand youth language as a semiotics of belonging, I draw on Bucholtz and Hall (2004, 2005). Their sociocultural linguistic approach theorized identity as both semiotic product and social process. Their theory of language and identity has two key parts: *identity* and *interaction*. Identity is understood as four semiotic processes of identification: *practice*, or habitual social action; *performance*, or intentional social action; *indexicality*, language pointing to social types or identities; and *ideology*, language pointing to cultural beliefs and the production of difference. These four processes draw on Irvine and Gal's work (2000) on semiotics and linguistic production of sameness and difference. Interaction is more closely explored as *tactics of intersubjectivity*. Tactics of intersubjectivity show how the semiotic processes of identity relate to social categories, hierarchy and power.

Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) tactics are organized in three pairs, each of which work in tandem. The first, *adequation and distinction*, refers to the processes of establishing relations of similarity and difference. It asks how speakers align with identities or produce differences and what value those differences are assigned. This relates closely to the concept of markedness, how socially powerful identities become norms. The second pair, *authentication and denaturalization*, describes the process of ascribing realness or artificiality to identities. Denaturalization is the process by which speakers undo the apparent reality of social categories, showing that they are not necessarily timeless or inherently accurate (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). Authentication does the opposite, making social categories seem innate or inevitable. It relates closely to questions of essentialism and belonging as unequal social relations become justified in terms of innate or essential qualities of groups. The third pair, *authorization and illegitimation*, describes the function of establishing legitimacy and relates to questions of institutional power. It asks how institutions grant some identities and language practices legitimate status.

All semiotic processes of identity and tactics of intersubjectivity implicate social categories, social belonging and social power. These processes show that identity is not always constructed in relation to an other but that identity and difference are often organized in hierarchical systems of belonging and exclusion. The powerful identity is often the unmarked norm and difference is seen as deviance from that norm, positioning both languages and their speakers as deficient. Although all of these tactics work in tandem, this paper has a specific focus on authentication and denaturalization as centrally implicated in the reproduction of and challenge to social difference.

Authentication is the process by which we linguistically and stylistically claim the genuineness of our own identity or ascribe realness to another group. Authentication may make claims to the timeless, traditional, local roots of a current practice, positioning it in opposition to authoritative institutional language such as claims about the "authentic" peasant's patois (Woolard, 2016), rural speech of "real Americans" or "authentic" black vernacular as street speech. Authentication takes these discursively produced differences and verifies them as part of some pre-existing, essential social difference (Bucholtz &



Hall, 2004); for example, “women’s speech” showing our essential nature as caring or “authentic” black language affirming an identity as streetwise or delinquent.

Denaturalization asks how speakers activate or destabilize social categories. Speakers can activate denaturalization to question the naturalness of social difference with parodic and stylized performances that highlight the socially and linguistically constructed image of group character, such as Slobe’s *Mock White Girl* (2016). Speakers can also undo social categories via denaturalization through hybrid languages and identities that call into question the essential nature of any group, as in Bailey’s (2000) work on how Dominican students’ fluid racial identities undermine American racial essentialism.

## **TRANSGRESSIVE LANGUAGE, AUTHENTICATION, AND DENATURALIZATION**

### **Authentication**

Existing literature on language and social reproduction shows how youth practices may seem to be transgressive but, in some instances, reinscribe racial hierarchies through processes of authentication. Youth linguistic practices occur within institutions that authorize (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) linguistic forms associated with the white middle class, while illegitimizing vernacular language practices. Studies of social reproduction in education (Collins, 2009; Willis, 1977) and studies of African American English (Alim, 2009; Morgan, 2002, 2004) have looked closely at the opposition between authoritative and vernacular language. Although many white youth’s use of vernacular language seems to contest these linguistic norms, they may in fact be producing social difference and reproducing racialized hierarchy.

In *Learning to Labor*, a central study of British youth cultures, Willis (1977) showed how the ideal of authenticity itself can be linked to processes of social reproduction. Willis found youth cultural practice initially serving as resistance to authority but ultimately reproducing youth’s working-class status. These practices of working-class youth authenticity reproduced class status by leading them to choose factory employment over school. Conversely, the youth practices also reproduced racial divisions through performances of masculine authenticity as fights with migrant groups.

Later work by Bucholtz (1999, 2011) in American high schools showed how attempts to portray an “authentic” language of another group can also reinscribe social divisions and hierarchies. In *You da man* (1999), white use of African-American English (AAE) in “fight stories” reified ideologies of masculinity and positioned black masculinity as hyper-physical, hyper-violent and hyper-sexual. Here, a white youth’s use of what he sees as authentic language linked this language form to an imagined, essentialized and dangerous Other. His use of authenticating language iconized (Irvine & Gal, 2000) his imagined black interlocutor, thus strengthening social divisions and existing racial ideologies of blackness and maleness.





Chun (2004) made a similar point in the appropriation of AAE by Asian-American students. Although the Asian-American students she studied used AAE in situations that seemed initially to critique or to push up against white social norms, such as calling a teacher “whitey,” in closer observation it showed these students only used words that had previously been used by white students. Further analysis showed these students situating themselves in a hierarchy between white and black students. This use authenticated or naturalized a social hierarchy based on white/black oppositions whose boundaries had been decided by the dominant group.

Hill (1998) clearly demonstrated how playful language recreates a social hierarchy. Hill (1998) notes the deliberate inauthentic use of language to naturalize racial and ethnic hierarchies and produce desirable images of whiteness. Her description of *Mock Spanish* (Hill, 1998) described white use of Spanish in advertisements and film which repeats racializing notions of Spanish speakers as dumb and lazy while reproducing ideas of white speakers as casually cosmopolitan. In her example, saying “hasta la vista, baby” indexes both casual bilingualism for the white speaker and portrays the Spanish speaker as a deadbeat. This mock language occurs both in speakers’ invocations of popular culture as well as media such as advertising and film. The use of Mock Spanish indirectly confirms the naturalness of English and the whiteness of public space.

Building on Hill’s work, Barrett (2006) took up Mock Spanish as used by white restaurant workers. The workers used Spanish to reproduce racial hierarchies while also producing an image of jovial and cool white workers. Distinct from Hill (1998), the workers utilized Mock Spanish in face-to-face interaction and not through media representation. Mock Spanish has become a way in which social dominance is reproduced. The poor quality of Mock Spanish impeded communication between managers and restaurant staff, which was blamed on the Spanish speaking employees. This deliberately inauthentic language paradoxically offered an image of “authentic Mexicanness” which paints Spanish speakers as lazy and stupid—enacting and naturalizing an inferior social position. Mock Spanish happens in school as well. Shankar (2008) noted that Desi students also use Mock Spanish in ways which repeat negative stereotypes of Mexicans as less academic, as less desirable immigrants than middle and upper class Desi.

Bucholtz’s (2011) work on slang and stylized language described how young white people both offer essentialized images of the Other and create images of whiteness in their linguistic and dress styles. Bucholtz (2011) noted youth cultural styles are not often explicitly racialized and that white youth claim colourblindness. However, youth stylistic choices are always made in reference to a black/white opposition and repeat that hierarchy and ideologies associated with it. In *White Kids* (2011), she described three groups of youth, nerds, cool girls, and hip hop boys whose use of language are all oriented around an opposition between AAE and Standard English. White hip hop fans consciously appropriated many features of AAE and slang, sometimes in ways which reified negative images of black manhood (Bucholtz, 1999). Their use of these terms from hip hop did not indicate mastery of AAE but did allow some terms to circulate throughout the school.



Bucholtz (2011) shows how “cool kids” appropriated some AAE terms as slang, but only after it was no longer associated with black youth. This process of “indexical bleaching” occurred through joking, mocking and the association of a term with white hip hop fans. Also, many students denied the association of their trendy slang with AAE. Nerd styles of super standard English and untrendy dress associate whiteness with academic success, as they distance themselves from slang used by “cool kids” but also from images of blackness as hip and sexual. Although students were choosing between nerdy or cool identities, these oppositions were clearly racialized around images of blackness as cool but also unacademic. This repeated common ideas about authentic blackness and affirmed a social hierarchy that positioned white students at the top of the academic ladder.

Authenticity itself has been linked to a rough, earthy, working class masculinity (Woolard, 2016), a transgressive identity that is opposed to a correct, academic or authoritative language. Authentic images of the Other employ similar oppositions between middle class white standards and the imagined Other to naturalize existing social hierarchies. They reify essential characteristics, as in Bucholtz’s (1999) portrayal of white students using AAE, and naturalize dominant racialized hierarchies, as in Chun (2004). Youth semiotic choices are made within this racialized hierarchy (Bucholtz, 2011). The literature on youth language surveyed here shows that white students’ choices often repeated these hierarchies and dominant racial ideologies of white youth. Kroskrity (2000) noted that language ideologies are enacted with varying degrees of awareness, and many students may not be explicitly aware that their local oppositions between nerd and cool kid recursively repeat (Irvine & Gal, 2000) larger political economic divisions of race and class. However, this does suggest that students consciously, linguistically perform whiteness and that an understanding of authentication may form a basis for a more critical understanding of race on their part.

The literature reviewed here suggested several ideologies of authenticity, language and race. First, literature suggests that there is a link between authenticity and working class whiteness (Willis, 1979; Woolard, 2016). Second, authentication is linked to white speakers' performance of other people’s speech. Both of these were processes of authentication, reifying group membership or division through both “authentic” language confirming group membership and through inauthentic (i.e., mock use) that mobilizes ideas of “authentic language” to index a stereotyped other. In all cases language is seen as emanating from, and depicting, real and pre-existing social identities. Some youth language play then confirms, justifies, or naturalizes these categories. In contrast, the work surveyed in the following section tries to undo these divisions of social power.

### **Denaturalization**

Recent research on creative youth language draws attention to practices that challenge racial hierarchies through processes of denaturalization. While much of the ways in which vernacular language and slang have been used by white students repeats the language



and racial ideologies of the school system, a great deal of work on youth language has shown its potential for denaturalizing and destabilizing existing social categories.

Early work on youth multilingualism envisioned it as creating new identities and social categories. Rampton (1995), in his work on *Multiethnic Urban Vernaculars*, observed the blending of multiple languages and creoles used by both students of colour and white students. He saw this demonstrated solidarity and theorized the formation of new, intra-class and inter-racial “new ethnicities” in a London working class neighborhood. Later work suggests the picture is more complex, creating both solidarities and superficial connections. Paris (2007) showed similar inter-racial solidarity as black students authenticated the use of AAE by some Latinx peers in the United States. Paris (2007) suggested the formation of inter-racial solidarities through language but stopped short of calling these friendships new ethnicities. Cutler (2015) offered two contrasting images of AAE use: the solidarity of relatively few white students who become deeply engaged in hip hop culture and others who perform a flamboyant but superficial use of the language.

Other work focussed not on vernacular language creating new social categories but on questioning the taken-for-granted nature or essentialism of existing ones. Some used mock language, not to create an image of an other, but to denaturalize social categories by calling attention to stereotypes. In Rampton (2001), mock language, called *Stylized Asian English*, was used by immigrant students as a way to navigate a racist school culture by calling attention to colonial-era stereotypes employed by white teachers. This use of stereotyped figures such as nodding and artificially thick accents with new teachers and in new spaces demonstrated student awareness of spatial and racial hierarchies. They also employed stereotypes to destabilize them. Chun's work on (2006) *Mock Asian English* also showed Asian speakers using mocking images of language to humourously question stereotyped images of Asian immigrants. Similarly, Jaspers (2011) noted the use of a *Mock Illegal* dialect by minority Dutch youth to both feign incompetence and highlight racism.

Further work using denaturalization focussed on how youth language challenges the homogenization of social identities. Mendoza-Denton (2011) showed how Spanish speakers engage in language play that establishes their identity as affiliated with Norteños or Sureños, gangs from Northern and Southern California. Their language practices call into question any simplistic association of Spanish language with homogenous ethno-racial identity. Similarly, Jaspers and Van Hoof (2015) noted a use of *Tussentaal*, interlanguage, to challenge class relationships between standardized and dialect speech. Shankar (2008), in her work with Desi teens, showed that their varied language practices undermine white listeners' image of homogenous south Asian Speech. The variation in their practices illustrates gender and class divisions within these groups, specifically, in their use of hyper-standard English and popular culture references. Perhaps more problematically, she showed middle class Desi teens using stereotyped Mock Spanish to call attention to teachers' racist erasure (Irvine & Gal, 2000) of difference between minority groups.





Other research focussed directly on how youth language practices attack racialized hierarchies. In Reyes (2011), Korean American students challenged implied racial hierarchies in everyday vocabularies. For example, the students used indexical links between blackness and dirt or violence even when the term was not used to describe a racial group. Students demonstrated a keen awareness not only of racial epithets but of the semiotic systems and hierarchical chains produced by racialized classroom discourse. Alim (2009) noted that there are instances, such as rap battles, where racial hierarchies are inverted so that particular youth language forms can produce black public spaces.

Last, some recent literature has focused on how youth linguistic play mocks white speech, subverting hierarchies and denaturalizing whiteness as an unmarked norm. Rosa (2016) described *Inverted Spanglish* in which Spanish speakers use a mock English (mis)pronunciation of Spanish words. This offers comic portrayals of whiteness but also inverts the dominant linguistic hierarchy, making Spanish the normative language. Tetreault's (2015) study of *TV Host Register* demonstrated how Maghrebi-French youth play at public ritual insults by impersonating a TV host speaking exaggerated standard French. This playful use of super-standard French reverses the relationship between standard and urban vernacular French and denaturalizes white speech and academic norms. Finally, Slobe (2016) has written about the use of Mock White Girl speech in social media. This includes finishing declarative sentences as questions, a high voice with lots of affect and other stereotyped images of white female speech. Though reproducing gendered norms, Mock White Girl also denaturalized ideas of white speech as correct. This is one of few studies that also demonstrates white students mocking whiteness. *Inverted Spanglish*, *TV Host Register*, and *Mock White Girl* all denaturalize white, middle class, academic speech norms, transforming colour-blind correct speech into speech associated with a particular social identity—and questioning that identity's place at the apex of social hierarchy.

Much contemporary research on transgressive youth language has shown students of colour making and unmaking whiteness in the classroom. Not only does work in language and identity suggest white students have a deeper knowledge about race than is often acknowledged in the education literature, it suggests that youth of colour are engaging in practices of denaturalization to form solidarities not just hierarchies. Their language is shown to produce practices of cross-racial solidarity, as in Rampton (1995), self mocking that highlights stereotyped ideas of "authentic" others (Rampton 2006), dissolving essentialist notions of social groups (Mendoza-Denton, 2011; Shankar, 2008), destabilizing class hierarchies (Jaspers & Van Hoof, 2015), questioning racialized hierarchies (Reyes 2011) and the normativity of whiteness (Alim, 2009; Rosa, 2016; Tetreault, 2015). Humour and language play can be important resources for students as they understand how stereotypes are constructed and social difference is naturalized.

Students' linguistic play offers perspectives on self and other that may be used in education. Cabrera and Corces Zimmerman (2017) challenge ideas that white students are ignorant or evasive in discussions of race by showing that—through their linguistic



play—white students engage in the construction and deconstruction of racial identities on a daily basis. In the final section of this review, I discuss the implications of a study of youth language and racial awareness for understanding and interrupting racist social media and white identity politics.

## **TRANSGRESSIVE YOUTH LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

In the following section, I apply these concepts of transgressive language as authentication and denaturalization to literature on social media. Earlier research on youth media had a techno-utopian ideal suggesting that digital and social media would equate to youth empowerment and the amplification of marginalized voices in the classroom (Jocson, 2008). This research tended to approach digital media as a denaturalizing power. With a perspective similar to dominant work on transgressive language, this strand of research linked social media to challenges to classroom authority, play, and freedom. With roots in critical pedagogy and cultural studies, much early work focussed on transgression: transgressive pedagogy as crossing borders between popular and official culture (Giroux, 2007), popular culture in the classroom as democratic education (Dolby, 2003), and culturally relevant practice that engaged student everyday lives to create a sense of belonging in the classroom (Chavez & Soep, 2005; Dimitriadis, 2001). Jocson (2008, 2013) developed an understanding of online spaces as sites for poetic creation, denaturalizing school hierarchies and creating spaces for voices of youth of colour.

Work focussing more specifically on language and media, such as Blackledge and Creese (2009), approached student citation of popular culture as heteroglossic, historically and politically situated multiple voices. They emphasize the transgressive carnivalesque as freedom and inversion of power. Building on this, Dovchin (2015) developed the concept of *transglossia*, the use of multiple codes and popular culture for transgressive purposes. This concept was at the centre of Dovchin's (2015) theorizing of how young women online challenged gender and linguistic norms. Dovchin, Pennycook, and Sultana (2017) have further theorized this transglossic perspective as a broader explanation for youth media that transgresses linguistic borders and social hierarchies. Androutsopoulos (2013) noted *YouTube* video use of dialects and participatory structure to destabilize linguistic hierarchies for German speakers. Mendoza-Denton (2017) used semiotic analysis to explore the way teens use visual and linguistic markers in *YouTube* videos to shape group identities as part of Norteño or Sureño gangs. Digital media was overwhelmingly seen as a space of belonging, one which had the potential to bring identity, belonging and solidarity to classrooms.

The current literature on social media and youth focusses on an image of academic, standardized language as hegemonic and authoritative (Silverstein, 1996). This is opposed to an image of transglossia (Dovchin, Pennycook & Sultana, 2017) that uses transgressive language, popular culture or multiple linguistic forms to challenge power (Blackledge & Creese, 2009; Dovchin, 2015; Martinez & Moralez, 2014; Rampton, 1999). Transgressive language, especially in the classroom, has been imagined to both break down and highlight the constructed nature of social power—as in the mocking rejection



of teacher authority. Yet a review of the literature on youth linguistic practice highlights how transgressive, playful and satirical speech can be used in both denaturalizing and authenticating ways, to build solidarity and hierarchy, and to reinforce group belonging and social difference. As Jaspers (2018) suggested, heteroglossia's valorization can be double-edged, both valuing student language and reinforcing dominant cultural norms. We cannot map a division between liberating and hierarchical language onto standardized and transgressive language. In the current political moment, more attention is needed to the ways in which transgressive language is used to reinvigorate regressive ideas and to reproduce hierarchy and difference. In particular, we need to examine how white youth are engaging in ironic, transgressive, sexual and sexist, identitarian and racist speech online.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Academics have focussed on the denaturalizing and solidarity-building potential of digital media in its ability to create new spaces of belonging. Yet while much research has focussed on a digital utopia, the online right has been appropriating these new spaces and transgressive language to build white identity. Research dating from 15 years ago already suggested that teens were engaging with online hate speech (Tynes, 2005). A more recent Pew survey suggested 89 percent of teens are online multiple times a day (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). And while the online right is not exclusively young people—as *Instagram* account names such as *generationz.rightwing* suggest—teens and young people use, and are targeted by, right wing accounts. Alt-right vlogger, *Blonde in the Belly of the Beast*, specifically mentions encouraging teen engagement with the far right in her video on the future of the movement. Neo-Nazis emphasize the provocative creativity, playfulness and fun of this movement to attract youth (Greene, 2019). In addition to *YouTube* and *Instagram*, gamers and gamer discussion boards also attract youth to these movements.

Research in media and language is beginning to explore the online right more closely, looking at their linguistic and visual identity practices. Ludemann (2018) explored the way users on the anonymous board *4chan* create identity through complex processes of double voicing and linguistic markers. New identities, solidarities and belonging can be created in novel ways through new internet platforms and affective language— both creative and deeply troubling. Central to the alt-right is the use of transgressive, affective, playful language which attracts new members (Greene, 2019) and differentiates this group from the dull “normies,” complacent “cucks,” ridiculous “social justice warriors,” and above all the wooden language of the politically correct. In this way it echoes earlier oppositions between playful transglossia and standard language. Often in these forums, online identity is created through the construction of damaging figures of alterity that deploy irony, profanity and provocation in authenticating ways. This creates identity— but by saying who does not belong.

Transgressive language is used in authenticating ways to reinscribe racial and gender hierarchies. Kosse (2018) explored how the overtly sexual language of *cuck* is used with



transgressive joy, to create white male space online, and to naturalize the place of white males atop a racial and gender hierarchy. Easter (2018) looked at how women's language online is mocked as long winded and dull, politically correct, as opposed to male humour. Massanari and Chess (2018) have shown how memes mocking the female *SJW* (i.e., Social Justice Warrior) use irony and humour to provocatively describe and denigrate feminists who challenge this hierarchy. Mock Arabic and Mock French in online forums are used to naturalize white identity and create belonging in online forums (Tebaldi, 2019). The same processes of authentication that were demonstrated in earlier literature on youth language, that is, using other people's language to create white identity and social hierarchy, may reappear online. These studies demonstrate that racializing language has long been intimately associated with youth identity creation, their sense of group membership and social hierarchy. Youth in these online spaces may be using transgressive language to shape white identity and to create group belonging, furthering their investment in dangerous ideologies and damaging practices. More research is needed that looks closely at youth language online and what that reveals about their changing understandings of identity in an age of white identity politics.

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