

**Racialized Policing in Winnipeg:
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Comments**

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Sociology

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Winnipeg, Manitoba

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“To all that judge in ignorance

Have any of you ever read the results of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry? If you have, do you understand those results, or do you need an adult to interpret them for you? Why not enlighten us with your wealth of education and tell us about all the steps taken by the police and justice departments to act on those recommendations.

You obviously think that you have what it takes to judge the actions of others based on simply reading a story. So then, as self proclaimed judges, what’s your opinion on the inequity surrounding the treatment of First Nation People within our justice system? What possible reason would a First Nation Youth have for fearing the police anyway? It’s not as though highly regarded police officers would display racist treatment such as driving him to the outskirts of town and allowing him to freeze to death, would they? The youth must have known that police don’t just shoot Aboriginal people for no reason; hell it’s been at least a couple of years since Dudley George and John Joseph Harper were shot right? Surely such barbaric and racist actions couldn’t happen here in Canada, in today’s enlightened age?

If you were to understand what it means to be raised in poverty, and grow up a First Nations Person, in a low socio economic neighbourhood, with limited resources and few prospects for a future, coupled with a police department and justice system that has openly displayed biases and racism in the past, your comments may warrant some credibility.”

Comment posted by VMeilleur on August 14th, 2008, 2:10 AM ET at:
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/story/2008/06/11/dumas-inquest.html?ref=rss>

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Abstract

The issue of 'race' and policing has generated considerable public controversy. I draw the work of Norman Fairclough in analyzing online public comments responding to three Winnipeg incidents from the summer of 2008: the detainment of Robert Wilson, the inquest into the death of Matthew Dumas and the taser death of Michael Langan. My main research questions are 1) what characterises these discourses? 2) what processes of social struggle are evident? and 3) what can this tell us about power relations and ideology in society? The analysis of 3342 comments demonstrates power dynamics in discursive struggles over the definition of the relationship between racialized group-members and the police. Specifically, a conservative discursive formation was found to have three interrelated 'stages': support for the police, denial of racism and mediating discourses of responsabilization/criminalization. The conclusion considers how a transformative discourse of racialized policing might mitigate prevailing justifications of racial privilege and inequality.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my colleagues and friends at the Department of Sociology, especially Dr. Rod Kueneman for your support and companionship, and to my thesis committee members Dr. Renate Eigenbrod and Dr. Andrew Woolford for your guidance. I also want to thank Amelia Curran for her work as a research assistant in coding the data, and the Manitoba Research Alliance, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the University of Manitoba and the Aboriginal Issues Press for funding my research. In addition, I have to recognize the good company of a young family of 4 red squirrels who occupied the courtyard outside of my office during the writing process. And thank you to my mother, Donnie, for everything that you do. Finally, there are no words to express the gratitude and respect that I have for my advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Comack—thank you, I am forever in your debt for the incredible experience that I have had as a student at the University of Manitoba.

Chapter One:

‘Race’ and Policing

The issue of ‘race’ and policing in Canada is one that has generated considerable public attention and controversy.¹ In Ontario, a heated debate around the practice of racial profiling— which occurs “when law enforcement or security officials, consciously or unconsciously, subject individuals at any location to heightened scrutiny based solely or in part on race, ethnicity, Aboriginality, place of origin, ancestry or religion, or on stereotypes associated with any of these factors” (Satzewich and Shaffir, 2009: 199-200)— emerged when the *Toronto Star* published several articles in 2002 that pointed to the overrepresentation of minority group members in arrest, ticketing, and charging practices in police data (Rankin et al. 2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2002d). In Saskatchewan, the freezing deaths of three Aboriginal men—Neil Stonechild, Rodney Naistus, and Lawrence Wegner—and the experience of Darrel Night in Saskatoon started a hurricane of controversy revolving around the issue of ‘Starlight Tours’—“the police practice of picking people up and taking them to some remote location and dropping them off, leaving them to find their own way home” (Comack 2012: 25)—and resulted in a major government inquiry into Stonechild’s death (Wright, 2004; Reber and Renaud, 2005). In British Columbia, the 1998 death of a Mi’kmaq man named Frank Joseph Paul after his

¹ I place ‘race’ in single quotations throughout this discussion as a reminder that ‘race’ is a social construction, although that is not to suggest that it does not have real, both symbolic and material, implications for us all. As human subjects with identities defined in multiple ways, we experience race, class and gender as social and personal realities.

unconscious body had been deposited in an alleyway by a police van driver prompted a public outcry that led to a commission of inquiry into his death (Davies 2008).

Manitoba has also seen its share of public attention and controversy with regard to the issue of 'race' and policing. Most notably, in 1988 the provincial government established the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (AJI) in response to two events: the 1971 murder of Helen Betty Osborne near The Pas; and the 1988 police shooting of J.J. Harper, executive director of the Island Lake Tribal Council, in Winnipeg. In their report, AJI Commissioners Alvin Hamilton and Murray Sinclair concluded that "The large number of complaints which we received points to a problem of considerable magnitude in how Aboriginal people are treated by police in Winnipeg" (Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991: 594).

While the AJI completed its work over two decades ago, the matter of 'race' and policing has not disappeared in Winnipeg. Indeed, tensions between members of racialized groups and the police appear to have intensified during the summer of 2008. On June 4th, a Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) officer handcuffed and forced Robert Wilson, an African-Canadian rapper known as Fresh I.E., into the back of a cruiser car after stopping him on suspicion of driving a stolen Chrysler 300. Wilson was subsequently proven to be the registered owner of the vehicle. Five days later, the inquest into the death of a young Aboriginal man, Matthew Dumas, began in a Winnipeg courtroom. Dumas was shot by a WPS officer in January of 2005 after being stopped by police during a sweep of his North End neighbourhood in search of a robbery suspect. On the afternoon of July 22nd Michael Langan, a 17-year-old Métis youth, was Tasered by an officer after he refused to drop the knife he was holding. Pursued as a suspect in a

recent car break-in, Langan became the youngest person in Canada to die as a result of Taser-ing. And in the early hours of August 3rd, police responded to a domestic disturbance call, resulting in an arrest. On leaving the residence they were met by a young Aboriginal man named Craig McDougall. An altercation between McDougall and a police officer ensued, and McDougall was shot and killed. All of these incidents garnered significant attention in the news media.

While government inquiries and academic research have addressed the intersection of ‘race’ and policing (see, for example: Comack, 2012; Tator and Henry, 2006; Smith, 2007; Tanovich, 2006; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2003; Wright, 2004; Ontario, 1995; and Hamilton and Sinclair, 1991), and academics have explored the ways in which racial bias pervades the media (Anderson and Robertson, 2011; Henry and Tator, 2002), the focus of this thesis research is not on the question of to what degree policing—or any other social institution—is ‘racist’; nor is it concerned with the media treatment of these cases. Instead, my interest is with what the online community has to say on the issue of ‘race’ and policing.

As the summer of 2008 progressed, a flurry of online news items reporting the events involving minority group members and the police emerged. Much of what was presented in these reports reflects the contested nature of policing in Winnipeg. Typical of the manner in which the media frames such events (see for example Kuypers, 2002; Reese et al., 2001), readers were presented with competing truth claims garnered from a number of sources, including the police, family members, Aboriginal spokespeople, and—in the case of Fresh IE—the person made the subject of police attention. As such, consumers of the media texts were left to interpret a mangle of narratives presented as

possible truths. In these terms, the symbolic representation of the events and their social contexts constitute a reality for those who did not actually witness the events themselves.

Many of the websites included space for readers to voice their reactions. Studying these online comments is one way to tap into public discourse as it exists ‘out there’ in the world. More specifically, analysis of these responses has the potential to reveal potentially widespread, common-sense understandings of the issue of ‘race’ and policing. Just as the media claims oppose one another and engage in a struggle over the definition of reality, claims made by members of the public about these events struggle in defining reality in online forums. The strategies used are diverse, ranging from championing the status-quo to a calling for a radical transformation of unequal social relations. Therefore, I look to the ‘discourses’—or the processes of social construction and representation—as they compete with one another in struggles over the definition of the relationship between racialized individuals and the police. Critically examining these discourses—the ways public commentaries construct the police, racialized groups and their members, and the nature of the relationship between them—can uncover subtleties in the dynamics of ‘race,’ racism, and racial privilege.

As such, my research is guided by three main questions: 1) *what does the discourse of ‘race’ and policing look like in online comments?* 2) *what processes of social struggle are evident in this discourse?* and 3) *what can these discourses tell us about power relations and ideology in society?* To address these questions, I draw upon the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2001; Van Dijk, 2003) to analyse 3,342 online comments that were posted on 45 web sources in relation to three of

the events that occurred during the summer of 2008: the detainment of Fresh IE; the inquest into the death of Matthew Dumas; and the Taser of Michael Langan.

Significance of the Study

This study has potential to contribute to the pursuit of social justice, specifically by offering an understanding of how social power can be resisted, and adding to scholarly knowledge about the social implications of the Internet. Findings from a report based on 2,614 interviews with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in 11 different Canadian cities indicate that a majority of Aboriginal people in Winnipeg agree that others behave in an unfair or negative way toward them (Environics Institute, 2010). This critical discourse analysis of online comments therefore contributes to the growing body of knowledge about the ways in which racialized oppression permeates society. In particular, the issue of how people understand various dimensions of oppression is a key aspect in the pursuit of social justice. The critical interrogation of how power ‘works’ in society is fundamental to moving towards a society characterized by greater equality. As this study interrogates power relations in society, it also points to avenues through which these relations can be challenged. And since power is a relation between a position of dominance and subordination, wherever there is power there is the potential for resistance. In the case of any social struggle, the existence of oppositional discourses and strategies to counter dominant discourses will hint at ways that broader dimensions of society can work towards incorporating transformative discourses.

Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Internet is a sphere in which important social processes take place (Bargh and McKenna, 2004; DiMaggio et al. 2001). Sociologists have recently taken to revamping theoretical paradigms to account for the

complexities of the cyber world and to keep pace with the social changes that follow technological advances (Cavanagh, 2007). In particular, research on how the Internet acts as a site for the propagation of social problems such as racism (Daniels, 2009; Akdeniz, 2009) has emerged, highlighting the need to look critically at the relationship between the social and the virtual.

Organization of the Thesis

The summer of 2008 was unique as a relatively short time span garnering considerable attention in the media concerning the intersections of ‘race’ and policing in Winnipeg. Notably, the news items covering the detainment of Fresh IE, the inquest into Matthew Dumas’s death, and the Tasing of Michael Lagen were presented in the standard, adversarial, two-sided journalistic style and typically framed as a debate over ‘race’ and policing. On the one hand, Fresh IE, family members of Lagen and Dumas, and Aboriginal leaders such as Manitoba Métis Federation president David Chartrand stand united in their allegations of racism by the police. On the other hand, quotes from official representatives of the Winnipeg Police Service are used to counter these claims. Readers of these news items are then presented with the opportunity to ‘weigh in’ on the debate. The online reporting of these incidents was accompanied by a vast accumulation of social commentary from members of the public.

In the next chapter, I outline the methodological and theoretical approaches that inform this investigation of online commentary. More specifically, I use Norman Fairclough’s (1992 and 1995) three-dimensional framework for analysing discourse and his conceptual model of discourse and power to assess how the discourses found in the online comments engage ‘in’ social struggles (2001). Discourse refers to language used to

assert a particular worldview; racialized discourse occurs when that worldview is premised on naturalized racial inequality. I use Elizabeth Comack's (2012) notion of "racialized policing" to refer to the role that police play in the reproduction of this inequality, which also draws attention to how policing serves as a framework through which racialized discourses engage with one another. In other words, the 'question' of police reproduction of racial inequality takes place on discursive terrain. Therefore, I am concerned with how a discourse of racialized policing might serve to legitimate an unequal social order through strategies that define the relationship between police and racialized people. My major task, then, is to make sense of the dialectical relations between the discursive practice of online discussions and the wider social practice of racialized policing. To do this, I frame the discourses evident in the online comments in terms of an ideological conflict between 'conservative' and 'radical' views. This conflict demonstrates what Fairclough refers to as the power 'in' discourse. To address the question of power 'behind' the discourse, or the symbolic or material advantages defended in discursive struggles, I develop a model of the conservative discursive formation to show how it preserves the status quo, and therefore the racial privilege within it.

The purpose of the next three chapters is to report on how the incidents themselves were presented in online sources and to interrogate the user-generated responses that followed. The discussion is organized by case and in chronological order. Each chapter begins with a summary of the incident under consideration, followed by a summary of the online comments. What I have tried to do through my coding procedure is to map the discourse and produce a model of how the dominant discourses found in the

online comments ‘cling together’ to advance a coherent version of reality—or what Fairclough, following Foucault, calls a “discursive formation.”

The main task of the project was to uncover the ‘text’; that is, how the police and the individual involved in each incident are constructed in the discourses. Of particular importance is how their relationship is understood as mediated by racialization and criminalization. Also of interest, however, is the ‘discourse practice’ or how the posters engage with one another in the forums. Here I looked at interactions between posters in two senses: how posters responded to each other within the context of the forum, and how the forum itself was constructed as having a generalized ‘voice.’ In these interactions, I found two main categories or ‘discursive formations’: “conservative” discourses that sought to maintain the status quo, and “radical” discourses calling for social transformation. Each of these positions is advanced by two distinct strategies: one where posters approve comments that are in line with their worldview; and another where posters oppose comments that do not align with their worldview. In the case of conservative interactions, I have called these *dominating* and *reinforcing discourses*, respectively, and *resisting* and *allying discourses* in the case of radical interactions.

In the final chapter, I show how the dominant conservative discourse is, and can be, challenged through oppositional discourses, and investigate the limitations of the radical discourses and possibilities of a transformative discourse of racialized policing.

Chapter Two

Critical Discourse Analysis in the Context of Racialized Policing

This project is an engagement with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a “type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Van Dijk, 2003: 352). The central concern of “power abuse, dominance and inequality” in this case relates to ‘racial’ inequality and policing as an institution, both of which are pressing and controversial issues in Winnipeg. Specifically, my work deals with how public commentaries on the Internet about the relationship between the police and ‘racial’ minorities reveal or evince wider discourses of social marginalization. The data used are user-generated content, or web material that is produced by the consumers of media texts online. Framing this empirical social product as ‘discourse’ to address the research questions—how is the issue being represented and constructed in the forums? How do posters engage in social struggle? What does this tell us about power relations and ideology in society?—requires an analytic framework of discourse. The second and third research questions also require a conceptual framework of discourse and power and an understanding of how ideology and discourse are related. As a first step, we require an introduction to, and a working definition of, the term ‘discourse.’

Discourse

Michel Foucault, a prolific and highly influential figure in the study of discourse and society, wrote that “nothing has any meaning outside of discourse” (1972, cited in Hall,

1997a: 45). The massive scope of the term “discourse” is evident in this summary definition offered by Stuart Hall: “A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—i.e. a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic” (2007: 56). According to both Hall and Foucault, discourse is everywhere; it takes many forms and exists in all that is social. Discourse is therefore to some extent necessarily an amorphous concept. Conversations between people, written communication, media production, art, body language, music, and all other forms of symbolic transmission are vehicles through which representations travel, and can therefore be discussed in terms of ‘discourse.’ Nevertheless, generalizations of the term often capture so much that it loses meaning, creating a danger in obscuring the social world through an analytical application that intends to explain it.

Further, the notion of discourse as representation is problematic. Discourse is more than a process of representation; it is also a process of social construction—discourse is productive and not simply descriptive. For the purposes of this project, I follow Norman Fairclough (1995; 1997; 2001) and define discourse as language used in processes of representation, social construction, and, most importantly, the power struggle that takes place within these processes. When I refer to discourse, I am referring to groupings of the English language employed in a variety of situations to advance a particular version of reality at the expense of others. The term ‘discourse’ is used here rather than the more general term ‘language’ for two reasons: it implies a relationship between language and its social context, going beyond semiotics and syntactic analysis, and it implies relations of power and social struggle.

Fairclough (1995: 133) uses a three-dimensional analytic framework that helps to make this distinction between discourse and language: discursive events are simultaneously individual instances of language (*texts*), their production and consumption (*discourse practice*), and their social contexts (*social practice*). This framework both simplifies and complicates the notion of discourse. Clarity results from being able to separate individual texts from the situations in which they are used to map out the broader social context of which they are a part. Ultimately, my interest as a sociologist is in understanding the contextual dimension of discourse—the ‘social practice’— and this framework suggests that to do so we must consider individual texts and the practices in which they are created, deployed, modified, challenged, and dismantled.

Texts occur in a multitude of situations and localities. For instance, Hall (1997b) makes it clear that while language is a very important vehicle of a given discourse, imagery is also heavily involved in how people are represented and therefore carries with it significant social repercussions. The study of discourse is not limited to any one particular form, format, or modality of discourse—what Foucault (1977) referred to as “orders of discourse” (see also Fairclough 1992 and 2001). That is to say, the various discourses concerning ‘race’ and policing take place in interactions with police officers, public presentations given by community organizations, official reports by law enforcement agencies, academic articles written on the topic, media accounts, and even discussions at home between people who might otherwise seem completely disengaged from the issue. It is important to note that the empirical work in any particular project of discourse analysis has potential counterparts that look at other forms of discourse.

This framework also makes clear that discursive events are related to one another in complex ways. Texts refer to others, are applied in multiple discursive practices, and make reference to a multiplicity of elements of their social contexts. For this reason, Fairclough uses the term *interdiscursivity*—meaning that discursive events are fundamentally relational—as an integral part of his understanding of discourse (Fairclough, 1995). This related-ness makes the study of discourse tricky because discursive events exist in multiple orders of discourse, and within each there are multiple interdiscursively-related discourse strategies. When in, or across, various orders of discourse particular discursive strategies align to present a coherent umbrella of symbolic resources—when language is differently used to put forward the same ‘version’ of reality— they can be said to belong to a *discursive formation*, or the entirety of all interdiscursively related discursive practices that draw on and reinforce one-another.

The notions of interdiscursivity, orders of discourse, and discursive formation show that the question of “what does the discourse of ‘race’ and policing look like?” cannot be completely answered in a Master’s thesis. The task itself is impossible because discourse is fluid and constantly changing. But even to take a temporal snapshot of this discourse would involve looking at all of the orders of discourse, which is unfeasible. Instead, I want to map out one particular order of discourse, online comment boards, and see what discursive formations exist there and to use them to theorize about wider relations of power in society.

The ability to address questions about social power, exclusion, marginalization and privilege depends on the ‘order of discourse’ under consideration. For example, good work has been done on how the media engages in discursive production of racialized

hegemony (see Van Dijk 1991 and 2000; Tator and Henry 2000 and 2002), and a thorough analysis of the news items that recount the events of 2008 would be in line with this project. As previously noted, CDA is by no means limited to media discourses, although they are particularly interesting because of the symbolic power held by media elites. Foucault said that power is everywhere because discourse is everywhere; so, in order to see how power is being subtly exerted at its extremities, that is, what are the ‘effects’ of these power relations at their terminal points, we should look at more diffuse discourses. As such, the focus of this research is the language used in public exchanges about the intersection of ‘race’ and policing in Winnipeg—a ‘public discourse’ wherein the contributors and audience are members of a public. There are not many public spaces for this issue other than the Internet, and there are many online public resources that are easily accessible to social inquiry.

Discourse, Power, and Ideology

My second and third research questions—what processes of social struggle are evident in the discourses? and what does this tell us about power relations and ideology in society?—can be addressed by mapping out the ways in which discursive strategies compete against one another. I use the data to show how these discourse practices might reflect overarching social practices. To do this, I need a conceptual framework of power and discourse.

Following Foucault, who held that discourses are imbued with *power*—that is, “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (1979: 100)—I take for granted that any social context under consideration using CDA will be inevitably characterized by power imbalances. So the recurrent themes that emerge from the process

of coding these data will point towards power differentials. The question for social research in this area is: how pervasive are these unequal relations, and how do we show the ways in which they are produced, maintained, and challenged?

Fairclough (2001) also developed a model for understanding the relationship between power and discourse in which there are two separate levels where power and discourse are intertwined: power is exercised *in* discourse, and power exists *behind* discourse. “In terms of ‘power in discourse’, discourse is the site of power struggles, and, in terms of ‘power behind discourse’, it is the stake in power struggles” (61). This means that discourse practices transmit power, and social practices reflect and reinforce broader ideological commitments. Fairclough’s conceptual framework provides us with a critical lens that complements the three-dimensional analytic framework of discourse—rather than simply describing discourses, this framework draws attention to how particular discourse practices engaged in social struggles, and how they are reflective of tensions between different ideological standpoints. An assumption here is that social actors have a propensity to attain and maintain the power vested in and made available to them through the ideology they endorse, and do so by engaging in discursive social contests:

Power relations are always relations of *struggle*, using the term in a technical sense to refer to the process whereby social groupings with different interests engage with one another. Social struggle occurs between groupings of various sorts—women and men, black and white, young and old, dominating and dominated groupings in social institutions, and so on. [...] Power through language must constantly be involved in struggle with others to defend (or lose) their position. (Fairclough, 2001: 28-29)

As discursive and social practices can be characterized in terms of struggle, they are not fixed but are fluid and dynamic. To say that power works ‘through’ discourses means that discourse defines and maintains or contests the relations that a particular individual,

group, or institution has with other individuals, groups, and institutions. If there are enduring unequal relations in society, they have to be continuously reproduced; if they are to persist, then they must be fortified. The relationship between power and discourse, conceptualized in this way, delineates the struggles found in the online comments as posters engage with one another as the ‘discourse practice,’ which flows from larger ideological struggles in society, or the ‘social practice.’ In other words, power ‘in’ versus power ‘behind’ discourse is a way of seeing more clearly that individual social contests, as they appear in the online forums, cling together in ways that represent ideological power.

Social Practice as Ideological Struggle

Like the term ‘discourse,’ treatment of the notion of ‘ideology’ in the CDA literature follows the tradition of a long history of theorizing in the social sciences, wherein adequate summary definitions of the term are hard to come by, detailed discussions are convoluted, and the distinction between ideology and discourse remains obscure (Purvis and Hunt, 1993). Ideology, however, is an important aspect of CDA as Fairclough practices it; namely, as a central element of the social practice.

As a point of departure for how I use the term ideology, consider the general definition offered by Frances Henry and Carol Tator (2006: 16), whereby ideology is conceptualized as “a set of beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and values that provide members of a group with an understanding and an explanation of their world.” This is different but compatible with Fairclough’s definition, whereby he considers ideologies as “significations/constructions of reality (the physical world, social relations, social identities) which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive

practices, and which contribute to the production, reproduction or transformation of relations of domination” (1992: 87). Fairclough notes that discursive manifestations of ideology are most effective when they “achieve the status of common sense,” but he cautions us to keep in mind that ideological struggle towards transformation is a key dimension of discourse. Indeed, he states that ideological power is “the power to protect one’s practices as universal and ‘common sense’” (2001: 33). In short, the power ‘behind’ discourse, or the power exerted at the level of the social practice of discourse, is ideological power.

As discourse is imbued with power, discourse practices engage in struggles, and discourse practices reflect ideologies, then the social practice can be conceptualized in terms of ideological struggle. According to Fairclough, “There is a constant endeavor on the part of those who have power to try to impose an ideological common sense which holds for everyone [...]. But there is always *some* degree of ideological diversity, and indeed conflict and struggle, so that ideological uniformity is never completely achieved” (1989: 86). This is to say, that even though a particular ideological orientation might be dominant at a given moment in history, the most totalitarian regimes still possess ideological diversity and discourses of resistance. For this reason, I opt to discuss the discursive formations found in my analysis as taking two forms: a *conservative* formation that seeks to maintain the status quo, and a *radical* formation that opposes, resists, and challenges it. While this dualistic framing of competing discourses conflates some of the diversity and richness apparent in the online discourse, it does capture a fundamental tension. I use the term radical, rather than oppositional, to connote that this discursive

formation is fundamentally concerned with altering the current state of affairs, which in this case refers to the relationship between racialized people and the police.

As Fairclough (1995) and others describe a dialectical relationship between social structure and discourse, a parallel symbiotic interconnection exists between discursive formations and ideology, reflected in the notion that discursive practices are dialectically related to social practices. A complete inquiry of discourse and ideology in the case of public discourse would therefore be concerned with how members of the public *contribute* to ideological formations; that is, how ideological power is maintained by the discursive practices and not only act as the carriers of them. However, methodological challenges associated with the data used for this study make this impossible. I can study the online discourses and theorize about how they relate to ideology, but there is no way to know who the posters are or who reads the forums. Therefore, any claim about the influence these discourses have on the wider society would be mere speculation.

As ideology is an amorphous concept to begin with, describing how discourse influences ideology is the most challenging task for critical discourse analysts. It is, however, possible to see the ways in which ideologically rooted statements translate into the material world through discourse, which, when interdiscursively connected, crystalize as discursive formations. Mapping texts and discursive practices to show discursive formations as, at least theoretically, reflective of ideology is one way to make the link from the discourse practice to the social practice. At this point, I should also note that online comments do not occur in isolation from the rest of the social world. They derive from the everyday experiences of the posters and the circulating discourses existing within other orders of discourse. So although it is not possible to say anything about who

these posters are as individuals or their social positionality, it is reasonable to assume that they have lives ‘offline,’ where they encounter ideological power and act as its carriers. Therefore, this study looks at the online discourse to see how it represents broader ideological tensions within a particular social context: that of racialized policing in Winnipeg, which I treat as both an ontology and ideological context that manifests its defining features in the practice of discursive struggles. I follow Elizabeth Comack (2012) in her conceptualization of racialized policing, or the role police institutions play in the reproduction of a social order characterized by racialized inequality. This concept is explored in the following sections by reviewing notions of racialization, racism, and racialized discourse, and how they relate to policing.

‘Race,’ Racialization, Racism, and Racialized Discourse

The concept of ‘race’ is complex and controversial. The term itself suggests an essentialism that fuelled an abhorrent human history riddled with slavery, expropriation, and extermination. Sociological treatment of ‘race’ has been primarily concerned with the processes by which ‘race’ is socially constituted, and arguably more importantly its hierarchizing implications. I join Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown (2003: 102) who use the term racialization to “denote a dialectical process by which meaning is attributed to particular biological features of human beings, as a result of which individuals may be assigned to a general category of persons that reproduces itself biologically.” However, “racialization has been regarded as ‘a problematic, a process, a concept, a theory, a framework and a paradigm’” (Small 1994: 33 cited in Murji and Solomos: 2), resulting in conceptual confusion over what exactly authors refer to when they invoke the term.

When I refer to racialization, therefore, I refer to it as a discourse: racialized discourses

are social constructions and representations of ‘race’ through which power is exerted to define a particular dominant view of the world, one characterized by racial inequality. Racialization, however, does not *de facto* produce racial hierarchy and oppression; for instance, idealized notions of the Canadian cultural “mosaic” imply that racialized difference can be the basis of a culturally vibrant society. Racialization does, however, produce hierarchy and oppression when the worldview advanced through discourse is one of racial exclusion.

One way that racial exclusion occurs is through what Hall (1997b) calls ‘Othering,’ which refers to discursive acts that establish a binary divide between ‘Us’ and ‘Them,’ where ‘They’ are deviant, abnormal and otherwise different in a negative sense, and ‘We’ are normal and acceptable. This builds on Richard Dyer’s (1977) argument that in order to understand the world, actors have to engage in organizing information into ‘types,’ or “general classification schemes” (cited in Hall, 1997b: 257). Using systems of meaning, individual objects can be collapsed into groupings based on similarities to and differences from other objects, which enables actors to orient themselves accordingly as they encounter new objects. Whereas ‘types’ apply to the entire spectrum of things in the world, ‘stereotypes’ are a specific form of type that only applies to people. Stereotypes occur when one gets a “hold of the few ‘simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized’ characteristics about a person, reduce everything about the person to those traits, exaggerate and simplify them, and fix them without change or development to eternity.” Specifically, stereotyping

reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes ‘difference,’ [is a] practice of ‘closure’ and exclusion [that] symbolically fixes boundaries, and excludes everything which does not belong, ... [and] tends to occur where there are gross

inequalities of power. ... [S]tereotyping “classifies people according to a norm and constructs the excluded as ‘other.’” (Hall, 1997b: 258-259; emphasis in original)

A stereotype is cognitive, but ‘Othering’ is discursive. It is a representation of someone or some group to be interpreted by other people, and construction of that person or group as problematically different. Individuals are outwardly cast into a deviant stereotype based on some easily accessible characteristic that fits within an ideological conception of the social order. The ‘Other’ is someone to fear, be wary of, or at the very least to suspend trust in. But more than just being the product of ideological understandings and stereotypical formations, ‘Othering’ serves a unique purpose in social struggle:

‘Othering’ acts as a rationale on which power relations rest, justifying power imbalances and cementing members of the dominant group to maintain their position in a social hierarchy (Hall, 1997b). Racial discrimination, therefore, is a social problem that derives from dominant worldviews that deem particular racialized group members as ‘Other.’

To suggest that there is a ‘social hierarchy’ in which racialized ‘Othering’ is the classifying logic points to what is commonly called the other side of racism: *racial privilege* or the systemic material and symbolic benefits reserved for everyone except the racialized ‘Others’ (McIntosh, 1997; Rothenberg, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). Peggy McIntosh, who coined the term “White Privilege,” defines it as “an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant to remain oblivious’” (1997: 291). This is not to say that all white people experience all of the benefits of racial privilege. Neither does it imply that racialized people never enjoy privileges reserved for white people. It does suggest that society is ordered in such a way that, as a general rule, white people have access to more resources than people of colour, and are more likely to share the dominant worldview.

There is considerable debate as to how racism and discourse intersect in contemporary social relations to exclude racialized ‘Others’ from social privilege. Some writers suggest that there is a “new” racism, one that is less overt, more subtle, and diffuse in its processes of racial discrimination.² Other writers argue that in line with the neoliberal project of eliminating identity, a ‘muted’ racism within discourses of ‘race-blindness’ now prevails, whereby racialization occurs without direct mention of ‘race’ (Davis, 2007). In the Canadian context, Frances Henry and Carol Tator (2006) coined the term “democratic racism” to refer to a contradiction in the idealism of equality and multiculturalism despite the persistence of substantive racial inequality. These terms all suggest that racism works through discourses in complex ways to promote a particular version of social reality that naturalizes racial inequality.

It should also be noted that racialized ‘Othering’ is not an absolute, pure discourse. Discourses of social exclusion are ‘intersectional’ or work interdiscursively with others, such as class, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, age and ability. In this way, racialized ‘Othering’ happens concomitantly with a variety of discourses (such as criminalization or the social construction of crime and criminals), and within and through a variety of social institutions (such as policing). Therefore, the issues of criminalization and policing are implicated in how discourse works to define a world in which racialized ‘Others’ are excluded from social privilege in diverse ways.

Racialized Policing

² For a review and critique of the concept of “new racism,” see Leach (2005).

Comack (2012) puts forward the notion of “racialized policing” to understand the relationship between racialized people and the police:

While crime control has become the leitmotif of modern policing, with the dominating public image of police officers as “crime fighters” and “law enforcers” out to “get the bad guys,” at its core policing involves the reproduction of order, the transforming of troublesome situations back to their “normal” state – and the management and containment of troublesome persons – thus preserving the ranks of society. When the social order that the police are reproducing is founded on racism and racial inequality (and other forms of social inequality), policing becomes one of the projects through which race is interpreted and given meaning. It becomes a means by which the racialized order of society is reproduced. In short, policing itself becomes racialized. (Comack, 2012: 221)

Racialized policing has at least three important features. The first is that policing is seen as a practice of reproducing order, whereby the primary task of police work is to uphold the status-quo. Police presence is employed to deter disruption, and when trouble makers fall out of line, police officers are there to get the situation back under control. As such, when a social order is one of unequal relations, then policing is implicated in reproducing those relations. Second, as racialization permeates society, interactions with various institutions become the vehicles through which we interpret and make sense of the relationship between differently constructed racialized groups. The third point is the logical conclusion from these two premises: as we live in a racialized social order, where dominant racialized groups enjoy privilege inaccessible to those belonging to subjugated racialized groups, policing is one mechanism that maintains that division and influences how we understand, and justify, differences between racialized groups. Policing is therefore racialized when problems of racism, racial discrimination, segregation, and the like saturate society and are integral to its ‘normal’ functioning. This definition has an

ontological dimension relating to the nature of reality, and an epistemological dimension relating to how we understand that reality. In other words, policing is both an *instrument* of and *framework* for racialization and racial ‘Othering.’

Comack (2012) notes that, as instrument, the police institution can itself be racist and racializing. Canadian policing has historically been an arm of the colonial state used to subjugate Aboriginal peoples (69-74). Police practices have been noted as being systemically racist in their over- and under-policing of racialized minority groups (Perry, 2006), selectively profiling and failing to respond to requests for help from people of colour. Importantly, as the first point of contact in the criminal justice system, police are integral in processes of criminalization; the police play a role in the reproduction of racialization in their interactions with racialized people.

Thinking in these terms helps us to situate claims about ‘race’ and policing within the broader social context of racialized group relations and the role policing plays in ideological understandings of racialized difference. In this way, the notion of “racialized policing” offers a framework for understanding the relations between racialized group members and the police. While Comack focuses on the ontology of racialized policing, this project concerns this epistemological dimension. To relate back to the notion of racialization as a discourse, racialization occurs in diverse orders of discourse through the lens of police actions, such that people interpret and construct the world through their experiences, both direct and indirect, of police actions. In précis, discourses that racialize ‘Others’ occur within the social context of racialized policing.

Drawing upon Fairclough’s three-dimensional view of discourse, racialized policing and discourse are related in three ways. *Texts* describe, construct, and represent

the relationship between the police and racialized group members. These texts belong to *discourse practices*, whereby people engage in struggles in defining the ‘dominant’ view on this relationship. Here we can see how power works ‘in’ discourse through either protecting the status-quo of a racialized social order or through critiques of racialized policing. The *social practice* is in this case an ideological struggle within the context of racialized policing itself, in which one aspect of this ideological power ‘behind’ the discourse is that of racial privilege.

The Craig McDougall Case

In an earlier project, Elizabeth Comack and I explored the issue of ‘race’ and policing by examining 834 online comments posted in relation to two CBC articles covering the death of Craig McDougall, the last of the four events from the summer of 2008 (Comack and Bowness, 2010). The CBC news items established the initial context for the online comments by providing particular details about this event; specifically, that the Winnipeg Police Service had responded to a domestic disturbance call, a fight between two young women, on Simcoe Street early in the morning of Saturday, August 2nd. Officers made an arrest, and as they were leaving the premises they were met by 26-year-old McDougall. One of the officers became engaged in an altercation with, and ultimately shot and killed, McDougall. McDougall was reported to be a member of the Wasagamack First Nation and a nephew of J.J. Harper.

In addition to these few details readers of the news items were provided with conflicting information and standpoints about the event. While Police Chief Keith McCaskill indicated that the police seized a knife at the scene of the shooting, McDougall’s family claimed that he was holding a cell phone when he was shot. While

the police held that McDougall was a direct threat to the officers' safety, a metre-high fence apparently separated McDougall from the officers. A police spokesperson was quoted as saying, "Our officers don't make the choice to use their firearms lightly. If they chose to in this instance, it's because they were forced to" (CBC 2008A). Meanwhile, Aboriginal leaders deemed the incident a "wrongdoing and the senseless killing of a First Nation youth" and called for a public inquiry of the WPS (CTV 2008).

Despite the limited information contained in the news reports, online posters were not restrained in voicing their own views on the matter. Analysis of these comments revealed discourses that were predominantly characterized by a *denial of racism* – which dehistoricized the relationship between Aboriginal people and the police—and *responsibilization*—which individualized the event (Comack and Bowness, 2010).³ Together, these discourses had the effect of 'Othering' Aboriginal people, blaming them for their own hardships without the acknowledgement of the historical and systemic oppression they face. Moreover, the frequent reference to 'playing the race card' in the comments provided a rhetorical device for silencing the standpoint of Aboriginal people while simultaneously defining "reality" from a racially privileged position. We also found evidence of an oppositional discourse, which worked to challenge and counter processes of racialization; however, this discourse was the less dominant voice in the forums.

My thesis research extends the analysis to the other three cases from the summer of 2008. Examining comments posted on a variety of different websites can provide a

³ The notion of responsibilization stems from the literature on neoliberalism, whereby individuals "should be obliged to be prudent, responsible for their own destinies, actively calculating about their futures and providing for their own security and that of their families" within a free market economy (Rose 2000: 324).

broader perspective with more detailed data on the issue of public conceptions of the relationship between ‘race’ and policing. It can also enable a better understanding of how discourse works within the social context of racialized policing.

The Data Set

The data used for this study consist of the online public discussions in user-generated content forums where users post their opinions and engage in discussion and debate in response to the Fresh IE, Dumas, and Langan incidents. A close examination of the comments, with an eye to constructions of the individuals involved, the police, ‘race,’ ‘crime,’ and the ‘public order,’ has the potential to reveal recurrent linguistic patterns used to advance particular versions of social reality at the expense of other, competing interpretations, particularly in defining the dominant view on the policing of racialized people.

A systematic Google search turned up 196 unique online sources that relate to at least one of the three incidents during the summer of 2008 (see Appendix A). Each of these articles presents competing versions of what occurred, as the dominant news narratives tend to frame the events in the standard two-sided journalistic style of competing interpretations: claims that the incident was an example of the pervasive racism in policing practices and claims that police action was justified and ‘race’ did not factor into it. Of these web sources, 62 contained user-generated comments, amounting to over 3614 comments in total. I was able to capture 3342 comments from 46 unique addresses before the comments began to disappear from the Internet(see Appendix B). As such, the final breakdown of comments used for this analysis is as follows:

Table 1: Summary of Data

| Case | Number of Comments | Number of Web Sources |
|-------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Fresh IE | 308 | 9 |
| Dumas | 226 | 17 |
| Langan | 2,808 | 19 |
| Total | 3,342 | 45 |
| Missing | 272 + | 16 |

The majority of the comments are short statements voicing the reader's reaction to the events. Many comments in these forums also make reference to earlier comments or posters, and in some forums there are ways to show approval or disapproval (even suggesting to moderators that the comment be removed from the forum) for what other posters are contributing to the discussion. Often, to be able to make a comment users need to register with the forum's host website, although most posters appear to use pseudonyms and anonymity generally characterizes these forums. There are also many social conventions that apply to discourse on the Internet that might not in face-to-face or other forms of communication (for instance, the use of emoticons, web shorthand, and hyperlinked references to other web items).

Once compiled into Word documents, the data—which amounted to nearly 1,200 pages of text—were then formatted for analysis, removing extraneous information typically found in all online forums. This included material such as the date at which a poster joined the forum, the number of posts that they have made to date, pictures and images included as part of their user-signature, and other descriptive information not useful to the analysis. The data were then organized using Nvivo9, a qualitative data

analysis application, which allowed for a methodical coding procedure in order to reveal the themes contained in the comments.

Coding and Analysis Procedure

The coding procedure was developed in two stages. First, I mapped out the text from the Fresh IE case, finding three core themes in constructions of the police, of Fresh IE, and of the relationship between them: racialization and criminalization, or the social production of ‘race’ and ‘crime’ and the exclusionary effects that they have, and responsabilization, a rationality used to describe instances of neoliberal governmentality, whereby people are held entirely accountable for their self-care within an assumed market of equal opportunity. I coded for constructions of the person involved in the incident (Fresh IE, Dumas and Langan), noting process of racialization, criminalization and reponsibilization. I also coded for constructions of the police, describing how the police were constructed (as either generalizations of all police, specific comments about the officers involved in the incident under consideration, and other various classifications of the police) and then coded the comments as either “Supporting” (supporting the actions of the police), “Critical” (criticizing the actions of the police) “Neutral.” Subcodes were made for various processes of racialization and criminalization as they related to groups and individuals other than the person involved in the incident, such as “Aboriginal Leaders” or “Car Thieves.” This approach to coding the text was then used in both the Dumas and Langan cases. For each of the cases, interactions between posters were coded as either ‘conservative’ or ‘radical’ to facilitate analysis of the discourse practice, and subcodes were made for the various strategies used by posters as they challenged and resisted discourses that opposed their position, and supported and reinforced discourses to

which they were aligned. I used NVivo 9, a qualitative data analysis application to keep the comments organized. Then using the Langan data, I created a model of the conservative discursive formation using the interaction codes, which enabled a discussion about the nature of the ideology as it manifests in the online discourses.

Concluding Remarks

This study investigates the online comments relating to three of the events of 2008 involving racialized individuals and the police, addressing the following questions: 1) *what does the discourse of ‘race’ and policing look like in online comments?* 2) *What processes of social struggle do posters engage in?* and 3) *What can this tell us about power relations and ideology in society?* The overview of this project is summarized below:

Table 2: Overview of Thesis

| Research questions | Analytic Framework | Conceptual Framework | Analysis strategy |
|---|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| What does the discourse of ‘race’ and policing look like? | Text | N/A | Coding procedure of online comments |
| What processes of social struggle do posters engage in? | Discourse Practice | Power ‘In’ Discourse | Interactions between posters |
| What can this tell us about power relations and ideology? | Social Practice | Power ‘Behind’ Discourse | Model of the ‘Conservative Discursive Formation’ |

Chapter Three

The Detainment of Robert Wilson (aka “Fresh IE)

Simply put, racial profiling is necessary for law enforcement to do an effective job of stopping certain racial groups well known for committing the majority of car thefts in the city. I believe profiling is a natural human response, which we all take part in at one time or another. Only the honest among us have the courage to admit it.

Comment posted by Tom Metzger on June 5th, 2008, 9:15 PM at:
<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2008/06/05/fresh-ie-car.html>

On June 4th, Robert Wilson, an African-Canadian Rapper and minister known as Fresh I.E., was stopped by police as he was leaving a Starbucks. According to police statements reported by the media, an officer became suspicious when he noticed Wilson’s car, an expensive Chrysler 300, pull into the drive-through for a second time, and so phoned the licence plate number in to the station to have it checked through the police computer system. According to police spokespeople, the licence plate was either mistakenly entered or the results from the computer were misinterpreted, which caused the staff member conducting the search to report the vehicle as stolen. The officers boxed the car in at a red light at the intersection of Ellice Avenue and Donald Street. They then approached Wilson and the passenger, a youth protégé he mentors, with weapons drawn and removed both of them from the vehicle. The officers proceeded to throw Wilson to the ground, emptying his pockets, handcuffing and forcing him in the back of a police cruiser, despite his claims that he owned the vehicle. The officers apparently laughed at him when he told them he was a minister. Fifteen minutes passed before the officers checked his identification to discover that Wilson was, in fact, the registered owner, after which he

and the passenger were released with an apology. Later that day, a police spokesperson stated that the incident would be reviewed by the police chief's office.

According to media reports, Wilson stated that he was humiliated and wronged, and that the incident was “a case of stereotyping” (CBC, 2008B). He also expressed his intentions to explore the legal options available in response to the event. The following day Chief Keith McCaskill made a statement admitting to the Winnipeg Police Service having made a mistake in detaining Wilson. He denied any allegations of racial profiling, explaining that it was instead simply a case of “human error” (CBC, 2008C). Although Wilson accepted the apology, he retained his belief that racism was an underlying issue.

Text – Constructing the Relationship between Fresh IE and the Police

Nine online sources reporting the incident contained 308 public comments. What is most significant for the purposes of this research is the ways in which posters construct Fresh IE, the police, and the relationship between them in the forums. Specifically, the comments reveal how posters engage in the question of ‘racial profiling’ and mediate this relationship with processes of responsabilization and criminalization. Aside from these discursive processes, the comments describe Fresh IE as a rapper (24) and community leader (20), often noting his activities as “exemplary service to society by being a youth worker” and acknowledging his contributions as a religious figure (10). In terms of constructions of the police, posters had a wide range of approaches. Many made generalized comments about police organizations as amorphous institutions (57), while others chose to focus on the WPS generally (86), their representatives specifically (61), or commented on the individual officers and police personnel involved in the incident (109). Some drew connections between the Fresh IE's detainment and events involving other

individual police officers (10) and other police services (15), such as the OPP in Ontario or police departments in the United States.

Although Fresh IE was deemed innocent in 5 comments, and 4 posters made note of his ownership of the vehicle that he was suspected of stealing, dominant in the forums were comments that engaged in the social construction of Fresh IE as a ‘criminal’ (68). Even though there was only one picture of Fresh IE in all of the online sources—which revealed very little about Fresh IE’s appearance—posters were quick to label him as a “thug” (23), “thief” (21), “punk” (5) and “gangster” (4). In terms of racialization, his ‘race’ was only directly mentioned in 9 postings, where most defined him as “Black” but other comments described him as Aboriginal or stated that he was “of a racial background.” Mainly, the racialization of Fresh IE in the comments took place indirectly as the posters constructed two opposing versions of the relationship between him and the police: one characterized by racial profiling (42) and another that denied allegations of racism and profiling (48).

Regardless of what aspect of policing a given poster was directing a comment towards, most applied a normative judgment on the incident and could be read in terms of offering support for (91) or criticism of (176) policing (6 comments were neutral in their judgment towards the police). These judgments tended to align with processes of racialization and criminalization in particular ways. A critical racialized view of the police saw the relationship in terms of racial profiling. However, other posters defended the police by denying the existence of racial profiling, thereby naturalizing the incident, or supported police by criminalizing Fresh IE.

The Charge of Racial Profiling

Most of the comments responding to the case of Fresh IE were critical of the police actions (176). Several took to doubting the apology and claims denying racial profiling given by police representatives:

Police apologize yes.....more than likely because of all the negative reaction.

Hey, the police don't lie....do they?? LOL

Some comments challenged official statements from police as untruthful, or issued solely to preserve their image in light of attention from the media. These comments shared charges against the police that the incident was so obviously one of racial profiling that the explanation given— that the incident was a mistake made when checking the licence plate of the vehicle—could only be interpreted as a false “excuse” used to defend their reputation:

Data error? Wow. Now they're reaching for excuses.

Baloney, what a lame excuse.

a wrong letter or number was punched into the system, resulting in his Chrysler 300 coming up as reported stolen..... Nice excuse.

I doubt that, I would like to think the officer would double check the plate on the car right in front of him to the number he entered into the computer before he pulls a firearm.

These comments tended to fault the officer(s) on site and the WPS as an organization with a tendency for misconduct followed by self-preservation. The last comment, like the

one below, points to details in the incident that condemn both the actions of the involved officers and the official response:

I do not buy this explanation whatsoever. On one hand the police are praising themselves for owning up to their mistakes, and on the other hand they are blaming a civilian employee who obviously will never be known. It is time for Winnipeg to make it's officer's accountable for their actions, because they clearly are not.

Posters who criticized the police were inclined to place most of the responsibility on the officers who were physically present at the time of Fresh IE's detainment, as is the case with the previous post. Here the most common approach taken by posters was to place fault on the officers themselves, but specifically because of the racial biases that they hold as individuals:

I am saddened that an officer would jump to conclusions and draw his gun based on an assumption.

its a shame but a lot of the officers in law enforcement automatically write you off as a criminal or up to something because of your ethnicity.

They said it wasn't profiling but that they just entered the wrong number when they ran his plate. But the racial profiling happened when they decided to run his plates in the first place!

Charges of racial profiling were the most prevalent among the criticisms of the police.

The notion of 'profiling' appeared 99 times in the forums. The following are some examples of how the posters framed the incident in terms of profiling:

Example 1: "An alternative explanation of profiling, is actually easier to swallow than a ham fisted cop who can't type, but can coordinate multiple cars to surround a 'stolen' vehicle."

Example 2: "you would think a college-educated mind could do better, or at least ask about the plates if they didn't match and immediately see an error."

This was obviously profiling of a racial nature, indeed, the assertion that black men can't possibly afford nice cars."

Example 3: "No racial profiling?" then the police need to answer why they entered his plate number in the first place. if it wasn't racially motivated, then im sure they would not have entered his plate into their computers. so what was their reason?"

Example 4: "And another thing, what are the chances that by one letter or number that this vehicle, same make, model , colour, etc. was reported stolen? Come on. This is definetely racial profiling."

Example 5: "admit guilt its profiling!!"

The first poster takes up the binary between racial profiling and honest mistake, suggesting that profiling is more likely than the mistaken identification of the car as stolen. The second adds doubt that a "college-educated mind" could make a mistake in entering the plate numbers, claiming that if such a mistake was made, there would have been some attempt at identity verification before drawing weapons on Fresh IE. Going further than the charge of racial profiling, Example 2 claims that a distinct class and racial bias against Black people was the motivation for targeting Fresh IE. Example 3 questions why the plates were searched in the first place, and Example 4 challenges the likelihood of the facts of the search as presented by the police representatives. All of these comments point to a purportedly common sense interpretation of the incident as 'racial profiling,' with the poster of Example 5 stating that the police were "guilty."

While the charge of racial profiling was prevalent in the comments, this was generally constructed as a problem of individual officers. Less common in the forums were comments that intentionally broadened the analysis to the social level, generalizing

charges of racial profiling beyond the individual officers involved to the police service as a whole:

Another case of racial profiling. What is with our Police?

Winnipegs so-called "Finest" have always practiced racial profiling.

Winnipeg is hotbed of car theft, its true, but it's also a hotbed of rampant racism by the WPS. The odds of a simple typo bringing up a 300 of the same colour are not good.

Racial profiling does not work at the individual level, and in fact it makes us less safe.

The first three comments above make the claim that the police service has a historical tendency to conduct racial profiling. The last post begins to make the claim that racial profiling is an entrenched aspect of policing, broadening the view of profiling beyond an individualized concept. Nevertheless, this argument appeared infrequently in the forums.

Others who commented on racial profiling did so in a way that mitigated profiling as a problematic police tactic. For example, the following posts acknowledge racial profiling but responsiblize Fresh IE for being profiled:

Nationality accounts for only a small part of what happened to you, my friend. The other factors that cause people to jump to conclusions CAN be controlled by you. Am I saying change who you are, NO but perhaps some adjustments are necessary. Were the police justified in their actions/excuse, ABSOLUTELY NOT but they have been trained to be prejudice against certain cars, race, attitude etc.

It's inconceivable that this could be anything other than racial profiling, but if you dress like a stereotype you have to expect the heat.

Other posters justified police actions, claiming that racial profiling is a necessary or beneficial approach to policing:

Racial profiling ~ probably. Is that bad? No. Let's look at the stats.....which racial group(s) do the most crime in the city? Thought so.....

If this incident was indeed a case of "racial profiling/gang-banger look alike stereotyping" then I say so what?!

These posts counter charges against the police, claiming that racial profiling, although not politically acceptable, is an important tool used by police to manage crime. The first claims that profiling is justified by criminalizing racialized people, the second supports the stereotyping of those who appear criminal. The following poster claims that this stereotyping is useful and usually turns up the intended results when used by police, and further is necessary to protect the safety of officers:

I'm sorry, but stereotypes exist for a reason. You're talking about a police officers life here, as if that is somehow less important then "upsetting" people by stereotyping. When 9 out of 10 times their judgement is accurate, I think it's pretty callous and ignorant to start screaming at them the one time that stereotype doesn't turn out to be accurate.

The following post, from the standpoint of a racialized group member, recognizes that often racial profiling can be the fault of the profiled:

I am part of a visual minority, and racing profiling does not frighten me. Some times is our own fault, I see young man of my people doing more stupid things that then average Xion/John/Juan.... So it calls us to help out people to learn proper behavior.

As the websites reporting the incident framed it in terms of a question as to whether or not Fresh IE was a victim of racial profiling, posters recognizing and accepting racial profiling join a number of others in their siding with the police. However, they diverge from those who reject claims that racial profiling occurred. Although less common in the forums, the posters defended the police and the work that they do using a number of different arguments (91), among the most notable of these

discourses was a denial of the existence of racism and racialized policing in interpreting the incident.

Defending the Police – the Denial of Racism

One approach posters took was to dismiss the idea that racial profiling occurred. Comments like the following work to cast doubt on the notion that the incident was racially motivated, while other comments pointed to the details of the incident as presented by the police as evidence against racial profiling:

Just because you are a visible minority and are pulled over does not mean it was racial profiling.w9

Do I believe the actions of the police were racially motivated or stereotyping? Absolutely not, the car matched the description of a stolen Chrysler 300.

Posters also framed the notion of racial profiling as an unfounded concept, seeking to minimize or eliminate the relevance of ‘race’ in interpreting the incident, and downplaying the applicability of racism in charges against the police:

Same old song. The subtext to this story reads something like this: we are better not to pull any people of colour over again, or accuse them of anything because cops [sic] white people are racists who need to be punished for the "sins" of the past.⁴

You can keep beating that "racial" dead horse to death all you want.

Comments like these make the case that the issue of racism has been resolved, dehistoricizing its effects in contemporary society. These comments, as is the case in others that align with them, use sarcasm, like placing the word “sins” in quotations in the

⁴ The academic convention “[sic]” appeared directly in the comment. This comment, like all comments recited in the reporting of the data, is posted verbatim, except in the case of square-bracketed ellipses, written as [...], which signifies that part of a quote has been omitted.

case of the first comment or drawing on expressions like “beating a dead horse” in the second, to reduce and mock claims of racism and racial profiling.

Other comments claimed that the incident is not newsworthy. Posters make claims such as the ones below to argue that Fresh IE’s apprehension is common to people of all racialized backgrounds, and the controversy around the incident is constructed by the media and Fresh IE himself in an effort to gain publicity:

let's not forget that if the officers had done this to a white person, it would never even have made the news.

People are just reacting because this RAPPER needs some publicity and now has it. There should be no outrage because he is of a racial background....

*But if you are native and a public figure in Canada, let's jump on the race issue right away.
It would not matter who was driving the car, the suspect would be handled the same.*

Although only appearing once in the forums on Fresh IE, these comments align with the rhetorical device used in other comment boards, the notion of playing the “race card”:

He's lucky. He has the almighty race card that he can use. what track is true. If you dress like a gangster, guess what? It's not only the homies who notice.

The “race card” is a metaphor used to criticize charges of racism where they are otherwise unwarranted, referencing the use in card games of a card that can beat or trump any other card. As in the last post, discourses denying racism often appeared concomitantly with the responsabilization of Fresh IE, as in the following post:

Did you see those characters in the paper- are you telling me that you wouldn't stop these two.....racial profiling- not really- look like a gangster and you get checked.....good police work.....

Here charges of racism are denied by criminalizing Fresh IE, which was another key discourse in the comments used to lend support to the police.

Supporting the Police – The Criminalization of Fresh IE

The majority of the comments that constructed Fresh IE did so through a criminalizing lens (68), claiming that it was reasonable for the police to have forced him from his car at gun point because he looked like a criminal ‘Other.’ This is despite the few details about his appearance presented in the web sources. In place of such details, posters pointed to the dangers inherent to policing:

The police had their weapons out because sometimes bad guys shoot at police.

By engaging in the criminalization of Fresh IE, posters construct a binary division between the ‘good’ police and the ‘bad guys’ who pose a threat to society and the police officers responsible for defending against it. In the describing the dangerous elements of society, posters point to Winnipeg as being a particularly risky space for police officers:

This is an ultra violent city and the WPS should use extreme caution when approaching potential thugs.

This isn't small town Canada, this is Winnipeg, where gang cops from the US came up to study OUR gangs.

The first of these comments constructs Winnipeg as “ultra violent” and Fresh IE as a “potential thug.” The second comment describes the ‘gang problem’ in Winnipeg. The following comment praises police actions, claiming that Fresh IE might have hurt someone had the police not responded the way that they did:

i for one Comend the police for their quick actions and stopping of someone they thought who could easily killed a young mother or son or daughter.

The author of the previous comment confers trust in the police officers' judgment, "commending" them for attending to the interests of law abiding citizens, therefore keeping families intact. These discourses place the police officers in high regard for the difficult work they do on behalf of those who deserve their protection.

Another, less nuanced discourse that sided with the police embodied the logic of stereotyping, using the metaphor of a 'duck':

you know what they say, if it walks like a duck and talks like a duck, 99.9% of the time, its a duck. this was a rare situation.

Looks like a duck, walks like a duck... Logical conclusion that its from the duck family.

If it walks like a duck looks like a duck chances are its a duck cant blame wpg police sevice for being suspicious of a failure that look s and acts the part of a gang member they could have been facing one of wpgs threats and been injured.

This rhetorical device is used to suggest that anyone who looks like a "gang member" is likely a member of a violent gang. The last poster also suggests that it is this suspicion held by police that keeps them safe from "wpgs threats." This discourse was one of many that responsibilized Fresh IE for the incident, with others claiming that because he dressed like a "thug" or a "punk" or in "gangsta wear," police scrutiny was justified:

If you dress the part, don't be oblivious to the fact MOST people think of you as a THUG.

Dress like a punk and you will be treated like one. THAT will never change in society.

if you look and dress like a thug with your gangsta wear, and you're driving a pimped out car with 22's you are asking for trouble. is it fair? no, but if you dont like being stereotyped, then stop setting yourself up for trouble.

The following comment also responsabilizes Fresh IE by suggesting that his choice to dress like the “criminal element of the city” invited police attention and suspicion:

How you dress is a very big deal in society, and the fact that this guy dresses in a very distinctive manner that is identical to the criminal element of the city, how can he even be remotely surprised that he was treated like he was.

Other comments used a similar logic, but infused their criminalization with a denial of racism:

I know that if I was a cop..in Winnepeg..and saw someone black red or white green whatever...driving a luxury car around and around a coffe shop...dressed like a thug..Id pull my gun too...and so would everyone here.

You dress like a punk or gangsta, you do it to draw attention to you, regardless who you are. Put your cap on straight and no one will notice.

In the first of these two comments, the poster alludes to someone as potentially being of different ‘colours,’ including red and green, thereby denying racism as an explanation for the incident. Instead, the fact that Fresh IE had an expensive car and was “dressed like a thug,” and not his ‘race,’ makes it justifiable that anyone faced with the situation would approach him with a drawn firearm. These posts all work to ‘Other’ particular members of society, to label them as potentially dangerous or the source of our need for police in the first place within the context of ‘colour blindness.’ As noted above, often these discourses are used in a way that denies the role that racialized ‘Othering’ plays in criminalization. In the case of the second comment, notice how the distancing from racism happens, where the poster hints at the neoliberal rationality of eliminating identity, that everyone is treated equally, “regardless [of] who you are.”

Criminalizing discourses constructed Fresh IE as a potential threat to police and society. These comments justified police actions and placed a division between ‘Us,’ the

law abiding, good citizens and ‘Them,’ the dangerous criminals. The following post encapsulates this sentiment:

One look at that guy, rightly or wrongly, would un-nerve most of us!

What these posts show is that just who constitutes ‘Us,’ those deserving of police protection, and ‘Them,’ those who ‘we’ need protection from, is itself a social construction and is produced through discourse. These definitions themselves, when presented as ‘common-sense,’ are a defining feature of social privilege, but as is the case in any discourses, to achieve and maintain taken-for-granted status they must subjugate others in struggles over the definition of social reality.

Discourse Practice – Two Discursive Formations

The aspect of the ‘discourse practice’ that I sought to capture in the comments was the division between posters who either drew on other comments to promote the status quo (conservative discourse) or to call for social change in their interactions with other posters (radical discourse). These discourses cling together interdiscursively to form discursive formations. There was a fairly even split between these positions: 48 and 55 coded items for the conservative and radical discourses, respectively. *Conservative interactions* took the form of dominating discourses (39), where posters denied attempts to claim that something was ‘wrong’ with the social order in which police play an important role, and reinforcing discourses (8) that showed support for the status quo. *Radical interactions* took the form of resisting discourses (51), which called on conservative posters to realize the need for change, and allying discourses (4) that agreed with other radical posts.

Conservative Interactions

Dominating discourses (39) are based on the negation of attempts to counter the criminalization of Fresh IE, criticisms of the police, and claims that the incident was racialized. Posters sought to dismiss these positions, thereby naturalizing a social order in which ‘race’ played no role in the Fresh IE’s detainment, and where equality of opportunity, rather than inequality of condition, forms the foundation of society. These discourses countered other comments by criminalizing Fresh IE, denying racial profiling or justifying it through citing the disproportional representation of racialized group members in the justice system. The following post draws on multiple attempts in the forum to resist notions of othering and criminalization based on the style or clothing of the person involved:

Some of these comments are funny:

"So are you saying it wasn't racial profiling but fashion profiling?"
"Last time I checked this was a free country and people can dress how they want"
"Nothing says dangerous like a t-shirt and ballcap."
"I am sorry, but your clothes or car don't define you"
"How you look and dress has nothing to do with the person you are."

In certain part of this crime ridden city what you wear and the colours you choose can mean the difference between life and death, or at the very least a brutal ass whooping.

Comments like this one appeared throughout the forums, drawing on the neoliberal rationality that criminal ‘Others’ invite suspicion by police officers, or what could be other forms of predatory behaviour, by dressing or looking in a particular way. This standpoint is clearly illustrated in the following comment, which responded to the claim that “You can't blame this guy because he drives a nice car and dresses the way he does”:

By the same token, you can't blame the cops for taking precautions and boxing in what they thought was a stolen car and drawing their weapons because of all the punks who have used stolen cars as weapons trying to run down cops.

Here the posters are engaging in a struggle over who is at 'fault' for the interaction between police and Fresh IE. The assumption made by the second poster is that the police made a correct judgment in assuming that Fresh IE's appearance warranted "precaution" because of the dangerous reality that police face in dealing with "punks"—a category in which Fresh IE is placed.

Similarly, several posters worked to establish the 'need for policing' in society as a means of discrediting posters who criticized police actions. Often this strategy appeared as a response to a generalized voice in the forums that 'blamed' the police despite a dependence on them:

All the comments saying the police shouldn't have done this are the first people to complain when their house gets broken into or their car is ripped off, that the police don't do enough.

people bitching "i hate the cops" are the same ones that call the cops when somebody rob their ass or murder one of their family. then they expect justice.

anybody who wants to blame the police should do the job for a day, oh wait, it's a job nobody wants because the public blame them for everything. They get blamed for not stopping crimes from being committed and they get blamed for trying to stop crimes (by stopping "innocents" to make sure they're not criminals). Maybe for a month or two all of the police should stay home to remind the citizens of this country what kind of place it would be without the men and women of law enforcement who risk their lives daily.

These comments make the case that criticizing the police and depending on them for aid should be mutually exclusive. This rhetoric is a way of justifying police profiling as a strategy to keep society 'safe.' Conversely, the actions of police were defended by challenging posters who asserted that the police did not profile Fresh IE at all, denying

any criminalization of his appearance whatsoever. Instead, these posters reminded the other participants in the forum that the procedures police use in circumstances such as the one in question are ‘standard’ for police, and thus devoid of profiling practices:

Wow, I missed the part where the police officers pulled him over because of the way he was dressed. I'm pretty sure they pulled him over because the car was mistakenly reported stolen. That seems pretty reasonable to me. As well with all stolen vehicles the drivers are taken into custody at gun point thats standard procedure for police services across the country.

In line with comments that denied the existence of profiling were a set of strategies for countering claims that the incident was in some way racially motivated. Some comments sought to categorize all who sought to name racism as a defining feature of the incident as engaging in “reverse racism”:

Many who cry racial stereotyping are reverse racists - they see every little slight as being caused by their colour or religion when in actual fact the singling out has nothing to do with either.

I find it ironic that ALL of you who decry the actions of the police when you are guilty of using the same racial profiling and biases you apply to them. You defend the rapper only because he is a rapper and coloured. If he had been a white parson in a 'dog collar' it would not have made the news and you would not have cared in the least, if it had.

Posts like these attack claims of racial profiling in two ways: they naturalize profiling by asserting that even critics of the police are guilty of profiling in some form or another, but simultaneously they deny the existence of racial profiling by police. When posters tried to broaden the conversation to include questions relating to racial privilege, their posts were met with malicious opposition. The following comment generated a wave of criticism that clearly illustrates the tension between posters with opposing viewpoints:

Comment: Racial tension doesn't only live in urban American centres. In fact, wouldn't a mostly-white city be the perfect place for an accusation of this kind

to take place? I think, as white people, we don't understand the kind of privileges we enjoy just based on the colour of our skin.

Response: Perhaps the privileges we enjoy are due to a strong work ethic, taking care of our families, and not always blaming other people for our problems. We represent 64% of the people in Wpg by population, but only 37% in the incarcerated population and 28% of the CFS caseload. Do you want to blame that on reverse racial profiling as well?

As an attempt to historicize the representation of Aboriginal peoples in the justice system and state care, posters followed this exchange by claiming that:

Perhaps the White privilege we enjoy is because we don't experience streaming and placement in the educational system, perhaps it because our white ancestor's accomplishments have not been erased from history in the school system.

Maybe it's because White peoples don't experience a ridiculously increased risk of being stopped by the police and thereafter being detained at a higher rate and incarcerated with harsher punishments than racialized peoples.

Another poster was quick to counter this attempt to frame the issue in racialized terms:

That's right, blame the school system too. Kids are streamed based on colour/race? I thought it was the fault of residential schools [...] Perhaps this is because some minority groups are responsible for the majority of crime. If a person wants to dress and act to fit the stereotype, then don't be so damned surprised when you get treated like in a stereotypical manner.

In this comment, the poster sarcastically refutes the notion that social institutions, such as the education system, should be part of our understanding of racial discrimination. This poster further clarified the argument that Aboriginal peoples are “predisposed to crime”:

Statistically, they do much more crime than anyone else. Why is that hard for you to understand. That doesn't mean they're all criminals. It means that there is a disproportionately high number of them who are criminals. You were the first to bring up natives. Maybe instead of saying stupid things like "cowardly bigots" doing whatever (even though you clearly don't know what racism is) you could accept that fact and get on with your life.

Other posters used similar forms of evidence to justify police profiling, demonstrating the dangerous context Winnipeg in particular poses for police and the role that Aboriginal people and other racialized group members play in creating that danger:

*Let me fill you in on Winnipeg.
This city, according to a report by Statistics Canada, has one of the countrys highest murder rates per capita.
Shootings and other violent crimes have become so commonplace in Winnipeg, that some streets are empty at dusk.
Many people from middle-class suburbs avoid entire neighbourhoods, even during the daytime. I know I do.
Most of the victims of violent crime are aboriginals, Third World immigrants, gang members, homeless people or transients.
Most of the gangs in the city are made up of Aboriginals and 70% or more of the inmates in our prisons are Aboriginal.
A new twist in Winnipeg is the addition of new black African immigrant gangs, perhaps the best know are called the Mad Cowz. A few years ago the gang reportedly split and a new faction, called the African Mafia, started pushing drugs on their turf thus sparking a gang war where an innocent citizen was shot down dead.
Ain't diversity great?
Now you know.*

Comments that sought to justify police actions because of their role in upholding a safe society while concurrently denying racism in society were common in the forums. The overarching logic was one that dismissed 'race' as interrupting the notion of 'equality' in society, demonstrated risk to officers and law abiding citizens, and situated racialized and criminalized 'Others' as the source of this risk. Noteworthy of the last comment is the division between middle-class and 'dangerous' neighbourhoods, the construction of Aboriginal people as violent criminals and gang members, and the broadening of the criminalization to include other racialized groups.

Posters also offered support for other comments that championed the status quo in *reinforcing discourses* (8). These comments lend support to posters who engaged in the criminalization of Fresh IE or defend the actions of police:

Comment 1: Fresh I.E. chooses to dress in a way that makes him appear to be a criminal.

Response 1: ...well put! This was profiling, of someone that chose to dress like a gangsta. The fact that he chooses to dress like a member of the criminal element, and then is surprised that police react ... he has to be kidding.

Comment 2: He looks like every other gang member in this city. When I first read the article, I was upset that the cops handled the situation so poorly, but after seeing that picture of him, I can understand why they chose to act as they did.

Response 2: Very well put.

The gang banger clothes are more of a costume or a symbol.

I do not think the police would have had the same occasion if the guy was in Ukrainian traditional garb, or in Leider hosen, etc.

This guy is trying to promote a certain image and that image has its criminal origins!"

The other tendency in the exchanges was for posters to draw on other comments that defended police actions and marginalized Fresh IE's claim that the incident was racially motivated:

Comment 1: Just because you are a visible minority and are pulled over does not mean it was racial profiling. Given the risks police officers take everyday, I think we should be giving them the benefit of the doubt.

Response 1: you have the right idea. People are too quick to blame.

Comment 2: Do you honestly think that police officers hang around doughnut shops? If these cops were going for a coffee break, you should give them credit for being cognizant enough to notice the SUSPICIOUS actions of vehicle and acting on the information provided to them.

Response 2: Someone else has already posted that they would not have pulled this car over if they had not witnessed suspicious activity AND had not been informed to do so!

In combination, the dominating and reinforcing discourses create a version of the social order where the police were justified in their efforts to attend to the safety and security of law abiding citizens. These posters construct the incident such that police took the necessary precautions against what was seen as a potentially dangerous criminal. These posters often denied the existence of racism, and usually occurred within the context of criminalizing Fresh IE by pointing to his appearance and the role that appearance plays in a dangerous society in which the police must mitigate risks to public safety.

Radical Interactions

Just as exchanges between posters could be found to represent a conservative standpoint in the online forums, many responses formed an oppositional, radical standpoint; one that constructed a social reality in need of change. As was the case with the conservative exchanges, most were negative or *resisting discourses*, which sought to counter other comments in the forums that maintained the status quo. The main strategy here was to resist comments that engaged in social exclusion. The following comment, which was removed by the CBC moderator and therefore quoted from within a response from another poster, generated at least one reaction before it was pulled from the comment board:

Comment: Rap "artist" Now, that's funny. Rap is jungle music for idiots who can't speak. And then complain that they're poor. Boo Hoo. You can't climb the social ladder if you think monkey talk is cool. eek eek

Response: You don't deserve this attention but I must say your comments are an expression of who you are and you have done a fine job of showing the world your true self. and of course we are always braver when we do not use our real name.

We are all one family, the family of mankind whether we like rock, country, classical or rap does not matter. Oh you didn't tell us what your preference is?"

The opposition to this criticism against Black rap music and the view that racialized people occupy low 'rungs' on a "social ladder" in the response takes the form of locating individualized racism within the character of the poster. Several comments were also made in response to the overt racism more generally in the forums, as illustrated by this post:

Coming from the South in the United States, I thought that I had heard the worst racist comments imaginable, but I was wrong. Winnipeg definitely has its fair share of bigots.

Posts that challenged outright racism contained within the posts were not uncommon. But countering racism in the forums usually took the form of naming the racism and racial profiling conducted by the police:

People think the facts through, they were obviously racially profiling. The officer put in one wrong number or letter for the licence plate and a stolen Chrysler 300 came up instead, same colour too? The odds of that happening are worse than that of winning the lottery. The fact that everyone is sticking up for these specific police officers is terrible.

To all of those posters who argue the "walks like a duck, talks like a duck" statement - give your damn head a shake and get the real facts on the story. Winnipeg is hotbed of car theft, its true, but it's also a hotbed of rampant racism by the WPS. The odds of a simple typo bringing up a 300 of the same colour are not good.

The last comment picks up on a strategy that appeared at the centre of the conservative discourses: the notion that the police were in fact justified in their actions because Fresh IE belonged to a particular category or class of individuals commonsensically known as criminal. However, more common among the oppositional discourses were comments

that countered non-racialized criminalization, making an effort to bring ‘race’ back into the picture. For instance, the following comment from *Maritmer4Life* (whose user name before the comment board closed was *TiredofurBS*) elicited several responses:

Comment: Maritmer4Life [TiredofurBS] wrote: Posted 2008/06/07 at 11:57 AM ET “Why do people dress like thugs...act like thugs...talk like thugs then get upset when they are treated as such...It was good of the cops to apologize to the "minister" for the error but why does he act and dress like he is in a gang? I just dont get it...People want to be treated with respect yet they walk around with their asses hanging out...This goes for black and white so none of that talk please.”

This comment makes several discursive moves. It categorizes Fresh IE as looking like a “thug” and gang member. It also sarcastically acknowledges his contributions as a religious figure, thereby seeking to discredit him and his supporters, and potentially to diminish the need for the apology given by police representatives. Furthermore, this comment pre-emptively denies any charges against its racializing influence by claiming that it is equally applicable to all ‘races.’ This comment was not atypical. Comments that engaged in constructing Fresh IE as a potential criminal based on his appearance most often simultaneously engaged in some form of denial of ‘race’ as an explanatory factor for the outcome of the interaction between police and Fresh IE and/or his criminalization. Some of the responses to this comment include:

Response A: “Sorry there "TiredofurBS", but last time I checked this was a free country and people can dress how they want. The cops messed up, plain and simple.”

Response B: “give me a break, the cops apologized because of the national attention it got, not because they were sorry. They will continue to profile people of color, so if you live in winnipeg and your a person of color, don't dress nice and don't drive a nice car. Sure they apologized, that doesn't mean they won't do it again. What do you believe, racist or incompetent?”

Response C: “Yes aren't we all TiredofurBS...because nothing says dangerous like a t-shirt and ballcap. I mean...don't black men know that to not get pulled over at gunpoint they should dress, act, and talk like white men?”

Response D: “TiredofurBS . . . So I guess if "People want to be treated with respect" they had better start dressing JUST LIKE YOU ?”

Response A draws on a liberal democratic notion of equality in that people are free to dress however they like and not be subject to discrimination. This post also criticizes the actions of the police, pointing to their profiling practices. Response B challenges the praise given to the police apology, asserting that their motivations were to protect their image during media and public scrutiny, and then further criticizes police as being either “racist or incompetent.” Responses C and D suggest that the original comment’s efforts to ‘other’ Fresh IE based on his appearance is plainly misguided, but also acknowledges discriminatory practices by police, where class appearance is assumed to determine criminality and respect from others.

A similar stream of comments following one made by *OldSeaSalt* demonstrates the reactions from posters who challenge the same logic used by *TiredofurBS*, this time claiming that Fresh IE dressed like a “thief” whose detainment by police was therefore justified:

Comment: If it dresses like a thief, acts like a thief it gets treated as a thief. It shows our cops are on their toes and doing their jobs. Occasionally an error will occur but these are few and far between. Keep up the good work and keep the peace!

Response A: OldSeaSalt ...how do you dress?

Response B: your comment about looking and dressing like a thug where in the story does it mention what he was wearing or if his car was stock or tricked out? You add a lot of details from your own concept of what a rapper should look like. Stick to the story not the things your mind adds later.

Response C: to all the ppl that claims that he was wearing "thief like" attire, you are pretty much making the assumption that this rapper was wearing gangsta wear. Now the article just mentioned that it was a rapper that was pulled over and automatically you've assumed that he looks like a thief. isn't that some sort of profiling? hmmm... not a surprise that you've also sided with the police as well.

Response D: OldSeaSalt, how exactly does one "dress like a thief"? Perhaps by dressing like Conrad Black? How does one "act like a thief"? By stealing? Society has an overly stereotypical view of what constitutes looking like a thief, and rappers tend to get the worst of it.

OldSeaSalt's comment also responsabilizes Fresh IE for the incident, claiming that it was merely an error that will naturally, although infrequently, occur in the course of proper policing. Further, the comment offers praise to police officers that carry out their duties by detaining a potential "thief." Response A illustrates the class bias in the original comment, questioning the social positionality of the poster, where responses B, C, and D point to the stereotyping that results from this bias. These comments illustrate details that are added to the construction of Fresh IE in his classification as a criminal 'Other.' As in the case of the following comment, which was a response to Response D above, posters also worked to support other radical comments that challenged the status-quo:

Response to D: totally agree with your comments to OldSeaSalt - I too would like to know how one dresses like a thief? I would hate to make this mistake.

Just as was the case in the conservative discourses, posters on the political left also built on other similar contributions to the forum with what could be called a *supporting discourse* (4). Although much less common in the comments, these posts connected with general criticisms of the police, as in this comment:

Yeah I believe the police here about as much as everyone else here...which is not at all.

Other posters laid down more specific criticisms of the police, simultaneously challenging opinionated postings and asking why the police noticed Fresh IE's vehicle in the first place:

Not enough info but oh so many opinions. I agree with those that want to know why the plate number was being checked.

I agree with many people who have left comments... they should have double checked the number when typing it in before jumping out of the car and belittling this innocent man and the youth that was with him. And the excuses they are coming up with to cover their sorry behinds is just absolutely ridiculous.

The following post from *Anonymous101* sought to highlight the racialized dimension of policing by drawing attention to the relationship Winnipeg police have with Aboriginal people, as is evident in this comment and the one posted in response to it:

Comment: "Can you imagine what might have happened if Fresh IE was Aboriginal?"

NOTE: I HOLD NO PREJUDICES OR GRUDGES AGAINST ABORIGINAL PEOPLE."

Response: "To Anonymous101: I agree with you, if this had been a native he would have been shot, but the p[osters would be saying he deserved it, the cops always get the benefit of the doubt, I think he should sue, thats the only thing that can hurt the force and make them change their old policy. I'm sure they have a policy of taking natives for a one way ride, like Saskatoon."

This last response is an important example for two reasons: it broadens the individualizing frame used in the vast majority of the comments, calling attention to the institution of policing as a racializing project, and it locates this project within the context of its impacts on Aboriginal people.

Although racism in policing was cited in the comment boards, posters often located the problem as primarily experienced by Aboriginal people in Winnipeg, which is

the focus of the next two incidents that occurred during the summer of 2008. Like the comments from the Fresh IE case, these discourses show a conflict between conservative posters who deny allegations of racism, defend the police actions, and engage in responsabilization and criminalization, and radical posters who challenge the current state of the relationship between racialized groups and the police.

Chapter Four

The Inquest into the Death of Matthew Dumas

The police are doing the right thing - cleansing the gene pool - saving tax dollars. If you think there are too many Aboriginals being shot then maybe there are too many doing the crimes. Besides if a person is too stupid to drop a weapon when he is told to do so then he doesn't deserve to live. I have no mercy for anyone in the criminal element - white, black, red, brown, or yellow - if they are criminals - waste them.

Comment posted by Frank Godon on August 7th, 2008, 2:08 PM at: <http://derrylsanderson.blogspot.ca/2008/08/whats-up-with-winnipeg-po-pos.html>

In the reporting of the inquest into the police shooting of Matthew Dumas, reporters framed the issue as one of a debate over the role of ‘race’ in policing. Eighteen-year-old Matthew Dumas was killed by a Winnipeg police officer the afternoon of January 31, 2005. In response to a report of a robbery in East Kildonan and the knowledge that the perpetrators had taken a taxi to Winnipeg’s North End, police officers began conducting a sweep of the neighbourhood, looking for suspects. When an officer called out to Dumas, who had been crossing a street, he began to run down a back alley. In pursuit, the officer caught up with Dumas in a backyard. Dumas managed to evade the officer and both ended up walking down the sidewalk on Dufferin Avenue. Other officers also began to converge on the sidewalk. When Dumas refused to drop the screw driver that he was holding, he was fatally shot by WPS Constable Dennis Gburek. The inquest into the death of Matthew Dumas began on June 9th 2008—what would have been his 22nd birthday.

The CBC summarized Crown counsel Robert Tapper’s opening remarks at the inquest: “because of the number of Winnipeg police officers and witnesses of aboriginal

background involved in the case, he's confident the judge will find, at the end of the day, that there was no racial bias involved in the death of Dumas, who was aboriginal" (CBC, 2008A). Donald Worme, a well-known and respected lawyer who has served as counsel on many high profile cases involving Aboriginal people, acted as counsel for the Dumas family. Worme held that Dumas was wiping the pepper spray from his eyes, which had an exacerbated effect on the young man since he was asthmatic and could not respond to the officers' commands because of his state of confusion and disorientation. Winnipeg Police Service lawyer Kim Carswell countered with "just because it's a screwdriver and not a knife doesn't mean it is any less of a threat for the officers... the distance was so close that Const. (Dennis) Gburek was in danger." Inquest Judge Mary Curtis released her report in mid-December. The report concluded that racism played no part in the shooting of Matthew Dumas.

In the media reports of the inquest, representatives of the Southern Chiefs' Organization, members of the Dumas family, and representatives of the Winnipeg Police all engaged with the question of 'how should we define the relationship between racialized group members and the police'? And so did posters who responded to these news reports. What is presented below is a summary of the comments posted online, where the focus is on how posters compete with one another in advancing their own worldview as 'common sense.' The section concludes with an overview of some of the different formats in which this struggle takes place; namely, that posters interact with 'generalized voices' in the forums by engaging with individual comments and by engaging with multiple posters in conversations.

Text – Dumas: a ‘Kid from the North End’

Of the web sources covering the inquest into Dumas’s death, 17 websites included space for user-generated responses, with 226 online comments posted in total. Despite the fact that Dumas was of legal age when he was shot, the majority of the comments constructed him as a youth, defining him as a “kid,” “child” and “teenager” (37), generally accompanied by a sympathetic view. Posters used the discourse of ‘childhood’ in a number of ways; the following comment illustrates a paternalism whereby society should care for and protect vulnerable youth like Dumas:

There are 15 year old kids getting shot every day on our streets now. Those kids are the ones which I, and every one of us, should be concerned about.

It is one thing to paint a picture of hope to a kid but it needs avenues to for him to follow up with so he doesn't give up.

The first comment cited above calls for “concern” for youth who are subject to violence and crime in the inner-city, and posters did describe Dumas as coming from Winnipeg’s “North End” (15). The second points to the role of opportunities for meaningful success in the path youth can follow as they grow up. Constructing Dumas as a ‘kid’ is important in this regard, because it places some of the blame or responsibility on the police, who should have handled the situation differently:

Maybe we need cops with enough guts to do the job and not so pathetic that they have to shoot a kid with a screwdriver.

Maybe the kid was guilty of a crime, maybe not. But he certainly didn't deserve to get shot to death because four police officers couldn't get him under control any other way.

Discharging a round into the ground or the air may have startled this kid into submission. Deadly force was simply not called for... but excused by the judge.

I thought a big part of the reason the WPS and RCs allegedly spent so much time in training was due to the unarmed combat training they received. What, you can't become a cop without a BA in psychology or conflict res, but you can shoot a teenager with a Phillips Head?

In these comments, Dumas is presented as a youth instead of an adult capable of taking responsibility for his actions, and therefore the police are held liable for the shooting. Adult officers are expected to be able to mitigate threats from young people without resorting to lethal force, and it is suggested that possibly another strategy, like firing a warning shot, might have helped to subdue Dumas.

When constructing the police, most often posters referred to the officers involved in the shooting (60), but they also make note of police representatives (6), such as Chief McCaskill, and the Winnipeg Police Service more generally as a public institution (26). However, unlike in the Fresh IE forums, criticism of the police was relatively uncommon in the Dumas posts (24). Some examples include:

Example 1: I think that the whole process of police departments looking at the investigations of other police departments and then finding nothing wrong (surprise, surprise) is flawed.

Example 2: Couldn't they have just winged or Tasered him? Dead youths tell no tales or contravene an incident report.

Example 3: No doubt about it, a screwdriver is a nasty weapon in the hands of an angry person. Only thing I am puzzled at, is why they would not have used tasers. This would definitely be a good use for one, when a person has a weapon but not a gun. It might have taken him down and not required the use of a gun. They use them on fairly innocent situations, why not this?? If the police officers don't have them, I think they should, but these things need to be used for special situations and not on anything like is being done to often.

Example 4: I think the police may have overreacted. He should have been tazered or at least shot in the leg.

Example 5: As for their tackle and handcuff policies, seems to me that they are heavy handed.

The first example is critical about the investigation process in which the Calgary Police Service was called upon to determine whether or not the use of lethal force was justified in subduing Dumas. The second focuses on the level of force used, suggesting that some other, unspecified means could have been used to diffuse the situation. The remaining examples question why a Taser was not used instead of a firearm. Although the preceding examples do hold the police responsible, the majority of the posts defend the police officers involved in the incident.

The next comments, as in the preceding Examples 2 to 4 above, question why the police did not use an 'Electronic Control Device' or "done things differently" by using a "less lethal level of force" to mitigate the threat, but these authors make a clear statement to absolve the police officers from any charges of wrongdoing. In this regard, the police are not held accountable or responsible for a wrongful death:

I dont' blame the police either. I dont' know what I would do in their shoes. Someone coming out you with a screwdriver who is unable to be subdued. It's unfortunate that they didn't have the use of a taser instead of a gun.

It's so easy to sit in a chair and scoff and say you would have done things differently, but when you're there in the dark and have literally 2 seconds to make a decision...I can't even imagine being in that place. I'm sure this could have gone down differently, I'm sure there were ways to ensure the young man wasn't killed. But I'm tired of him being portrayed as an innocent victim of police negligence.

Our officers are trained well to deal with situations like this and are not employed merely to get hurt or even worse, lose their lives for the sake of trying to use a "less" lethal level of force in a situation where their lives are seriously at risk.

Although comments were critical of policing actions, far more common in the forums were comments that offered support to police and defended their actions (62).

Many of these comments took a general form of endorsing the police:

I fully support the Winnipeg Police on this one.

Officer responds in the way he is trained. Case closed.

Keep up the good work officers.

I am 150% in favor of the officers' actions on that fateful day

I totally agree with the outcome of this case.

I would have say that i'm on the side of the policeman.

These comments were often presented as the obvious or common-sense response to Dumas's shooting, denying alternative, critical interpretations of the way that police dealt with the situation.

The last set of examples support of the police as standalone statements; many comments in this vein also occurred alongside justifications. There are a variety of strategies used by posters to this end. One such approach was to offer emotional support for the officers who had no other option but to take the life of another human being:

My heart goes out to the officer that Dumas put in the position to utilize deadly force. I hope he walks into the future knowing that he had no other options and used the appropriate force that allowed him to see his own family on the day of the date of the incident.

Glad the officers weren't hurt, but very sorry for the poor officers who have to deal with having been forced to do something like this.

Like the article said, police are trained to use deadly force if anybody is within 7 meters of them with a knife (of similar weapon), and approaching aggressively. That's exactly what happened here; I just wish that the officer involved was able to get the support he needs so that he can cope with killing this young man.

I feel for this family, but I feel more for this officer who has to live knowing he killed a young man while the public berates and belittles him into the ground for a "bad decision".

Here the responsibility shifts from the officers to Dumas, whose actions probably caused significant distress to the officer forced to fire the shot. Comments that call for emotional support to the police officer who pulled the trigger and criticized scrutiny by the public rallied around a discourse at the centre of those in support of the police: the construction of an inherent right to self-defence.

The Right to Self-Defence

Constructing Dumas as a 'kid from the North End' enabled some of the posters to point to youth crime as a problem, thereby defending the actions of the police who must protect themselves against the dangers posed by young, reckless criminals:

Suicide by cop perhaps? If he was warned that he'd be shot, why, at that point, wouldn't he drop the weapon? Perhaps because he didn't think the officer would actually do it, because these kids have learned they can practically get away with it all... who knows. Glad the officers weren't hurt, but very sorry for the poor officers who have to deal with having been forced to do something like this. At the rate society is going, in another decade or two it will be just second nature for a police officer to have to use deadly force.

Its only a matter of time before a kid stealing a car gets shot. Police have been forced to shoot several times in the last year.

If this had ended with a police officer being injured, or worse killed, would there be an inquiry today? In Winnipeg, young criminals can steal a car, try to run over innocent people, ram police officers and nobody blinks an eye. This is the real outrage that deserves an inquiry.

The police officers on site are given the benefit of the doubt because of the dangerous nature of their role in society, especially given the extent of youth crime in the area and the perceived leniency of the criminal justice system in dealing with young offenders. Therefore, the use of lethal force is justified, not only in protecting those that they are employed to serve, but more importantly in protecting the police themselves from youth who are 'out of control.' The dangers inherent to policing in Winnipeg's North End are highlighted in particular, as in the following example:

Speaking as someone who lives in the wonderfully seedy area of Winnipeg, I can only tell you what I have seen. The police don't just randomly thug people around. They also don't shoot at criminals for no odd reason.

This discourse holds the rights of police officers to defend themselves while on the job as paramount. Above all else, policing is an integral part of society and is rife with occupational hazards:

Police are paid to protect us, they have to start with protecting themselves. I don't think anybody would of played that card any different.

We need to stand up for the rights of cops to protect themselves when working

A police officer is only instructed to use force when his/her life is in danger, and if I had pepper sprayed someone twice and they lunged after me even if they had a weapon or not, you bet I would be terrified for my life and would not hesitate to protect myself.

I agree with what the cop had to do. Doesn't matter who went at him with a weapon. He had the right to protect himself from getting harmed or even killed if he got hit in the right spot.

My heart goes out to the officer that Dumas put in the position to utilize deadly force.

A Violent Criminal

Common to all of the comments cited above, and acting as a major justifier for the police is a discourse of criminalization that constructs Dumas as a dangerous “thug” or “violent criminal” who “threatened police”:

Example 1: Respect the police and they respect you, act like a thug or threaten to harm a police officer and they will put you down. It's simple. Oh, and they have better tools and they usually win. I am on the side of the police....

Example 2: Another violent criminal, dies a violent death.

Example 3: This is ridiculous! While it is too bad that this criminal died, I don't blame the police.

Example 4: Dumas approached the police threatening them with a weapon

Example 5: Their obvious contempt and flagrant disregard for the law is apparent everytime one of these thugs threatens a policeman with a knife or gun.

Example 6: What would have happened if this guy pulled a screwdriver on a regular citizen? Somebody would have been stabbed and possibly killed. It's unfortunate this criminal was killed but better him than an innocent bystander!

Example 7: I am glad this dirt bag is dead, he was a criminal...not a law abiding citizen like the rest of us. I hope he DOES NOT rest in peace but rot for all eternity.

1 criminal down, 50,000 to go!

Criminalizing discourses work to create a division between ‘good’ citizens who obey the law and those who show “contempt and flagrant disregard” for it. To further justify claims that Dumas was indeed a criminal, posters note that he was carrying a screwdriver and would not have run from the police officers if he had not committed a crime:

Why did he have a screw driver anyway?? Was he going around tightening people's hinges?

The blame for this lies on a misguided 18 year old boy, nobody else.

he was up to something that night. He was carrying around a screwdriver, a potentially deadly weapon. I doubt this kid was going around tightening screws in the neighbourhood. He also ran from the police. Who knows what this kid was planning that night. He may have been planning a robbery of his own or worse he may have been planning to kill someone

If he didn't run, he'd be alive. If he didn't commit the crime he wouldn't have to run.

If he wasn't guilty why would anyone in the right mind lunge at police with a weapon, they know if they are threatening the police in an way yes they will try to do their job to bring a criminal to justice.

By framing Dumas as a criminal 'Other,' he is ultimately deemed responsible for his own death:

it's everybody else's fault but the individual who brought it on himself. You chose to lead that life, you have to take responsibility for your actions.

Modern, societal life exhibits Darwinian attributes: Those who succeed usually deserve to succeed; those who deserve to succeed usually succeed; & ultimately we are primarily responsible for our own fate.

suicide by cop

Similarly, many comments note that he failed to comply with police orders:

Example 1: When a police officer tells me to stop, I stop. I don't wait until he tells me several times; I don't wait until I get pepper sprayed twice; I don't wait until he says to me "stop or I'll shoot" and I certainly don't lung at him with something in my hand.

Example 2: Complying with these instructions would have save Dumas his life, he made the wrong choice and lost.

Example 3: The kid never listened to the cop and still went forward.

*Example 4: How not to get shot by cops?
When the officer tells you to put down your weapon, put it down.
You think he'd still be alive if he did that. I'd say so.*

*Example 5: If a cop tells you to stop, you stop. He tells you to drop your
weapon, you drop you weapon. If you decide not to listen to the police, you
take your own life into your hands.*

In constructing a common-sense discourse that champions responsibility for one's own behaviour, posters denounce Dumas for "attacking" the officers, explaining that his choice to do so resulted in his death:

If you attack someone with a weapon and a armed person at that what do you expect to happen.

You attack a cop with a weapon, you are going to die. It was not dark, there was no confusion about identities here. This kid could have stopped at any time. Any time. And it would have ended with a warm dry bed.

Don't want to get shot? Don't charge at an offier with a weapon!

As long as people continue to go on "stupidity sprees", the cops should use full force to squash the scofflaws that want the easy way out! What makes these "fine citizens" so special, besides the fact that they're obviously brain-damaged!?

What emerges from these comments is an aligned narrative whereby Dumas, a young, violent criminal from a dangerous area, who after threatening police officers and failing to comply with police orders was shot by police out of the exercise of a fundamental right to self defence. In the end, Dumas is ultimately held responsible for his death, sympathy is extended to the police officer who fired the shot, and claims against the WPS are chastised.

Largely absent from the posts cited in the preceding paragraphs is any discussion of the role that ‘race’ played in the shooting. Many posters leave questions of racism, racial profiling, or racialized policing out of their comments, even though the online sources did follow the two-sided journalistic style, whereby opposing voices debate over the role of ‘race’ in the incident. The discourses of responsibility to abide by the law, to listen to the police and not threaten them with violence—and, most importantly, to suffer the consequences for failing to do so—are ultimately used by posters to deny claims that the incident was in some way racially motivated. However, there are also other ways in which posters deal with charges of racism as they extend their comments to include constructions of Dumas’s parents and Aboriginal leaders.

Beyond Responsibilizing Dumas

Constructing Dumas as a “kid” is also part of a discursive move to constructing his family. In particular, as the online sources made mention of Dumas’s mother, she too is the subject of several comments in the forums:

Example 1: My heart breaks for the family, it dose not get any harder, than losing a family member.

Example 2: I grieve for his Mother-she has lost a son.

Example 3: I feel bad for this kid's family nad the officers involved.

Example 4: I feel for this family, but I feel more for this officer who has to live knowing he killed a young man while the public berates and belittles him into the ground for a "bad decision".

Example 5: This overall is a very unfortunate incident for the Dumas family and the police officer involved because of the actions of Matthew Dumas.

The first two examples make statements of condolence, while the last two compare the hardship experienced by Dumas's family to the difficulty this incident must have posed for the officer who pulled the trigger. In making note of the Dumas family, posters can move beyond responsabilizing Dumas for the shooting, extending responsibility to his parents. Comments in this regard tended to premise criticism of Dumas's family with sympathy for them, as is the case with the following post:

This was indeed a tragedy for everyone. However, I take issue with the family's "grandstanding" approach.

The notion of "grandstanding" derives in part from a statement made by Dumas's sister, Jessica Dumas, who is quoted in the following comment:

"My mom deserves a better explanation than this whole process, and I think that she deserves a real sincere apology, " she said.

How better can you explain, "Your son went after a police officer using a screwdriver as a weapon. The police officer (who puts his life at risk everyday to keep the community and people just like them safe), didn't feel like dying and killed Dumas before he could kill him.

Commenting on her feelings towards the first day of the inquest coinciding with Dumas's birthday, Jessica noted that she was "very bitter about it and kind of disgusted, because this was the one day that my mom could look back and remember her little baby boy and all those joyful memories. But now the date is tainted for her, and for us" (CBC, 2008D) A poster had this to say in response:

Oh for crying out loud. Yeah, he could still be alive making joyful memories for you robbing innocent people. I guess it must be depressing knowing you have no income now that your thieving son can't bring home the goods. Give me a break.

Many comments in the forum counter claims from the Dumas family by constructing him as a “risk” and a “criminal”:

It's unfortunate and sad...HOWEVER...sometimes when you're the family of a criminal you have a hard time seeing the same person the rest of us see...a criminal.

The Dumas family should be ashamed of themselves. Instead of blaming everyone else, why not be accountable for the mistakes they made that led their son to become a criminal...

As in the case of the last comment, the following posts demonstrate how participants in the forum saw the family as wrongfully “blaming everyone else”:

I am sorry for his family - I am sure that it hurts to lose someone you love - but you need to stop blaming everyone else and understand that he decided to ignore the police himself and paid the ultimate price for that decision

I don't understand, families know what kind of person they are raising and for the most part what their children are doing, maybe they don't want to know. Then when something happens, it's everybody else's fault but the individual who brought it on himself. You chose to lead that life, you have to take responsibility for your actions. And that includes the families.

Matthew's family is expending a lot of effort to shift the blame for his death. It is the fault of police, of society, of racist policies...etc. If they had only used a fraction of the energy they now have into raising Matthew properly and teaching him right from wrong, perhaps he would not have been put into that tragic situation where he died a violent death. The blame for this tragedy is Matthew's alone; the family's assertions to the contrary is completely unfounded.

The preceding comments suggest that claims from the Dumas family misplace “blame” and are therefore “unfounded.” The first two examples above point back to Dumas himself as primarily responsible, but the second and the third begin to broaden the responsibility, suggesting that poor parenting is the true culprit for the incident, as in the following comments:

Maybe you should reflect on your parenting skills before blaming society for your son's death.

my heart goes out to you, but however you made the decision to let your child grow up in this manor [...] so don't blame the law for protecting us. to all you parents with young children, raise them to love not to hate.

If someone else must be blamed, maybe blame the terrible parent who raised a bad kid.

In attempts to redirect responsibility to the family for a “lack of parenting,” the comments particularly denounce the family’s allegations of racism:

And where were his parents when he needed their guidance to become a usefull member of society?...they are sure here now crying racism...how about "I did a lousy job of raising a child and I should take responsibility for his stupid actions"...OH, sorry, its societies fault...and you need to compensating us for loss of our child...

So shake your head and look in the mirror...YOU ARE ONE OF THE REASONS THAT THE PROBLEMS EXIST IN THE FIRST PLACE

Or our government should pass a law such as when a youth commits a crime the parent(s) should also be held responsible. I'd really like those deadbeat parents to serve jail time along with their child but a fine for the parents will also work.

There should be consequences for peoples lack of parenting Aboriginal or not.

Just as criminalizing Dumas responsabilized him for his own death, and constructing him as a kid enabled posters to responsabilize his family, posters also positioned Dumas in racialized terms, assigning fault to Aboriginal leaders who appear in the web sources as supporting the family and criticizing the outcome of the inquest. In a few comments, the parents and leaders are blamed simultaneously:

What the native leaders should be doing is "requiring" parental classes and pass a law that you can only consume alcohol 1 night out of each month. I am

almost positive that these young people roaming the streets in gangs at 12am will diminish, if only they had parents/family who cared.

you leaders want to blame something blame the parenting , the mistakes always begin there.

The focus of several comments was to responsabilize the leaders, holding them accountable “for their peoples actions”—although, as it is noted in the comment below, some posters voiced their doubt that the leaders would be capable of meeting their obligations in this regard:

wonder why I never see these chiefs or aboriginal leaders speak up when their own people are committing awful crimes. I dont know if I have ever heard Fontaine or Chartrand even ATTEMPT to take some responsibility for their peoples actions but then again im not holding my breath because im pretty sure ill see some bovines flying out of the schneiders plant first.

Among the most blatantly offensive comments were those that called Aboriginal leaders ‘thieves’ and ‘parasites’:

LoL....I have NO COMMENT. Suck it cheifs.....continue to steal government money that is intended for YOUR PEOPLE...and you wonder why the indians are a scar on society...pFF what a load of crap.

I hope they can keep the parasitic native leadership from making hay off this event. One of their people commit suicide-by-cop, and they see endless days of per diem payments to protest and consult. meanwhile, the young continue to die.

Posters also call upon the chiefs to help police officers in dealing with crime in the “bad area’s [sic] of town”:

these bad area's of town are not what you think. i'm amazed that officers aren't walking around with their guns drawn. its a scarey thought. but unless we help them its only going to get worse.

many including the aboriginal leaders, which need to lose the racism attitudes and come see what these officers really have to deal with in these area's.

Just as posters were critical of the family's claims of racism, criticism of

Aboriginal leadership for making the same claim featured prominently in the forums:

those wonderful Native leaders are doing nothing but crying racism....How about becoming true leader and helping the youth(all young troubled people, regardless of race) ...it seems the only time that you hear from THE LEADERS is to criticize and demand compensation....

I am an aboriginal person and it saddens me that the aboriginal leaders are always so quick to cry racism.

wish that in the near future that these so called leaders will realize that racism is not the answer they should be looking for. [...]those were very strong words which came from people that call themselves leaders. sorry but i don't see how a man is racist when he's fending for his life. its now time to be real leaders and straighten out your kids. blame is an easy thing say but not an easy thing to accept.

you say RACISM and you call yourself leaders, open your eyes the kid attack a cop wanting to stab him with a screwdriver. what exactly are you leaders of, there's no racism here, this kid could have made a much better decision than the one he made, remember it turned out he wasn't a suspect, of that crime anyway. RACISM is the easy way out, but not this time, try again. i think you leaders need to walk around these area's late a night and see whats really going on. RACISM , i can't believe you leaders , a native dies and its racism,bs.

These posters dismissed charges of racism as “crying,” and challenged the legitimacy of the “leadership” of those making statements on behalf of Aboriginal people. Naming racism is framed as being far “easier” than accepting responsibility for Dumas’s actions, and is treated as a political platform in the forums.

Although the responsabilization of the Dumas family and the Aboriginal leaders, layered with a denial of racism, was a common theme in the posts, some participants in the forums also presented charges of racism:

Whatever the mindset of the officer who killed Dumas, the Winnipeg Police Service as an institution have all but ignored the crucial Aboriginal Justice Inquiry report, which means that the force is bound to continue to get in situations where they will kill native people unnecessarily, and that relations with native communities will remain poor.

The Winnipeg Police Service, as are most police services including the RCMP, are out of control. The police have to get rid of the "cowboy" mentality when dealing with aboriginals

and yes beng a native played a part in this murder !! The recent apology to natives keeps getting holes SHOT through it ! !

This is so sad. Racial tension is rampant in Winnipeg and the fact that Gburek is Metis doesn't wash with me. It's just a variation to I'm not racist, some of my best friends are Black, Aboriginal, etc.

Although comments like these did point to issues of systemic racism in policing, going beyond individualization of the problem, they were marginalized in the comment boards. Far more common were posts denying the role of ‘race’ in the shooting. Four common strategies are used to this end: denial backed with responsabilization of Dumas; pointing out that the police officer who shot Dumas was Métis; mentioning Aboriginal overrepresentation in the criminal justice system; and the discourse of “playing the race card.”

Four Denial Strategies

The most simplistic approach to denying charges of ‘race’ in the comments was to responsabilize Dumas for the incident:

Example 1: If I get into trouble with the law, it's my own damn fault, not my race.

Example 2: It doesn't matter if he was brown, white, or black. You shouldn't be walking around with a screwdriver around police feet from them anyway. He got what he deserved!

Example 3: I'm with the cops on this one. I don't care if it was just a screwdriver, those could kill someone and I would have done the same thing regardless of skin color."

Example 4 The cop didn't have a choice. The facts have proven it, along with racism played absolutely no role in this whatsoever.

Example 5: The shooting was never about race - it was about somebody who took his life in his hands by ignoring the commands of police officers, and actively decided to escalate the situation by brandishing a weapon and advancing. Had he simply dropped the screwdriver and complied, he'd still be alive.

All of these comments suggest that two distinct arguments—that 'race' is a contributing factor and that Dumas is personally responsible for the shooting—are mutually exclusive or incompatible explanations. The first comment suggests that 'race' never has any influence in conflicts between citizens and the law, and clearly champions the notion of personal responsibility by using the first-person position. The second and third suggest that skin colour plays no role in assessing the danger posed by someone armed with a screwdriver. Examples 4 and 5 hold Dumas responsible for leaving the police officer no other option but to shoot, with the fourth example deferring to the legitimacy of the inquest's findings.

Another strategy to deny 'race' was to note that the officer who killed Dumas was Métis:

Lets look at it another way . if the cop was native would it still have been racism. ummm. he was defending himself, his life was at risk.

Now that it has come to light the officer involved in this unfortunate incident is in fact of Metis decent I wonder what spin the Dumas supporters will use to maintain their racial point of view.

it is also funny that we don't hear those prominent native voices still screaming racism like they were before it was one of their own that shot this thug.

The freakin' officer who shot him was Metis. Get with it.

The first example was posted before the police announced that the officer who shot Dumas was Métis. These comments suggest that racism is an individualized phenomenon, and that racialized people are incapable of being 'racist.'

A third approach used to deny charges that 'race' is a factor is to describe the overrepresentation of racialized peoples in conflict with the law. Several comments use percentage figures to make this claim:

Considering 85+% of all violet crime is committed by Natives; they as a whole should count themselves lucky that only one of them have been killed recently.

Police probably tend to be a little or edge when confronted by an aboriginal suspect, and probably with good reason. I live near Brandon, and the Brandon paper publishes Crime Stoppers articles, and 95% (just my guess) are aborinal.

*If 80% or so of crimes are committed by people wearing red hats,then it's likely that the police are going to be on the look-out for people wearing red hats.
It's common sense,not racism.*

Like the last comment, other comments suggest that comments taking this approach are using “common sense” and that Dumas’s shooting is obviously not evidence ‘race’ and policing, just a fact of social life:

I am not being racist, but a realist....large portion of crimes are committed by natives.

Its difficult not to sound racial, Most of the crimes in Winnipeg are committed by Natives!!!!

If you think there are too many Aboriginals being shot then maybe there are too many doing the crimes.

A final strategy, appearing 27 times in the forums, was to call efforts to name ‘race’ and racism as “playing the race card”:

How many more could have/should have been shot when they tried to run officers down with stolen cars? How many times can you walk through a minefield and not get blown up? Play that card.....

I don't understand why the race card is being played in this case.

well.. if you play the race card, then you don't have to take responsibility for your mistakes, or short comings as a parent; responsible for the actions of your child....

These "leaders", while they go around playing the race card, have squandered hundreds of thousands of dollars that could have been better spent showing our youth a better way.

The use of the discourse of the “race card” was applied to the Dumas family, the Aboriginal leaders, and other posters. As described in the section on Fresh IE, the ‘race card’ discourse reduces allegations against the police to a game, and holds that charges of

‘race’ and racism should be discounted because they can be used at any point in an argument, even when losing.

Discourse Practice – Three Types of Interactions

In the ‘discourse practice’ section of the Fresh IE case, I broke the comments into *conservative* (dominating and reinforcing) and *radical* (resisting and allying) discourses—comments that engaged with other comments to either promote or critique the status-quo, respectively. These categories describe different approaches that posters took either to respond to the forums in a general way or to specific posters or comments that can be seen to constitute discursive formations. It is important to note that both discursive formations appear in the forums in a variety of ways. Rather than navigating the comments following this four-part classification scheme in the Dumas case, the discourse practice is presented in three sections, each focusing on a different type or modality of interaction to demonstrate how the discursive formations are woven throughout the forums. The three types of interactions are: *responding to generalized voices in the forums*, *responding to individual comments*, and *conversations between multiple posters*. In total there were 75 interactive comments in the 17 web sources, with 50 taking a conservative standpoint (38 dominating; 12 reinforcing) and 25 a radical standpoint (all of which were resisting discourses). The target audience of the comments is underlined. In conversations between multiple posters, author’s usernames are placed in parentheses before each comment.

Responding to Generalized Voices

The excerpt below is the second half of a posting which begins by stating the position ostensibly held by the poster—that the police officer followed protocol against an armed

subject—and then issues a statement in the hope that the officer has access to resources to cope with killing a “young man.” The poster goes on to address the forum generally, challenging those who hold contrary views:

For those who think differently, put yourself in this situation. You've got an aggressive person charging you with a knife. Pepper spray didn't work, a baton will allow them to get way too close to you with that knife, and you don't have a taser. What's your only option at this point???

The comment responsabilizes Dumas and defends police by using the discourse of the right to self-defence. The poster uses first person positionality to try to make the argument more convincing by creating a dangerous scenario where the actor is out of “options” and is forced to make a quick decision to mitigate oncoming danger. The same approach is used in another comment, this time without using the first-person, which enables the poster to ‘Other’ Dumas as mentally incompetent:

all you people in favor of this kid need to give your head a shake, sure he wasn't the suspect but he sure wanted to become one. who in their right mind attacks a guy with a gun. let me help you with that one, "a complete idiot".

The following comment responds to a generalized voice in the forums in much the same way as the last post, but uses both dominating and reinforcing conservative discourses:

I struggle to see the issue here at all. The kid didn't listen to the cops. He provoked the response by attacking the officer with a weapon ... and got shot. People, please.... THINK about this carefully... what the hell do you expect out of a situation like this? This kid's decisions are the only reason he is dead now. I, too, feel sorry for the officers who are being dragged through this circus. They did their job and furthermore, protected themselves. What do you expect? For the officer to take a screwdriver in the lung on the 'off chance' it might not be fatal?? Get a grip!

Calling on participants in the forum to “think carefully” about the issue, the poster challenges those who do not responsabilize Dumas for the shooting, reinforces comments in support of police by agreeing with those who have sympathy for the officer, and criticizes those who do not acknowledge the officer’s right to self-defence. Further, this poster takes the position of someone who has thought carefully, and therefore elevates himself or herself above the others.

This next comment begins by addressing “several people” in the forum about the issue of lethal force, challenging posters who believed that killing Dumas was necessary. The poster follows up with resistance to those who refute race as a way to understand the event, but does so in a way that seeks to broaden narrow conceptualizations of racism. Interestingly, to do so this poster aligns her or his comment with the denial strategy that ‘race’ does not apply because the officer was Métis:

As for claims made at the time of racism, it's not about the individual cop or cops involved. The one who pulled the trigger was aboriginal himself. It's about an ingrained way of thinking that causes police (and others) to react to individuals differently based on their race. Somehow I think that if I'm wandering the sidewalk, drunk, confused, whatever, and I have a screwdriver that I don't drop right away when ordered, I don't think I get shot in the head for it. I don't think the cops would feel automatically threatened. I don't think they'd think of me as a possible robbery suspect (like they did, incorrectly, think of Mr. Dumas, and J.J. Harper years before) even if one had been reported in my area. But then again I'm a white dude. I bet I get the benefit of the doubt. That's the racism that is being talked about, not that the specific cop behind the gun was consciously targeting someone because of race, it's just a biased way of thinking that gets accepted as normal and that in this case may have cost a kid his life.

Racism is reformulated in the post as more than an individualized process. This poster argues, admitting his racialization as a “white dude,” that it is a widely-held “ingrained way of thinking” and points to the normalization of white privilege in society as potentially responsible, at least in part, for Dumas’s death. But for the most part, posters

tended to address the issue of ‘race’ from a conservative standpoint, drawing on discourses of responsabilization (that Dumas was “threatening”), defence of/support for police (the right to self-defence and the importance role they play in society), and using denial strategies like the rhetorical device of “playing the race card” and asserting the Aboriginal positionality of the poster:

Example 1: And its time people realize that when you threaten an armed man with a weapon he will most likely defend himself! DUUUHH! Enough with the race card! Every race and creed falls into this!

Example 2: People, have respect for our officers.They are there for our protection, not for punching bags.I am a First Nation.

The following quote clearly exemplifies how comments in the discussion boards can have multiple discourse strategies compressed into a very short space:

Perhaps the people who are still crying racism or police brutality should pause and take stock of the real issue here: a marked lack of people taking personal responsibility for their actions and a failure to see that society has rules.

The poster from the previous example addresses everyone, which likely includes those who are quoted in the web sources and participants in the forum alike, who are “still crying racism or police brutality”—i.e., those taking a radical stance on the issue—and has the primary objective of belittling those making claims of racism, which can be taken as taking an emasculating or patronizing stance. In doing so, the comment works to defend the police by denying allegations of police brutality, places the responsabilization of Dumas as paramount to making sense of the incident, and advances a vision of the social order in terms of the “rules” to abide by in society.

Responding to Individual Comments

While posters did frequently respond to generalizations of what they perceived several other participants to be saying in the forums, the discourse practice was more often characterized by direct responses to individual comments. The following two examples demonstrate conservative interactions that dismiss efforts to decriminalize Dumas:

Comment 1: A classic case of a kid who didn't need to die. A kid with a screwdriver puts four officers "in fear for their lives" (the magic code words that allow a police officer to shoot to kill) and is shot dead in the process.

Response 1A: You are right...a kid didn't need to die. Perhaps he should have listened to the "magic code words" DROP THE WEAPON.

Response 1B: Well if anyone armed with a weapon of any kind does NOT obey police when they are told repeatedly to drop it - they SHOULD be shot.

Period

There are WAY too many incidents lately of people being told to stop and then trying to get away by assaulting the police - THIS IS A VERY DANGEROUS TREND - if they show total disregard for the police then you just know that they will treat the average person with even less respect.

In Comment 1, Dumas is constructed as a “kid who didn’t need to die,” casting doubt on police justifications for the incident as acceptable policing, and presenting them as having used excessive force. Both responses to this comment responsabilize Dumas because of his failure to comply with the officer’s orders. The second response further justifies the responsabilization by drawing on the discourse of the police officer’s right to self-defence and constructing the profession of policing as dangerous.

The next example is a post where decriminalization of Dumas works through a racialized interpretation, holding that Dumas would not have attracted police attention had he not been an “aboriginal youth.” However, the response to this comment re-criminalizes him, noting that since he posed a threat to police, he is a criminal, and hence responsible for his own death:

Comment: Matthew Dumas was not involved in a crime of any description, but he — simply because he was an aboriginal youth — had become a suspect and as such ended up where he did.

Response: Is it not a crime to threaten and advance upon a police officer with a weapon? We're not talking about a person who was innocently playing hoops with his friends and he was shot for no reason. He advanced on a police officer with a weapon, he was told to drop his weapon and he did not and instead continued to advance on the police officer. He made the choice to do what he did and he died for his choice. Matthew Dumas was responsible for his own actions and consequently his own death. It has nothing to do with his race and everything to do with his actions.

Like others belonging to the conservative discursive formation, these comments create a binary of “Us” (the hoop-playing, officer obeying, unarmed, responsible, innocent people) and “Them” (reckless, renegading, armed criminals who disregard the law) through challenges to posters from the left. The following two examples clearly demonstrate this process:

Response 1: The comment, "I think it's also become abundantly clear that because of the large aboriginal population in that particular vicinity, they are all at risk", what about the rest of us?

*Comment 2: Once again another shooying by the police in Carlyle, Sask today!!
When is this going to end???
Pepper spray, tazers, the only thing that seems to work are bullets!!
When is this going to end???*

*Response 2: You're joking right? When will it end? Simple to answer. When these pieces of scum stop terrorizing innocent law abiding persons. That's WHEN.
The best part is it only cost ten cents for a bullet rather than thousands of tax dollars for a trial.[...] You need a reality check.*

The first comment constructs Aboriginal people in the North End as posing a risk to “the rest of us,” and the second response defends against criticism of police and separates “pieces of scum” and “innocent law abiding persons.”

Responses to specific comments also took a variety of approaches to reinforcing the conservative discursive formation. This example approves of the way a poster criminalizes Dumas:

*Comment: Smash says: What?Did he think he would be going to jail for life?So he would be arrested,big f'in deal,not like it was the first time or anything.The way our system works he would've been home before the dayshift cops finished their shit.
Dumas.more like Dumbass.*

Response: LOL Smash...you always have the best post's!!!

The following comment was cited as an example of a denial of racism and responsabilization, and it elicited reinforcement from another poster:

*Comment: It dosn't matter if he was brown, white, or black. You shouldn't be walking around with a screwdriver around police feet from them anyway.
He got what he diserved!*

Response: true that playa

And this example reinforces support for the police, evident in both the response to the comment, but also in the comment itself in the form of a response to a generalized voice in the discussion board:

Comment : I just want to thank everone who supports the the Police and the tough job that they do. Thank You!

Response: Here here!

The next comment generated four direct responses from different posters. *Frank Godon* starts by challenging those who argue that less lethal force could have been used in the altercation between Dumas and the police. He then goes on to a Social Darwinist account of Dumas as inferior, pointing out the cost-saving service officers provide to society when they shoot criminals. He also describes Aboriginals as more likely to be criminal, responsabilizes Dumas, and denies ‘race’ as an important factor in dealing with “anyone in the criminal element”:

Comment: Frank Godon said...

I don't know if you have ever handled a handgun - but from experience they are very difficult to be accurate with - most are ok within 25 meters but you need a full mass to even hit the target - forget the movies and TV - it doesn't work that way - even if the cop could hit the person in the leg - if they are drugged up etc it wouldn't stop them - the only way to stop them is a kill shot. The police are doing the right thing - cleansing the gene pool - saving tax dollars. If you think there are too many Aboriginals being shot then maybe there are too many doing the crimes. Besides if a person is too stupid to drop a weapon when he is told to do so then he doesn't deserve to live. I have no mercy for anyone in the criminal element - white, black, red, brown, or yellow - if they are criminals - waste them.

Response 1: Frank Godon has a good point. If anyone has a lethal weapon and refuses to drop it when ordered by the police they're taking their lives into their own hands.

Response 2: Frank Godon makes the most sense here.

Response 3: Agree with Frank Goodon. Even if someone were shot in the leg, for example, there are some serious arteries there - the person could bleed out very quickly.

Response 4: Frank "Loadon" Godon has experience as a United States marine – seriously

Although these responses focus mostly on the lethal/non-lethal debate aspect of *Frank Godon*'s comment and offer reinforcement for the defence of police, by stating that they "agree" with him, that he "has a good point" or "makes the most sense here" does not challenge the cold, calculated racism in the second half of his posting.⁵

The issue of racism emerged in interaction discourses in a variety of ways. From the radical side of the comment boards, posters picked up on responsabilization of Dumas and attempts to deny 'race' and racism as cues to craft a racialized analysis of the situation:

Comment 1A: therightside said "OH HOW WE LOVE TO FEEL SORRY FOR CRIMINALS"

Comment 1B: Cdnexpat said "How hard is it to understand? When the police tell you to drop the weapon, you drop the weapon. I glad the judge saw this sham for what it was. "

Response 1: THE rightside- proven that he did not commit the crime so he was not a criminal-please read then think before commenting! Cdnexpat Police have a habit of killing Natives here, there is no trust for good reasons. When a stranger ask you to get out of your car or asks anything be on Guard also with people impersonating police why should we trust the officer he is still a stranger and one with a gun. Sheep-Bah!

Comment 2: Quit playing the race card every time an Aboriginal is confronted.

Robert Dziekanski was jolted and died by a taser just 24 seconds after being confronted by police in Vancouver International Airport. Perhaps we should play the Polish race card.

Response 2: 'Quit playing the race card...'

⁵ In a subsequent comment, *Frank Godon* leads readers to *The Black Rod* blogpost on the shooting of Craig McDougall. *The Black Rod* is a right-wing "citizen journalist" group from Winnipeg, advancing various racist and neoconservative ideologies. See the <http://blackrod.blogspot.ca/>

Nice comeback. You may not agree that race was an issue here, I for one don't know if it was or not. But it's a discussion worth having, because racism is alive and well in our city and it does have real effects for real people. Just dismissing it out of hand won't make it go away. When someone raises a point, and others respond by calling it "playing a card" rather than explaining their reasons for thinking the point is not valid they do nothing to contribute to dialogue or increased understanding in society.

The response to the comments 1A and 1B above decriminalizes Dumas and names police violence towards Aboriginal people in Canada as a problem. The response to the Comment 2 challenges the notion of 'playing the race card,' holding that it falls to the very fault that this idiom is supposedly used to attack: its universal applicability as the final word used to stop further discussion on the issue of 'race.'

The outright racism directed at the Dumas family in the following post prompted a moderator working for the CBC to remove the comment from the forum; however, it was pointed to seven times in interactions between posters and was copied as a quotation from one of the comments made in response:

Comment: Another example of natives riding/working/plugging up the legal system to get attention. Wouldn't surprise me if taxpayers are paying for their lawyer.

Resistance 1: No young person deserves to die and it is unfortunate circumstances in which it happened, but I'd say that you winkwink have a racist attituded and you don't deserve the freedom of speech. Its people like you that make society can do without.

Resistance 2 : winkwink, your comments are inconsiderate and inhumane IMO.

So winkwink are you saying this story made national headlines because the shooting victum is aboriginal? I would imagine every shooting invloving police makes national headlines no matter what racial backround people come from.

And no one deserves to get shot, well maybe only raciest people and only with a none leather weapon like a tazer.

Resistance 3: That was ENTIRELY unnecessary. Put yourself in their shoes, if it was your kid you wouldn't do the same thing? Your last comment reflects your true character. I hope your children don't grow up thinking as you do.

Resistance 4: what a general categorization and 91 People recommended this. I see native resentment is very popular, so I wonder why the govt bothered making an official apology when in the real world this is what natives still face from other Canadians who agree with winkwink. I'm sure these values and opinions are passed on to children as well, so the cycle continues and nothing gets better. very sad.

The first of the comments engages in resistance by accusing *winkwink* of having a “racist attitude” and calling on responsibilities under free speech, stating that people who share views like these should not be allowed to express them publicly. The comment also presents a juxtaposition of the statement made in the original comment with respect to Aboriginal people, replacing “natives” with racist people as ‘unwanted members of society.’ Further, the poster sympathizes with the family’s perspective, stating that “no young person deserves to die.” The second resisting comment builds on this by suggesting that, while no one deserves to be shot with a gun, racist people who make “inconsiderate and inhumane” comments possibly deserve to be shot with non-lethal weapons. This poster assumes that by “getting attention” *winkwink* means embellishing the issue to gain “national” media coverage, which is challenged by stating that all police shootings receive wide attention in the media. The third poster labels the original comment as “unnecessary” and encourages *winkwink* to empathize with the family. It concludes by locating the comment’s racist content as reflective of the “true character” of the poster and also points the reproduction of racist ideology in family interactions. The last comment, which contained a full quotation of *winkwink*’s words, made note of the recommendation function, with 91 recommendations having been issued in favor of

winkwink, as evidence that “native resentment is very popular.”⁶ This post questions the legitimacy or utility of Steven Harper’s official apology to Aboriginal people, given their persistent social disadvantages and, in light of this apparent racism, also refers to a “cycle of racism,” once again challenging the poster’s lack of empathy for people with different family backgrounds. The radical standpoint is clearly articulated in the final words: “and nothing gets better. very sad.”

The comment posted by *winkwink* also prompted two responses from the opposite end of the political spectrum:

Reinforcement 1: wink wink...you are absolutely right

Reinforcement 2: I don't see any racism in his post. The family kept trying to play the race card, and any rational person would just laugh at that claim. Just because you're caught committing a crime and you're a minority doesn't mean that's why you were caught. We have mostly free speech (we're not America you know) to protect people when they say controversial or stupid things. What winkwink said was neither of those though.

The first of the reinforcing responses is general in that it fully agrees with the original comment. The second further reinforces this agreement by appealing back to the notion of freedom of speech, claiming that *winkwink*’s comment is very much protected under the auspices of “free speech,” as the comment was not “controversial.” The main thrust of this comment is a denial of ‘race’ strategy, using the discourse of “playing the race card” to ridicule the family and attempting to craft an argument that racism and policing follow the objective rule that ‘association does not equal causation.’

⁶ Recommendations are another aspect of the discourse practice where posters can show their support for a given comment by ‘recommending’ it, with the total number of recommendations received being posted alongside the comment.

Conversations between Multiple Posters

Another modality of interactive discourses is transactions between several different posters. Here I have selected a conversation from an online CBC article that demonstrates how the comments act as vehicles through which the opposing discursive formations collide. This conversation involves a definitional debate over the nature of ‘race’ and racism.

The interaction starts with a comment issued from the radical side of the board.

Voice56 tries to make a racialized analysis, broadening the frame of how the posters see ‘race’ and racism to include a socio-economic lens:

Opening Comment (voice56): It is impossible to put the context of what and why is actually occurring in the North End, into a single day of discussion on a web forum, let alone solve the problem overnight. The problems there run deep and wide for a reason. There is no "mysterious gene" that makes any one ethnic group more prone to committing crime than another, obviously. Mostly, it has to do with income and upbringing. Social barriers created on both ends are HUGE in how a kid will develop.

This comment clearly states that problems in Winnipeg’s North End cannot be fully detailed in a single forum. However, the first response challenges the racialized analysis through a “cursory observation,” using the overrepresentation denial strategy and offensive language to describe what *voice56* described as complex:

Rejection 1 (Tom Metzger): Voice56 said that: "there is no "mysterious gene" that makes any one ethnic group more prone to committing crime than another, obviously. It is not obvious to me or anyone who makes even the most cursory observation of the staggering over representation of a certain ethnicity clogging up our prisons for violent offenses. Can you site any studies proving your assertion or are you simply regurgitating politically correct platitudes?

The comment prompts resistance from another poster who names the blatant racism in *Tom Metzger's* response, comparing it to Nazi ideology:

Resistance 1 (BentWang): tom metzger said, "It is not obvious to me or anyone who makes even the most cursory observation of the staggering over representation of a certain ethnicity clogging up our prisons for violent offenses. Can you site any studies proving your assertion or are you simply regurgitating politically correct platitudes?" you are speaking of eugenics which is a NAZI theory. i wonder why you are so profoundly fond of it as a vaible theory? does it have anything to do with the skinhead movement in america?

The original poster, *voice56*, also responds to the racism in *Metzger's* post. And the resistance from *BentWang* leads to another attempt to advance an argument showing the intersections of racialized inequality and socio-economic inequality. *Voice56* concludes by asserting that people who do not understand this issue likely have a concretized view of social issues, emphasizing the conservative stance taken by *Tom Metzger*.

Resistance 2 (voice56): Tom Metzger - Sorry, Buddy. You're going to have to work out your own racist convolutions on your own. - No matter how verbose a diatribe you try to cover it up with. I'm sorry you weren't able to glean any redeeming value from all that I said and only found that one sticking-point of concern to bog you down. If you can't see the socio-economic connection of population numbers in a given area vs. everything I said before, nothing or no one is going to convince you otherwise. I take it that your vote is "do nothing and pass the problem to someone else". Good luck with that.

These resistance discourses elicit a dismissal from *Tom Metzger* who uses the 'race card' strategy to reduce charges of racism from the other posters, whom he labels "cultural Marxists," to a political move. The second half of the post further reduces the responses to 'name calling':

Rejection 2 (Tom Metzger): It never ceases to amaze me how easily and automatically cultural Marxists throw out the ugly label of "racist" when challenged to defend their delusional theories. Replying to my argument by attacking me rather than by addressing the substance of my point or producing evidence against my claim is the definition of ad hominem attack and it is an unmistakable sign that you have lost the argument.

Another poster, *17 Wing*, chimes in and reinforces the ‘race card’ strategy advanced by *Tom Metzger*, going on to dismiss *voice56*’s attempt to name the racism apparent in *Metzger*’s comment. Here the conversation shifts to an argument over what racism means.

Reinforcement 1 (17 Wing): Tom Metzger I agree with you 100%. It would seem that voice56 is doing the same thing as the criminals. They all play the race card, when you try to point out fact they call you racist.

Voice56, stating fact(s) is not being racist. If I see a native walk down the street, and I recognize they are native, you'd label me a racist. Must I be blind to not fall into this category. I also fail to see where you came up with "do nothing and pass the problem to someone else". That seems to be your motto, pass the buck. I'm sure you believe it's the authorities fault for trying to capture criminals.

The last three sentences in *17 Wing*’s rejection of *voice56*’s radical critique include both generalized responsabilization for ‘criminal’ behaviour and defence of the police discourses. This poster then adds a second comment and the definitional debate over racism continues, now naming *voice56* racist for what is seen as an assumption about what racialized group *Tom Metzger* belongs to.

The exchange then extends to *voice56*’s purportedly held conceptualization of racism as enabling ‘state reverse-racism’ in society:

Rejection 3 (17 Wing): A little off topic but I think it's funny when one person refers to another as racist. For a person to call another racist, this person must see both races as different. In this case voice56 assumed Tom is white, and knows the other is native. So he decided not only to recognise the

differences, but to label one person differently due to being white. That is what I call racist, labelling people due to the color of their skin. What people don't realise is in this day and age the government allows racism towards the majority, but only protects the rights of the minorities.

Voice56 resists the challenge, pointing out that unveiling racist language does not imply assumed racialized group membership, and then tries to steer the conversation away from semantic arguments and back to substantive 'issues' of socio-economic deprivation in the North End.

Resistance 3 (voice56): 17 Wing - Telling someone to work out the logic of their own racist convolutions isn't telling someone "they're white", it's saying: you're on your own with that real winner. But maybe you could do the math for him....

*Resistance 4(voice56): For those that care about the real issues: [...]
To those young people still in the North End:
I understand. Pay no attention to those that can't..
It is hard. So hard. More hard than so many people will ever understand.*

A fourth poster, *AttritionSleuth*, enters the thread and tries to make the case that it is 'possible' to know objective differences between 'races,' and that recognizing these differences is not racist. The definition advanced here is that racism only exists when there is discrimination, making a semantic division, much like the distinction between discrimination and prejudice. The comment concludes by using the notion of 'reverse racism' as a dismissal to *voice56*'s standpoint.

Rejection 4 / Reinforcement 2 (AttritionSleuth): 17 Wing, I think it's okay to point out differences in races, which do exist, but not to discriminate based on those differences. It's possible to know differences without being racist. For whatever reason, the fact that Asian (and possibly native) people have a different ear wax comes to mind... That's neither here nor there though. It seems it's only okay to call someone racist if they're white.

Voice56 returns to the comment board and continues to resist reducing the issue of racism in this incident to a definitional project:

*Resistance 5 (voice56): It's not that huge a leap for most people to see what I'm saying, really.
The truth is, you're happy creating side-issues because you have nothing positive to contribute as a solution. You have to wonder about the wiring in someone who would put that much energy into hiding their own lack of interest.
Anyway, I'm done with this page. Pardon me for trying.
Good luck to all, and good luck with your brilliant ear-wax theory.
Glad you could share that with us here.
Possibly you should take a walk through that part of town and share your views with them, face to face.*

The final contribution to the discussion is by made *dizzie101* who rejects the attempt to broaden the view of racism, and replaces it with a criminalization strategy framed in terms of ‘Us versus Them.’

*Rejection 5 (dizzy101): "To those young people still in the North End: I understand. Pay no attention to those that can't..
It is hard. So hard. More hard than so many people will ever understand.
I know you are afraid, asking yourself "where is it safe?".
Voice65, you are WRONG. The kids aren't afraid in this area. They aren't afraid of the cops, the YCJA or the people in this area. Just look at the girl who LAUGHED at the cab driver that got killed by the vehicle she was joyriding in.
They are not afraid. WE are.*

The interactions between the posters show a fairly clear division between the conservative and radical discursive formations, demonstrating how power works ‘in’ the discourse to situate racism and racial profiling within two opposing versions of reality. The next section reviews comments in response to another incident, the tasing of Michael Langan, with emphasis on the conservative standpoint. I present this conservative standpoint as a model in which three discourses—denial of racism, support

for the police, and discursive processes of criminalization and responsabilization—work to naturalize the incident and suppress arguments advanced from the radical standpoint.

Chapter Five

The Tasing of Michael Langan

BenjaminBelanger wrote: Posted at 10:23 AM ET

In response to the “where were the parents” comments, and those criticizing the Manitoba metis Federation for “playing the race card”, I think you fail to see how seemingly isolated, violent events involving minorities reflect larger social injustices that continue to go unpoliced and underfunded. Your comments are uncompassionate and racist because you fail to consider what this family has experienced in this generation and the last. The abuse their culture has endured throughout the history of this young country is atrocious, and it is no surprise that the new generation, many of whom grow up in conditions most of us white, privileged readers cannot comprehend, lash out against the system that has devastated their family and robbed them of a future. Families are not islands, they are intricately linked to the society and culture that surrounds them and when it seems that parents are “dropping the ball” in their responsibility, and especially when this becomes a trend amongst a specific group of people, perhaps we need to look outside the walls of the home and evaluate the society that surrounds it. This family lost a son. It is a tragedy which deserves compassionate thought and understanding.

Popester wrote: Posted at 11:06 AM ET

Re: BenjaminBelanger: I quite agree that statements such as "where were the parents" are rather irrelevant. As we all know, 17 year olds from the best of families are capable of acting out in the dumbest ways. But to suggest that 400 years of history somehow absolves an individual of socially acceptable behavior is really pushing the limits of reason. Providing historical excuses for any group or race of people who have somehow failed to keep pace with society, is simply another form of racism. It destines that group to remain where they are, as sure as a parent continually telling a child he/she is stupid creates in that child the actually belief. This 17 year old simply did something impulsive that cost him his life. If he were white and on welfare would it make a difference?

Comments posted on July 24th, 2008 at:
<http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2008/07/24/taser-mother.html>

Following the inquest into Dumas’s death, the issue of ‘race’ and policing continued to appear in the media and in online forums. Media sources summarized an incident occurring on Tuesday, July 22nd when two residents of Winnipeg’s West End witnessed

someone break into a Lexus vehicle. They flagged down two police officers in the area who pursued the perpetrator, meeting him in a back alley near the National Microbiology Laboratory building on the 800 block of William Ave. He was Michael Langan, a 17-year-old Métis youth. Langan had a knife which he refused to drop, causing an officer to deploy an Electronic Control Device (Taser) in order to subdue him, which rendered him unconscious. He was taken to the hospital in critical condition and died from his injuries. The police contacted Langan's mother hours after this incident had been reported in the media, requesting a photograph of Langan. She was not told that the victim was her son until the next day.

The day after the incident, a police spokeswoman, Constable Jacqueline Chaput, made a statement to the media claiming that Langan "was armed with a knife and clearly refusing to comply with directions from the officer to disarm" (CBC 2008E). The following day, the president of the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF), David Chartrand, is quoted as saying that the Winnipeg police use excessive force when dealing with people of Aboriginal descent. He requested that the province hold an immediate inquest into the death of Langan, questioning whether racial profiling played a role in the deployment of the Taser. The MMF provided Langan's family with counseling during the investigation. In a follow-up interview, Chartrand re-emphasized his concern, claiming that "Aboriginals are no[t] stranger[s] to being mistreated." (*The Star*, 2008). Both of Langan's parents are cited in the web sources. His father, reported to earn his living by panhandling, is quoted as saying that "they shot an innocent child for nothing. For breaking into a fricking car." (Winnipeg Free Press, 2008) Langan's mother is reported to have called on the WPS to ban the use of Tasers. Police Chief Keith McCaskill responded

by denying that Langan was a victim of racial profiling, although he did admit that the WPS's relationship with the Aboriginal community "could be better." (King, 2008). Constable Chaput described the standard process following a homicide involving a police officer: first Winnipeg's homicide unit will investigate the incident, then their report will be forwarded to an outside agency for a full review, which will be followed by a public Inquest (Canwest News Service, 2008).

Text – Langan and the Taser Controversy

Some 2,808 comments were posted in relation to the news items. Langan was constructed as a youth (69) from troubled neighbourhood (14), belonging to a lower-class background (78). His race was directly mentioned in 27 comments. Comments describing him were generally negative, insulting his character (66) and intelligence (17), and even making the assumption that he was a school dropout (9). Some posters extended support (23) and sympathy (14) for him. Most of the comments in the forums, however, concerned the police (over 1334). A large number of these comments revolved around controversial topic of the use of 'Tasers' (officially known as "Electronic Control Devices"), which were the sole focus of over 127 postings.

For the most part, Tasers were criticized by posters:

Plain and simple...tasers kill

How the electric stun gun entered the arsenal of our police forces is highly questionable. Its adoption was never debated in parliament. The citizens of Canada have never had a say. Yet it is a subject that impacts the fundamental rights of freedom of every Canadian.

Another needless death involving a taser. By now the Police must know this is a lethal weapon. So hold the Officers responsible for its use. If the youth was

not directly threatening the Officers' lives than a murder was committed. But there is no independent review and no equal Justice in this country. My heart goes out to the family of the victim.

Tazers can be used to torture people and nothing else.

*Tasers provide too much power for police and the justification for it's use has become interpreted way too loosely.
Get rid of them.*

Twenty-nine people have died as a result of being tasered since 2003, to put that in perspective we have lost eighty-eight soldiers in the WAR in Afghanistan.

Of course the report will say "heart failure" or "complications of drug injection" or some other damend fool thing... because everyone knows tasers don't kill people.

The Taser controversy had a few general currents to it that posters picked up on in their comments. The question of non-lethality was central, where posters challenged police services personnel who point to Taser International, the manufacturer of Electronic Control Devices, and their official claims that Tasers do not kill. Other posters voiced their concerns that police access to Tasers makes them more likely to use lethal force in subduing offenders. Moreover, posters who were critical of the police were able to move from condemnations of Taser usage to another discourse not found in the previous Dumas comments: the 'Charge of Capital Punishment' (56):

Instant death sentence for stealing.

"an electronic control device" basically is a portable, remote controlled version of the Electric Chair.

We do not have the Death Sentence in Canada. How much damage would a 17 year old do, with the knife he supposedly had.

Let's face it, there is a capital punishment after all, perfectly legal, mind you! Make sure you are working for police. One wonders why we try to imply that we do not have capital punishment while people are summarily executed, by Taser guns, simply because they refuse to cooperate!?

Firstly, even if he was a suspect in an attempted car theft our laws do presume those accused of a criminal offense innocent until proven guilty. Secondly we do not believe in the death penalty in Canada even if one is guilty of a crime. However police forces across the country are skipping the whole judicial system in general and electrocuting people without even giving them their day in court.

Like the Fresh IE case, and mostly because of the discussion on Taser use, there was a fairly even split between comments posted in support of police and those posted from a critical standpoint. Posters were supportive of the officers present at the scene in 402 comments, critical of them in 347, and neutral in 80 comments. Posters were generally critical of the Winnipeg Police Service as an institution (168 of 239 references). Whenever other police services were mentioned, they also tended to be the target of criticisms (55 of 65 references). These comments were around the abuse of power and police brutality. Supportive comments were very closely aligned with the strategies appearing in the Fresh IE and Dumas comment boards, appealing to the officers' right to self-defence, acknowledging the emotional toll taken by the officers, and offering support for the hard work that they do in protecting civil society.

The Langan case bears many other similarities to the Dumas case, and in several respects differs from the Fresh IE case. Where Fresh IE was 'Black,' with critical allegations against the police revolving around the notion of 'racial profiling,' Dumas and Langan were First Nations and Métis respectively, with a general discourse of 'race' and racist policing common to critical voices in the comment boards. Both the Lagan and Dumas families had backing from Aboriginal leadership, where Fresh IE represented

himself and spoke on behalf of visual minorities who face police mistreatment. Further, Fresh IE was detained and released, whereas Dumas and Langan lost their lives in their altercations with the police. Moreover, discourses of economic hardship were largely absent from constructions of Fresh IE, who stands as a successful community leader with a ‘voice,’ a markedly different social context than that of Langan and Dumas, both of whom are constructed in relation to the economic and social marginalization known to the inner-city areas in which they lived and where the incidents occurred. Fresh IE was detained outside of the city’s core area.

As in the Dumas comments, Langan is primarily held responsible for this own demise (found in over 434 comments). Comments like the following were characteristic of many in the forum:

The responsibility for his death lies solely with himself.

weilding knife at police = getting shot, simple as that... just don't weild a weapon at the police or anyone else... no, ifs, buts or maybes.

The criminal deserve everything that comes to them if they get hurt or die while commiting a crime.

While much remains to be discovered through the process of disclosure in this case, one fact is known: Michael Langan was directly responsible for his own death

Certainly this is a tragedy. The boy made a very bad choice and paid with his life.

If the bad guy doesn't want to get hurt, they need to strongly consider the consequences of what they are doing BEFORE.

Parents will always refuse to see their child as a criminal engaged in anti-social behaviour. However, the victims of their crimes are left to pick up the

pieces and rebuild their lives. No parent should have to bury a child. But, a 17 year old should have a reasonable grasp of right and wrong and understand the consequences of their actions.

As reflected in the last comment, like many from both of the Dumas and Langan cases, the media coverage of his age and family involvement in denunciations against the police enabled discourses on parenting, which were absent from the comments relating to the Fresh IE incident. Langan's parents are responsabilized for the incident in over 120 of the comments:

*"'Damn machine' killed my son, Winnipeg mother says"
No...bad choices and shitty parenting did.*

feel really sorry and sad for this family. However it is NOT the fault of the Taser OR the police that this child is now dead. It is the direct responsibility of the parent to raise a socially responsible child who does no harm to others and accepts responsibility for his own actions.

Hmm . . . how about this headline instead: "Winnipeg citizens question the use of knife on police officer, as well as the parental capacities of the mother who raised such a bad child!"

Responsibility lies with Parents on their child's behaviour.

So the grieving father may be forced to panhandle so that he can buy shoes. It's normally bad form to dump on someone who is down but the apple didn't fall far from the tree, did it?

I blame the parents. If they raised their kid right, he wouldn't be trying to steal cars or pulling knives on people.

Stop shifting responsibility on to authority when it should be at the parents door step. They brought him into this world, they are responsible for him until he's 18.

Whereas Fresh IE 'looked' like a criminal according to most posters, Langan and Dumas 'were,' for all intents and purposes, criminals. The web articles recounting the Langan incident note that he was allegedly chased as the suspect of a car break-in, and therefore many posters confidently described him as engaging in "criminal activity" (145):

Good work cops, knock 'em dead! By killing him, the police have rid the streets of one less criminal! I hope what he stole was worth dying for!

If this man was armed, then I have no sympathy for him. He was doing some kind of criminal activity, or the police would not have tazered him. It is unfortunate he had to die, but I don't think the police did anything wrong.

The guy was carrying a knife and appears to have been going about some unlawful business. A practice that he was apparently known for.

This kid was trying to break into a car and either steal it or steal the contents. HE'S A CRIMINAL NOT AN INNOCENT KID!!!! If you're stupid enough to try and commit a crime then expect that you're gonna get tuned on if the police show up.

More specifically, Langan is constructed as a "dangerous" thief (173)

I for one will sleep easier knowing one less person is ripping of my stereo system.

That knife could have easily killed numerous people who were not committing crimes, better not give the criminal a chance to do so.

What kind of society do we live in where we route for the offender of a crime. Its sad that a 17 year old died but better the thief brandishing a knife then the cop.

I have "ABSOLUTELY" no respect (dead or alive) for a knife wielding thief. While I'm out working hard and earning a living for my family and I, this scum bag is holding someone up at knife point to support his drug addiction, gets tased, and half of Canada feels sorry for him and others like him? Good ridence!!

As in the last comment, which makes reference to a drug addiction, posters assumed that Langan was likely under the influence of drugs (93):

He was a Idiot, possibly on drugs or alcohol or maybe just plain stupid, but he was holding a knife and refused to put it down after being ordered to do so.

Who knows the perp could have been hopped up on some of the garbage going around on the street...maybe that was why he was caught stealing...all i can say to that is get a friggin job you loser!!!

Charges of racism in policing were uncommon in the comment boards. But many comments worked to deny the existence of racism in policing:

*Here we go again. And wouldn't you know it's another family holding up a race card instead of admitting the kid was trouble from the word go. Naturally the MMF hauls out there army of sleazy bag hoes (sorry to Hoes I mean lawyers)
What will this cost the taxpayer?
I applaud the police for doing the right thing*

A criminal is a criminal regardless if he's aboriginal, white, black or purple!

*I am metis and I am getting so tired of people using this racism thing as an excuse. We all have choices to make and choosing to do the wrong thing eventually catches up to you.
metis federation apparently has so many programs and funding for thier kind...so why aren't these kids taking advantage of that instead of choosing to take a life of crime and don't tell me because there are no opportunities for them to do so. As far as I am concerned there are more opportunities for them than any other race out there. So stop the blame and start bettering yourselves.*

And this kid's age and ethnic background are irrelevant. He was told what to do, he didn't. It's too bad he died but it was his choice.

There will be an inquiry and we'll learn the details. To the people saying this is race motivated and such - think about what your are saying. Do you really believe these officers there were thinking "...now here is a person who is of a minority race...well, in that case, let's tazer him "?That is crazy. Look, for

whatever reasons, this boy was facing officers with a knife and brought this on himself.

Let's not pretend that Michael was a perfect little angel and the big bad police saw a native and instinctively pulled out their weapons. That's a load of BS and anyone who buys into the argument that aboriginal people "seem to fall prey to this extra force" all the time are naive and being taken for a ride.

The discourses from the Langan forums showed several themes common to the other forums: responsabilization, criminalization, denial of racism, and defence of police. These all appeared in the interactions between discourses, particularly in the conflict between the radical posters who were critical of the current state of affairs between the police and racialized groups and conservative posters who approve of the status-quo.

Discourse Practice – Dismissing the “Bleeding Heart Liberals”

In total, there were 800 interactions posted, of which 306 belonged to the radical discursive formation and 494 belonged to the conservative discursive formation. The focus of this section is the dominating discourses, as they clearly demonstrate the conservative ideology and the discourse that works to protect it. As in the case of Dumas, Langan is relegated to the margins of the social spectrum, criminalizing him and even showing vindictive appreciation for his death. However, oppositional discourses notably resisted criminalization (116) and responsabilization (89), often in tandem with criticisms of the police:

Then there is the other folks here going for his parents' jugulars...THESE BRAVE COPS KILLED A 17 YEAR OLD 5'6" 145lb KID DUMBASSES and all you can say is well his parents were no good so this is why this happened! No wonder this country's leaders and law enforcement do as they please!!

The argument that the 17 year old brought on his own death is ridiculous. The idea that lethal force is necessary to stop a kid with a knife (and the taser IS definitely now deservedly classed as lethal force) lacks a bit of imagination.

And for those who are so low and think this kid deserved what he got, then it's easy to say that you think he's... well scum, dirt, trash, an animal, stupid, deserving of death, etc. just like all the other ALLEGED criminals/victims of murder by Tasers Inc.

'He is responsible for his own death'. Since when is car theft a offense punishable by capital punishment?? We don't even (in our best moments of reason) permit it for axe murderers and child rapists /killers.

If we are going to play the blame game, blame the system for letting a young man end up so lost and desperate.

Although Langan had supporters like these posters in the forums, they were cast as being irresponsible in their understanding of the social world by posters from the political right. As with the other cases, responsabilizing and criminalizing discourses were dominant in the forums. Here, comments defending the police against allegations of racism and misconduct intersected as a unified voice that supports a particular version of social reality, and attacks those who hold differing views.

Rarely mentioned in the comment boards on the Fresh IE and Dumas incidents was a discourse characterizing those on the left of the political spectrum as 'Bleeding Heart Liberals'; however, this phrase appeared 46 times in the Langan comments. As a categorization of a stream of thinking belonging to those on the political left, its use by posters encapsulates a separation between the conservative and radical standpoints. As in the case of the following examples, posters denounced comments as belonging to this misguided class of individuals, who are supposedly lacking the needed life experience to be able to objectively assess the context surrounding Langan's death:

Perhaps when some of you bleeding hearts leave your safe neighborhoods, live in central Winnipeg a few years and actually witness the crime first hand, then you will not be so naive.

If these bleeding heart posters were the victim of a violent crime, they wouldn't be long changing their tune!

Why is it bleeding hearts never get one simple concept... people are NOT nice. News flash... not nice people tend to do not nice things.

The “bleeding hearts” are those who sought to de-responsibilize Langan, his parents, and Aboriginal people. In so doing, they pointed to social factors like age, economic difficulties, and other axes of social marginalization:

When do the bleeding heart liberals wake up and understand that age is an excuse for these young people. They know they will never do hard time and laugh in the faces of law enforcement when judges continually release them with little or no consequence.

Typical.....see it more and more unfortunately. No one wants to take responsibility for their actions anymore. It's always "someone else's fault"or who's to blame? Would the bleeding hearts like fries with that?

When are you bleeding hearts going to wake up and face reality? The system did not fail this lad, his parents did. Any parent that does not take an active, long term and personal approach to their child's social upbringing is placing them at risk. I was 17 once and I was taught responsibility at a very young age.

aboriginals, like everyone else, are faced with making decisions. They cannot blame their plight on others. They have to take responsibility for themselves. They live in squalor on many reserves because they choose to.

Radical posters were thought to be playing a “blame” game and delusional in thinking that there is more to the incident than a lack of personal responsibility. A similar categorization of these posters held that they are concerned with de-criminalizing Langan, who was ‘obviously’ a criminal to many posters:

You knucklehead bleeding hearts. This guy was a punk. I guarentee you the officer did not want to kill the thug. We want to be protected against these useless parts of our society and when police try you still whine about it. [...] When are people of this country going to stop justifying criminal behavior and take it for what it is. No one wants to see this person dying, but enough is enough. He is not a martyr. Stop treating him like one. He was a thug. Society owed him nothing.

For all you bleeding hearts - you're forgetting that THIS GUY PULLED A KINFE ON POLICE!!!! Yes, sad a young life has ended but what is it going to take for our society to smarten up and realize force is a necessary evil in order to retain order in certain cases? If you're opposed to my last statement, go start a commune somewhere.

Ok, for all of the bleeding hearts on here who and crying about this piece of crap CRIMINAL being killed, I'm going to break the situation down for you.

Your right, the police DID handle the situation incorrectly. Based on the Incident Management Intervention Model, this kid should have been shot square in the chest.

In line with dismissals of de-criminalization, posters also held unwarranted criticism of police to be a staple of the radical mindset:

People are continuously complaining about crime but every time these poor "products of society" are killed by police due to their own misadventure all the bleeding hearts come out bashing the police.

And to all the "donny do-good bleeding hearts" out there who blame the police every time a criminal is roughly treated, just be thankful the POLICE dealt with this young criminal... so YOU and I don't have to.

It's a puzzle to me why anyone these day would chose a career in law enforcement or the military. With all these bleeding heart, liberal, pukers running around trying to tell them how to do their jobs, how can you win?

Police officers today are more closely scrutinized than ever before and I think are doing a good job. Keep up the good work guys & girls because there are only a few bleeding hearts who are criticizing you.

We're making a mountain out of a molehill here and all to the benefit of the criminals who probably laugh each time a cop cant do what he should because the criminal knows the whiners and bleeding hearts are helping him out.

As well, in their criticism of the police “bleeding heart liberals” are seen to be ignorant of police officers’ right to self-defence:

Even the bleeding heart Liberals have to remember police have every right to protect their own safety and life in the execution of their sworn duty.

There are way to many bleeding hearts in this country. Tazer or gun...Does it really matter?? Either way the officer wants to go back home to his family.

While I agree that there have been instances in the past where the Police have used excessive force, this is NOT one of those times. So next time before you start jumping on the "Ban Tasers" band wagoon, stop and think for a second about what you would do if someone was treatening your life.

Another criticism against the police that conservative posers took issue with had to do with the use of Tasers:

I cant beleive the bleeding hearts crying over this Taser Death already. The police defended themselves but did choose the taser over shooting him with their firearms, obviously attempting a less lethal method.

I can't believe all the bleeding hearts on here crying about tasers. Your the reason why are laws have gotten so lax over the years. This guy had a knife,from what I here and lunged at the cops. If you get tasered you might die,if a cop shoots to kill you will be dead. If you get up every morning ,go to work and provide for your family and don't threaten cops with knives, you won't get tasered or shot. This low life had it coming and we have one less scum bag on the earth.

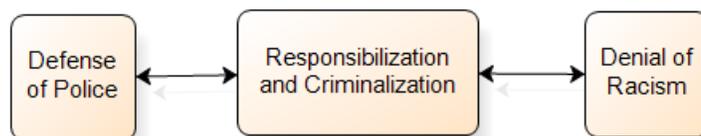
And a final target was the charge of racism, which was countered with discourses of denial:

And the fact that the victim was metis is irrelevant. The police would have acted in the same manner regardless of race. Earth to bleeding heart liberals, if you don't want your poor disenfranchised souls to get tasered and potentially die, tell them to keep the knives in the cutlery drawer.

The Conservative Discursive Formation – A Three-Stage Model

Analyzing the comments that label forum participants as “Bleeding Hearts” shows what angles conservative posters take in their criticisms against radical posters. Based on the analysis of the text in the Langan comments, and the results from the Fresh IE and Dumas cases, the conservative discursive formation, as it constructs the relationship between the person involved and the police as ‘non-racialized,’ is presented in the following model. The model has three distinct and intersecting *stages*: a discursive denial of racism as an explanatory factor; a discourse defending police actions and the social order which they are to uphold; and intermediary discourses of responsabilization and criminalization.

Figure 1: The Conservative Discursive Formation



Each one of these stages contains multiple strategies and connects with one another in a variety of ways; the sum product is a discursive manifestation of the conservative ideology.

Analyzing these comments with reference to the model offers a way to explain how power works *through* discourse and how it reflects ideological commitments. Importantly, it also shows where the conservative formation can be challenged, as the connections between discursive strategies are where ideologically based assumptions are

used to bind the stages together. These discourses defend the police by stating their role in maintaining order, often commending them for doing a dangerous job when confronting violent criminals, and countering allegations of racism by responsabilizing the victim and others who advance criticism of the police. Using discourses of the denial of racism and support for police as they appeared in the comment boards, the following demonstrates how power travels through this discursive formation, using responsabilization and criminalization as justifying rationalities. In these comments, the discourse works to advance a dominant, common-sense understanding of the relationship between Langan and the police, one that subjugates a broader racialized analysis.

In the following discussion eight examples of lengthier comments from the forum are reviewed to show how discourses from the three stages of the model interact with one another in a single text. These comments are not unique; the only selection criteria were that they were coded for the denial of racism and that they were long enough to serve as examples in which we can overtly see the discourse work through all three stages. That they are called ‘stages’ here is not meant to reflect their direction or a predetermined order; rather, they build upon one another. Posters can use a single strategy to connect to multiple stages or to different strategies in the same stage.

Moreover, although each of these comments explicitly contains a manifestation of at least one strategy at each stage, whatever strategies that do appear in dominating discourses implicitly depend, in part, on discourses that belong to the other stages. For example, the denial of racist policing is a comment in support of the police. Similarly, suggesting that the police acted appropriately only appears because of allegations, either from those quoted in the web sources or other posters, against the police. And

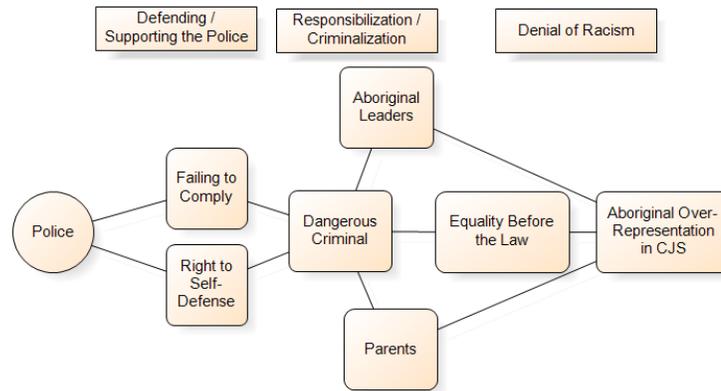
responsibilization in the context of the question of racialized policing is effectively a strategy for the denial of racism. That is to say, all three stages can still be seen in shorter comments that align with the conservative ideology. Therefore, after seeing how these strategies work to reinforce one another in explicit terms, we can better understand how power flows *through* discourse— even when specific strategies are missing from various stages.

The first example contains multiple strategies for each of the three stages of the model:

Example 1: Two independent witnesses saw this teen committing a crime and called police. When confronted by officers - he made the choice to threaten them with his knife instead of surrendering. Regardless of his age or his race - he was a criminal. Let's not try to blanket this in aboriginal profiling. The unfortunate truth is our prisons have disproportionate high numbers of native inmates. Blame that on lack of parenting skills and lack of community leadership and not the "aboriginal excuse."

The poster denies racism by making recourse the notion of ‘equality before the law,’ stating that “age and race” are not factors in determining Langan’s criminality. The poster notes that “independent witnesses” saw the crime, thereby rejecting the notion of “aboriginal profiling.” A further denial strategy points to over-representation in the criminal justice system, calling charges of racism the “aboriginal excuse.” Social exclusion and a history of oppression are not said to be the cause of the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system; instead, responsibility is placed with the parents and community leadership. Ultimately Langan—who was constructed as carrying a knife and threatening the police— is held responsible in making the choice not to comply with their orders and forcing them to act in self-defence.

Figure 2: Model for Example 1

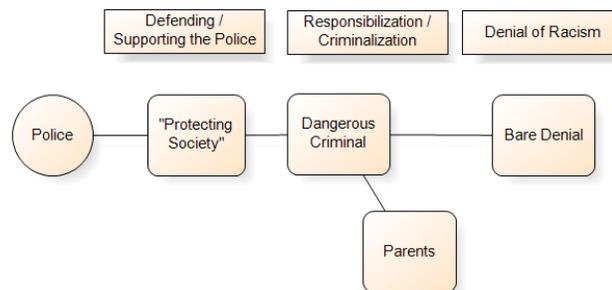


Often responsabilization follows from denial strategies, as in the previous example where posters can suggest that when most criminals belong to a certain racial group, then racial profiling does not exist, only criminal profiling does, and therefore this logically leads to notions of criminalization and responsabilization. However, an interesting aspect of the denial discourse is that it also acts as a responsabilizing/criminalizing tautology. For example, posters can claim that Langan is responsible for his own death, and therefore his death cannot possibly serve as evidence of racism. Or, posters can also claim that Langan’s death is not evidence of racism because he was responsible for his own death. In this way, an overt denial strategy is not necessary for a comment to completely fill all three stages of the model. Further, although there are multiple strategies for denying racism that connect with various discourses of responsabilization, often they exist as bare statements, as in the following example:

Example 2: Sad part is a young life was lost, a young life that had a miserable existence from dysfunctionl parents in a society that so often doesn't give a damn. Good part is no else suffered at the hands of this young man in the future, which was sure to happen, or the police that had to deal with this person. it was not racism, it was not police brutality, it was not police over stepping their bounds or using excessive force. It was police protecting society with the tools society gives them within the rule of law society dictates, it was just a sad affair that has happened in the past and will happen in the future. Somtimes life sucks and society can't solve all of lifes problems, utopia it ain't!

Although the poster responsabilizes Langan’s “dysfunctional parents” for his “miserable existence,” this statement is not explicitly connected to the denial that Langan’s death “was not racism, it was not police brutality.” Instead the rejection of racism works through a criminalization and responsabilization of Langan, and positioning the police as “protecting society” and, therefore, characterizing their actions as justified.

Figure 3: Model for Example 2



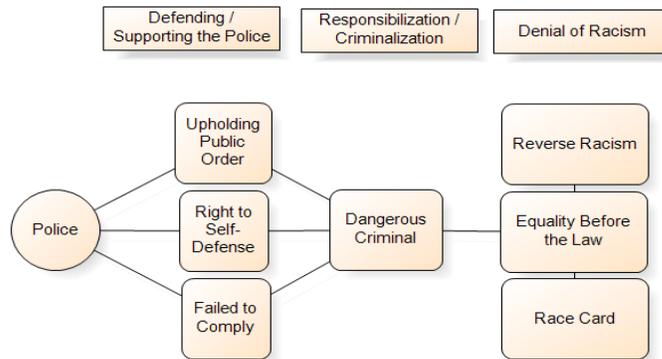
Other comments used multiple denial and defence of police strategies simultaneously. The following example ends up using harsh language in its denunciation of Langan; however, it begins with a disclaimer that the poster feels “terrible” for his parents:

*Example 3: These parents lost a son and for that I feel terrible, however, their son had a knife and refused to put it down. Here are the options, put down the knife or we will shoot you, or put down the knife and we will taser you. Putting down the knife is not negotiable!
 People have been harping on the taser being touted as a safer alternative to shooting a person. Well, it is. Yes sometimes a person dies if they are tasered and we should not be using them haphazardly, but if pulling a gun on someone is the other alternative , tasering them is a might safer than shooting them is it not? They at least have a chance at living where as if they were shot, probably not so much. It is also safer for bystanders as there is no risk of stray bullets. I live in an area with a high population of native people. I am tired of seeing the race card played every time a native person is dealt with by the police or authority figure of some kind. Was there racism? Hard to say, but where I live we see a great deal of reverse racism. You know the stuff.....you can't touch me because I'm native and will scream racism, but I sure as heck will touch you and expect no repercussions. I know around here the general public as well as the police get pretty tired of hearing the race issue when the issue is*

*crime not race. The funny thing is when racism is claimed by a native against another native in a position of authority. What?
Quit committing crimes! I don't care what color your skin is, just try obeying the law and we will all get along just fine!
How about when the police say stop what you are doing, or put down the knife or what ever they demand when they have the authority to shoot you if you do not comply.....maybe stop doing what you are doing or put down the knife so you don't get shot with a gun or a taser? Just thinking!
The police put their lives on the line every time they go to work. Let's do remember that we don't want people running around putting others in danger or committing crimes. After asking someone to stop doing something, what else would you like the police to do? First you ask, then you react to the issue with more force.
It's not like the kid didn't know the risks. The police don't just shoot without warning, whether using a taser or gun. The kid could have done what he was asked, it is that simple. He choose his own consequences and threw the dice and came out losing.*

The poster uses a variety of denial strategies here, including an equality discourse much like that found in the first example, claiming “I don't care what color your skin is, just try obeying the law and we will all get along just fine!” Stating life experience in a neighbourhood with a “high population of native people,” the poster also connects this denial to reverse racism and the ‘race card.’ These discourses work to negate charges of racism against the police, explicitly so with reference to criminalization with the statement “the issue is crime not race.” Support for the police is extended as they frequently “put their lives on the line” to stop other people from “putting others in danger or committing crimes,” in the first case commenting on their right to self-defence and in the second commending their efforts in upholding the public order. Finally, Langan is ultimately accountable for the incident as he failed to obey authority and “choose his own consequences.”

Figure 4: Model for Example 3



Another denial strategy is to reject a fundamental feature of claims of racism against Aboriginal people—that its effects today have historical roots. In this post, the comment starts by acknowledging social atrocities against Aboriginal people such as the residential schools. However, the poster goes on to state that these historical ills have adequately been dealt with, then proceeding to criminalize Langan as dangerous and therefore solely responsible for his death:

Example 4: I agree that the aboriginal people have been treated unjustly and disrespectfully in the past. I learned about their misery in residential schools, and the discrimination they had to face as employees. Luckily, some apologies and some compensation have been made by the government of Canada. But now, are they going too far? Are they asking for too much? Protecting themselves from the police by accusing them of racial profiling...I think that is just ridiculous.

See, this is what is actually happening: the police is being profiled by the public. Just because of what happened at the Vancouver airport, many people are automatically thinking "policemen are irresponsible", "policemen do not keep us safe, but they kill", "policemen are using excessive force all the time", and "policemen who use tasers are useless" (essentially this is what some are saying). Okay, the Vancouver incident was idiotic. But don't pour all those thoughts in everything the police does afterwards. More often than not, the police carry out proper procedures to maximize the safety of the people and minimize the harm done to the suspect/criminal. You just don't hear about them as often because they're so common, it's not "worth wasting resources on" for a 30-minute news broadcast

What the male did was clearly wrong, and what the police did was clearly justified. (I refuse to call the deceased a "kid" or "boy" because I believe a 17-year old is much more capable of inflicting harm than a 10-year old "kid" or a

*14-year old "boy". Just the fact that he opposed the police shows he isn't a "kid" or a "boy".) For those still questioning whether the male was waving his knife aggressively towards the police, it doesn't matter. Just because he wasn't waving the knife at the police from a distance doesn't mean he wouldn't wave the knife as the police approaches him. For those who still feel that policemen are trained well-enough in hand-to-hand combat to disarm a "boy" (as some called him in this context) with a knife, try having a 17-year old swing his knife in random directions and pay a black-belt martial artist to disarm him. Did I read a comment about a suspect being able to withstand the taser completely? That just shows it doesn't belong in the same category as a gun. A taser is NOT as lethal as a gun!
I feel so sorry for the police, having to deal with all the public crap whenever something unfortunate happens to a suspect. I say, keep up the good work in keeping our communities safe.*

The previous comment characterizes charges of racial profiling as “ridiculous,” responsabilizing Langan as an adult capable of making decisions about the risk he encounters in his interactions with others, and that he should not have been “waving” a knife at the police. The poster notes that although there are some police officers who abuse their power—a discourse known as ‘a few bad apples’ (Tator and Henry 2006)—for the most part the police efforts are “justified” in “keeping our communities safe.”

Figure 5: Model for Example 4



The discourse of childhood was often used in a sympathetic way in both the Dumas and Langan comment boards, but the poster in the next example notes that Langan was old enough to bear the responsibility for putting an officer in danger as an armed criminal:

*Example 5: 17 is a man NOT a little boy.
17 is old enough to understand the consequences of his actions.
17 is legally a minor so we will never know if he has a criminal record.
Who amongst you can tell the difference between a 17 year old and an 18 year
on sight, yet you expect a cop to know that a full grown man is a minor!
Not only is this patently NOT about racism, no-one has actually mentioned
what race the cop is - for all we know he/she is aboriginal.
Crying racism only creates hatred. Some poor sucker really is going to suffer
because of their race and people will just assume they are after some money -
and they will be victimized twice, the second time because of their own people
crying wolf too often.
To the people disparaging cops - Police officers are very well trained, many
have degrees (something PhD guy obviously lacks). They spend their lives
'serving and protecting' us from criminals and put their lives in danger every
day to achieve that end. I am very thankful for the police for doing their best
for me and mine.
I believe the police acted correctly.
When push comes to shove an officer's life is more valuable to society than a
criminal.
It is thoughtless to suggest hand-to-hand combat, for one thing (as someone
already pointed out) it would have been hand-to-knife, for another, a knife can
be thrown and had an officer moved towards the criminal the knife could
easily have been thrown at the officer.
My heart goes out to that mother, I am sorry for her loss. Unlike many posters
I do not blame her for her child's actions. A parent can teach them right from
wrong but they cannot control their actions. There are plenty of criminals who
were raised by good people. If the dead guy was 10 then you can apportion
some blame to the parent but not when he was 17. It is really rather cruel to
blame the mother.*

Allegations of racism are reduced to “crying,” akin to the notion of “crying wolf” where charges of racism reduce their efficacy with increased frequency. And while nowhere in the web sources is the ‘race’ of the officer mentioned, the comment draws on a denial strategy that holds that racism cannot be perpetrated by racialized group members. Police actions are appraised as ‘correct’ in following the training that officers received; their right to self-defence nullifies an armed assailant’s right to safety. Further, the poster thanks officers for “serving and protecting” the social order.

Figure 6: Model for Example 5



This next comment takes issue with MMF president David Chartrand’s questioning of police racism, dismissing it as a matter of over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system and responsabilizing Aboriginal parenting in particular. Both are used to explain why Langan might have resorted to “criminal activity” and “violent behaviour”:

Example 6: To answer David Chartrand's question "Why does it seem to be aboriginal people that seem to fall prey to this extra force against us?" the answer is simple, aboriginal people are involved in disproportionate amounts of criminal activity in Winnipeg and often display extremely violent behaviour towards police and others.

The question David Chartrand should have asked "Is why is there so much disfunctional parenting within the aboriginal community and what can we do about so that our children do not get involved in gangs and other criminal activity that get them into confrontational situations with the police?"

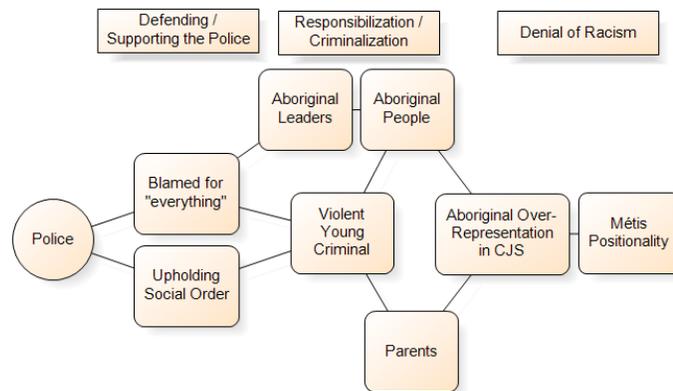
As a citizen of Winnipeg I'm tired of the growing problems with vandalism, break-ins, violent assaults and gang activity generally committed by young with a very high proportion of them being aboriginal. I'm also tired of aboriginal leaders trying to grab cheap headlines by blaming the police for damn near everything.

I have been an active member of the Manitoba metis Federation for many years and am quite proud of the mixed ancestry that I along with so many other Manitobans share.

Furthermore, this poster states her or his positionality in two ways: first, by claiming membership with the MMF, which can work to lend legitimacy to engaging in denial

strategies and, in this case, criticism against Aboriginal leaders for “blaming” the police for issues beyond their control as they work to reduce crime; and second, by interpreting crime through personal experience as a “growing problem,” which acts as to support the work that the police are doing.

Figure 7: Model for Example 6



Example 7 is very similar to Example 3 in that it contains a reference to the ‘race card,’ claims of reverse racism, and an equality discourse in denying racism. Note that the poster equates ‘race’ with religion and socio-economic status in the equality discourse, thereby further distancing the role that racism purportedly played in Langan’s death. Although direct criminalization is absent from the comment, it is implied in the statement “if you cooperate with police, they will not taser/shoot you”:

Example 7: Here we go again with the race card...I knew it was just a matter of time.

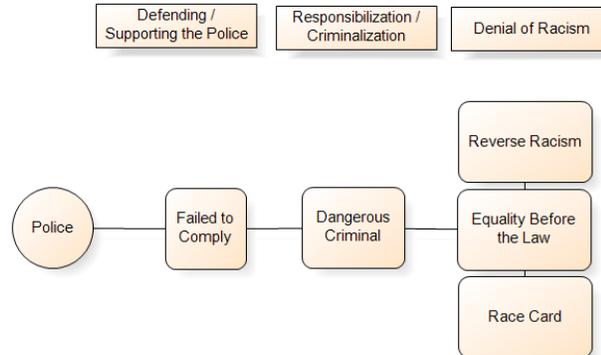
Bottom line...if you cooperate with police, they will not taser/shoot you. If you pay your bills, your service will not get cut off.

THESE RULES APPLY TO EVERYONE PEOPLE!!! NOT JUST aboriginalS!!! They apply to whites, blacks, asians, hispanics, east indians...EVERYONE!!!! We are all part of the same society, regardless of race, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. Therefore we must all obey the same laws.

Also...to the aboriginal people who continue to spout off all this baloney about cops targeting youth JUST because they are aboriginal: Many of you (note

that I said "many", not "all") blame the "white man" for all your problems. How is that any different??? How is that NOT racist ???

Figure 8: Model for Example 7



The final example explicitly denies racism and asserts what is taken-for-granted as an inevitability that police respond to threats of violence with violence:

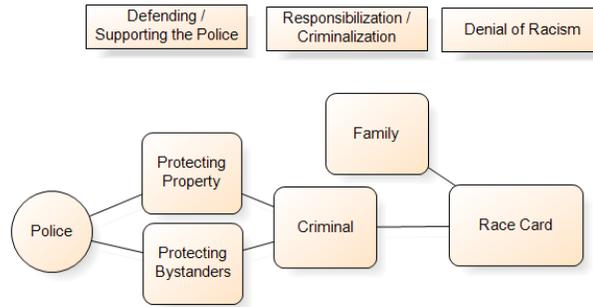
Example 8: I am so sick of hearing about the perpetrators of a crime being the victims of "racial profiling". If you're stupid enough to brandish a knife, gun, screwdriver or even a wiffle bat at the police you should expect them to retaliate with force. If this kid had been shot with a gun you can bet there would have been people screaming that excessive force had been used. He gets shot with a tazer and what happens? People are screaming about excessive force.

This kid was trying to break into a car and either steal it or steal the contents. HE'S A CRIMINAL NOT AN INNOCENT KID!!!! If you're stupid enough to try and commit a crime then expect that you're gonna get tuned on if the police show up.

I say good for the Winnipeg Police. They didn't endanger any innocent bystanders by discharging a gun and they were able to stop this guy from stealing what ever it was he wanted to steal. I feel sorry for the friends and family because they lost a loved one but after that I have no sympathy for them when it comes to the "racial profiling" card. He was a criminal and he paid the ultimate price for being one.

Allegations of racism from the family are framed in terms of the ‘race card’ strategy, although the poster does not directly responsabilize the family for Langan’s death. The poster approves of police actions claiming that they stopped future thefts and protected innocent bystanders.

Figure 9: Model for Example 8



In each of the preceding examples, the posters follow the same trend in engaging with all three stages of the model. The relationship between the police and Langan is framed in non-racialized terms, mediated by discourses of criminalization and responsabilization, which creates a justification for claims that the police did what they needed to in order to protect the safety and security of themselves and the public. This conservative discursive formation is put to work in any situation where posters seek to reject arguments made by others that policing is racialized in Winnipeg, and effectively turns allegations of racism into support for the police as they currently practice the maintenance of the public order.

Given the prominence of the conservative discursive formation in the posts and the understanding offered here of how power works *through* discourse, the question remains as to the ways in which the conservative ideology can be challenged. As Fairclough and other critical theorists remind us, discourse is a site of struggle. As such, whenever there is power, there is room for resistance.

Chapter Six

The 'Social Practice' and the Discourse of Racialized Policing

This thesis project critically analyzes online comments responding to incidents involving racialized group members and the police. It is 'critical' in the sense that I interrogate the postings with the intention to understand how relations of power are produced and maintained. My main research questions are: 1) *what does the discourse of 'race' and policing look like in online comments?* 2) *what processes of social struggle are evident in this discourse?* and 3) *what can these discourses tell us about power relations and ideology in society?*

To address these questions I used Fairclough's CDA framework of discourse, whereby discursive events can be broken down into three dimensions: as 'text' or individual instance of language use, in this case a comment or a portion of a comment; as 'discourse practice' or the processes by which the texts are produced and consumed, in this case interactions between posters; and as 'social practice' or the ideological context in which the discourse operates. Questions relating to 'power' featured in the discourse practice where posters engaged with one another in defining the relationship between police and Fresh IE, Mathew Dumas, Michael Langan, and racialized group members more generally, including family members and Aboriginal leaders. The last question concerns what can be said about the ideological power that transmits through discursive practices, or how the social practice can be seen as a form of ideological struggle. This is the main focus of this final chapter. The findings from each case described in terms of 'text' and 'discourse practice' dimensions of the discourse address my first and second research questions. The following is a summary of the discourses and how posters engage

in social struggles over the definition of the relationship between racialized people and the police.

‘Texts’ and ‘Discourse Practices’

In the case of Fresh IE, comments constructing the police and him in relation to one another were generally split into those that defended the police/criminalized Fresh IE, and those who were critical of the police/supportive of Fresh IE. These two competing clusters of comments were conceptualized in terms of conservative and radical discursive formations, respectively. The conservative formation had several features to it, including defence of police, denial of racism, criminalization of those who look like Fresh IE, and responsabilization of Fresh IE in having an appearance that attracts police attention. The radical formation tended to place its criticisms against the police in terms of racial profiling. Comack (2012), however, warns against critically examining interactions between the police and minority group members in terms of ‘racial profiling,’ as doing so places a complex social phenomenon within an individualized frame. Instead, she opts for a more nuanced conceptualization of ‘racialized policing,’ wherein policing as an institution works in diverse ways to reproduce a racialized social order—one in which dominant racialized groups enjoy privilege inaccessible to those belonging to subjugated racialized groups and policing is one mechanism that maintains that division and influences how we understand racial difference. Therefore, conservative and radical comments alike engaged in discourses of individualization, albeit in different ways.

The Dumas comments were, on a whole, less critical of the police. Comments from the conservative standpoint constructed a social order in which demonization of “violent criminals,” as Dumas was presented by posters, pose a threat to officers who

have a fundamental right to defend themselves and the public from. As the online sources cited allegations of racism from Dumas's family and from Aboriginal leaders, responsibility is extended to them, nested within a variety of denial strategies. These included outright denial, noting that the officer who shot Dumas was Métis, pointing to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system, and using the rhetorical device of 'playing the race card.' The section recounting the online comments relating to the Dumas case also showed some of the dynamics of the discourse practice in the comment boards, noting that posters interact in a variety of ways, including responding to generalized voices, single comments or particular posters, and through conversations with multiple posters. This demonstrates some of the modalities within this order of discourse in which conservative comments subjugate radical ones.

Lastly, posters constructed Langan as a "kid" from the "North End," which enables radical discourses that invoke a critique of responsabilization, attempting to frame the concept of responsibility as not equally applicable in all circumstances. The main project of the analysis of the Langan comments was to build a model of the conservative discursive formation, which was clearly demonstrated in its opposition to those deemed as "Bleeding Heart Liberals." The conservative discursive formation is then shown in a model with three stages: Support for Police, Responsibilization/Criminalization, and Denial of Racism.

Interrogating Power

The third research question—what can these discourses tell us about power relations and ideology in society?—relates to the social practice. This is a much trickier question to

deal with than the other two because it relates to how texts and discourse practices connect to ideological formations.

Ideology is a problematic concept and in some senses runs contrary to the notion of discourse as Foucault meant to use it. It conjures up images of an assumed external, objective force somehow intentionally determining consciousness and social actions. However, I am not claiming that ideology is an organized process of intervention in the social world. Instead, I treat ideology as a framework in which we can categorize discursive formations that have unintended effects and thereby serve particular interests. As noted above, what enables ideologies to attain dominance as ‘common sense’ is ideological power, which is a process and not a state achieved with any finality—it must be continuously reproduced through discourse.

Before I go on to consider the social practice of the discourse of racialized policing in further detail, a brief review of the terminology is in order. First, I consider discourse to be textual social constructions and representations that exert power in defining a version of reality. Racialization is in this sense the social construction and representation of ‘race’ and therefore racialized discourse is discourse with racially hierarchizing effects. As I noted above, I situate this discourse within the context of racialized policing, which is both an ontological statement and an epistemological statement about the relationship between racialized people and the police. As an ontology racialized policing refers to policing as a practice implicated in the reproduction of a racialized, unequal society. As an epistemology this conceptualization draws attention to the ways in which policing helps us to understand the social world. If the ‘normal’ functioning of society is racist, and we use the police to make sense of it, then the social

practice is an ideological conflict in which that racism in policing is normalized. Or more specifically, in the context of racialized policing, the police become a reference frame through which racialized ‘Othering’ occurs—how people construct the relationship between racialized people and the police is a political discursive struggle.

This research does not consider the ontological aspect of racialized policing. The research questions do not interrogate policing, racial inequality, or racial privilege as objective features of the social world. Neither is this a methodological project to advance how we better understand the details of racialized policing or to lend empirical support to the conception of racialized policing. I bracket these issues, and instead focus on the subjective aspect of racialized policing by examining the discourse of racialized policing—or the processes of social construction and representation of the relationship between the police and racialized groups that enable racially hierarchized effects.

But, if the ontological statement is accurate, then we can expect to see a few things about the nature of the discourse of racialized policing. These break down into the following premises: 1) We live in a racialized, unequal social order and policing is a project for the maintenance of racial privilege. This refers so social structural features of society. 2) As Fairclough and others note, social structures and discourse are dialectically related, such that discourses draw on social structures and work for their reproduction and transformation. Therefore, for these social structures to persist, unequal relations have to be naturalized in discourse. 3. As noted earlier, ideological power is the ability to advance a taken-for-granted or common-sense version of reality. Therefore, within the context of racialized policing, discourse will transmit ideological power that naturalizes unequal relations. This is all to say that if policing reproduces racialized inequality, then the

‘social practice’ of these online comments is an ideological struggle over the naturalization of racialized policing.

I have framed the discourse practice in terms of opposing ‘conservative’ and ‘radical’ discursive formations. The struggle in defining this relationship has two sides: one which recognizes racial inequality and police brutality and calls for change; and one that does not and recognizes the status-quo as ‘just fine.’ Each side has a variety of strategies that they use. I have also mapped out the conservative discursive formation as containing three parts: support for police and denial of racism, connected through discourse strategies of responsabilization and criminalization. Here I want to discuss how this formation suggests some of the ways in which ideological power, or the power ‘behind’ the discourse, works. Again, this assumes the ontological reality of racialized policing and conceives of ideological power as serving to maintain racial privilege.

There are three main themes that I present as provisional considerations of the social practice: a fusion of racialization and criminalization; a limitation of the critical discourse as ‘radical relativism’; and some thoughts on what ‘effective’ radical discourses might look like. All of these themes engage with the question of how racialized discourse functions. But more often than not, processes of racialized ‘Othering’ do not happen in straight forward, blunt ways. This is clearly evident in the discourses in describing the relationship between racialized people and the police, which only infrequently racialized those involved in the incident. The process is therefore complex and occurs through a ‘racialization of crime’ or ‘criminalization of ‘race’’ in which ‘race’ only features in the negative sense.

From Relative Radicalism to a Transformative Discourse of Racialized Policing

Within the conservative discursive formation, a version of the social order is taken for granted in which everyone is equal before the law and the police are there to help us so long as we choose to avoid participating in criminal activities. Within this worldview, we all have the opportunity, indeed, the responsibility, to play by the rules. This means that if we do encounter the police, we should listen to them, cooperate, and everything will be fine. The role that the police play in society is finding and stopping those who are not prudent in acting within the confines of the law and taking responsibility for their actions.

As noted in the model of the conservative discursive formation, discourses of responsabilization and criminalization are used to mediate denials of racism with support for the police. Responsibility, seen as the determining feature of the outcomes of interactions between citizens and the police, works in a variety of ways to connect the other two stages of the conservative discursive formation. By responsabilizing Fresh IE, Dumas, and Langan within the context of denials of racism, posters resolve the tension between formal equality and substantive inequality reflected in Tator and Henry's (2002) notion of 'democratic racism.' This has a subtle effect of imbuing covert racialization into discourses of responsibility and criminality in such a way that crime becomes naturally racialized, and criminalization and racialization fuse as a single process. This might suggest why open and clear attempts to define 'Black' and 'Aboriginal' peoples as groups with distinct characteristics are relatively uncommon in the comments. The racialization of crime/criminalization of 'race' extends beyond direct constructions in the cases of Dumas and Langan, where the parents are held responsible for failing to raise a responsible child and Aboriginal leaders for helping to stop the overrepresentation of

racialized people in the criminal justice system. Therefore, criminalization becomes a signifier for defining the family practices of racialized groups and the groups themselves. This draws on and contributes to a common-sense expectation that racialized people are criminals, individualizing the problem and deflecting the need to situate the issue within its broader social and historical context.

Individualization is a central barrier to defusing the ideological power at work here, or what ethnomethodologists might call ‘breaching’ the taken-for-granted-ness of the conservative worldview. But criticism of the police in terms of ‘a few bad apples’ and ‘racial profiling’ (Henry and Tator, 2006) exists in both the conservative and radical discursive formations. In this sense, the issue of ‘race’ and policing is reduced to a matter of individual police officers, not one of policing as a social process within a context of racialized inequality. The terrain of the debate of how to characterize the relationship between racialized people and the police is organized around individualization, which most closely aligns with strategies used by those who support the status-quo. This limits attempts of radicals in making a case for urgent transformation, and confines the struggle to questions about whether or not the officers involved are racist. In this way, the radical discourse, in failing to de-individualize the problem, shares much in common with a more liberal discourse. While I retain my description of this discourse as ‘radical’ rather than liberal—since these posters still oppose the way in which policing is practiced—this approach cannot escape the naturalizing logic of the conservative formation.

Conceptualizing power as fluid, non-centralized, and multifaceted, and showing the limits of relative radicalism begs the question: how can discourses within the context racialized policing become more transformative? Although radical discourses were found

to work by targeting and resisting the individual stages of the conservative discursive formation, another approach would be to problematize and destabilize the leaps between the stages, thereby interrupting the power 'behind' them. This would involve challenging individualization as the discourses transition from support for police or denial to discourses of responsabilization, and separating out and calling attention to the omissions of racialization that take place within them. It would also mean inserting new questions, framed in de-individualized terms, into the debate on how to characterize the relationship between the police and racialized group members. For example, in interrogating the taken-for-granted coupling of responsabilization and defence of police, posters could ask questions like: why might racialized people feel threatened by the police? This question calls attention to the privilege of not being a 'usual suspect' in the eyes of the police, and deconstructs the discourse of the 'right to self-defence' to show that it also applies to victims of police brutality and inner-city violence. Additionally, asking this question deconstructs the discourse of responsabilization by showing how the police can contribute to the need for racialized people to defend themselves, as well as to their criminalization. In challenging the leap from denial of racism and responsabilization, posters could ask questions like: how might historical legacies influence family dynamics? Or how might Aboriginal leaders address disproportional representation? In this regard, similar to the conservative discursive formation, a radical discourse of racialized policing would have three stages: one that works to denaturalize racial privilege; another which links police practice to racialized inequality; and discourses of contextualization and de-individualization to mediate the two.

In the struggle for defining the contested relationship between racialized people and the police, the online forums represent a site in which two conflicting ideological positions collide. But the purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis is to interrogate not only how discourses maintain power and privilege, but also to show how relations of domination can be transformed. Therefore, a radical discourse of racialized policing can be a means to challenge and resist racialization in the context of policing. But what has typically been a difficulty experienced by those on the political left is that issues relating to social marginalization are not as easy to communicate as are more ‘knee jerk’ responses that justify the status quo. This is especially evident in the format of online comments, where posters have a relatively small space in which they can voice their opinions and standpoints. Contextualizing issues such as racialized policing is difficult in such forums because of their complexity, requiring a more nuanced approach in describing and having to draw on less widespread, historical and social explanations. Add into the mix the racialized stereotypes that exist and it is no wonder why so many radical comments are easily dismissed by conservative-minded posters. But the online forums also present an opportunity to regroup and take another approach, to try different strategies, to pose questions that problematize taken-for-granted assumptions behind discourses of responsabilization, criminalization, and conservative constructions of the social order. Being able to destabilize privilege in this format is a key element of this complex exchange of power, as it enables more versatile strategies that can be applied in other orders of discourse.

Limitations and Concluding Remarks

A major limitation to this study is the issue of generalizability. The data set comes from a relatively isolated group of individuals—those who make comments in online forums relating to the events of 2008. The posts are anonymous, and there are no means of knowing who these people are or whether the comments reflect their views and values when offline. The leap from ‘text’ to ‘social practice’ will turn up conclusions that require further empirical work if they are to be extended beyond the data examined here. Theorizing about the nature of power in society within an assumed context of racialized policing has a limited scope in this regard, because the empirical basis can only suggest *potential* ideological formations in the broader society, and assumes that these discourses are not purely limited to the forums themselves. However, as noted earlier, it is reasonable to assume that the online discourse practice does not exist in a vacuum. These comments derive from experience within other orders of discourse. What this study offers is a basis for interrogating the social mechanisms and the workings of power should they exist elsewhere.

Appendix A

List of Unique Online Sources

1. http://72.14.205.104/search?q=cache:RXh_IrbUBr0J:tgcts.blogspot.com/2008/08/amc-one-minute-to-midnight-before-race.html+%22michael+langan%22+winnipeg&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=136
2. <http://allhiphop.com/stories/news/archive/2008/06/10/20074271.aspx>
3. <http://anybody-want-a-peanut.blogspot.com/2008/07/dont-tase-me-bro.html>
4. http://article.wn.com/view/2008/07/23/Winnipeg_man_dies_after_being_tasered_by_police_8/
5. http://article.wn.com/view/2008/07/24/17yearold_Michael_Langan_died_after_Winnipeg_police_Tasered_/
6. http://article.wn.com/view/2008/09/13/Michael_Langan_died_after_being_Tasered_Tuesday_by_Winnipeg_/#comments
7. <http://blackpoliticalthought.blogspot.com/2008/06/winnipeg-police-apologize-to-rapper.html>
8. <http://blackrod.blogspot.com/2008/06/fresh-ie-in-dirty-harry-sequel.html>
9. <http://blackrod.blogspot.com/2008/06/matthew-dumas-inquest-truth-1-race.html>
10. <http://blackrod.blogspot.com/2008/12/matthew-dumas-inquest-sinks-hopes-of.html>
11. http://blackrod.blogspot.com/2008_08_01_archive.html
12. http://blackrod.blogspot.com/2008_12_01_archive.html
13. http://blog.canoe.ca/raisinghell/2008/06/20/dumas_pepper_spray_claim_nonsense_1#comments
14. http://blog.canoe.ca/raisinghell/2008/08/05/drop_your_weapon_it_s_good_advice
15. http://blog.canoe.ca/raisinghell/2008/12/09/time_for_native_groups_to_apologize_on_d
16. <http://blogs.canoe.ca/raisinghell/general/dumas-case-drag-on-too-long/>
17. <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=HeKboRpxCss>
18. <http://ca.youtube.com/watch?v=PZf-CYGYZhY>
19. <http://canada.com.dose.ca/topics/entertainment/story.html?id=1b887ac0-bd8d-457a-8393-68d1c346a2af>
20. <http://ccin.menlopark.org:81/2425.html>
21. <http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Canada/2008/12/10/7694556-sun.html>
22. <http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Crime/2008/07/24/6253276-cp.html>
23. <http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Politics/2008/08/23/6551656-cp.html>
24. <http://copyrightad.com/>
25. http://cybersmokeblog.blogspot.com/2006_09_01_archive.html

26. <http://dallassouthblog.com/2008/07/30/use-of-force-continuum-needs-revisiting-due-to-lethal-nature-of-taser-guns-day-of-blogging-for-justice/>
27. <http://de.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=2357448339&topic=8990>
28. http://derrylsanderson.blogspot.com/2007_01_01_archive.html
29. <http://derrylsanderson.blogspot.com/2008/08/whats-up-with-winnipeg-pops.html>
30. <http://edmontonsun.com/News/Canada/2008/08/11/6416191.html>
31. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winnipeg_Police_Service
32. <http://enmasse.ca/forums/viewtopic.php?p=194268&sid=e6114e05b7c2bc4963d985a692a0d918>
33. <http://fightforjustice.blogspot.com/2008/06/winnipeg-police-officer-says-there-was.html>
34. <http://finance.banks.com/www.shannonhurley.com?GUID=5681317&Page=MediaViewer&ChannelID=3204>
35. http://hacksandwonks.blogspot.com/2008_12_01_archive.html
36. <http://impolitical.blogspot.com/2008/08/leadership-files.html>
37. http://issuu.com/ccsimard/docs/urbanndn_july2008/4
38. <http://itsmypulp.wordpress.com/2008/07/23/another-taser-victim/>
39. <http://macedoniaonline.eu/content/view/2480/54/>
40. <http://marginalizedactiondinosaur.net/?p=4670>
41. <http://mdcellphoto.wordpress.com/2008/06/05/pulled-over-for-looking-too/>
42. http://medlibrary.org/medwiki/Winnipeg_Police_Service
43. <http://mikeoncrime.com/article/10214/winnipeg-safety-boss-backs-tasers-despite-death>
44. <http://mikeoncrime.com/article/10862/winnipeg-police-combat-string-of-shootings-inquiry-that-have-tarnished-image>
45. <http://mlp.manitobaliberals.ca/?p=478>
46. http://mostlywater.org/an_open_letter_canada_and_all_first_nation_leaders
47. <http://mostlywater.org/node/3389>
48. <http://news.aol.ca/article/police-shooting/300780/>
49. <http://news.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=602796>
50. http://news.sympatico.msn.cbc.ca/Local/MB/ContentPosting?newsitemid=winnipeg-dumas-inquest&feedname=CBC_LOCALNEWS&show=False&number=0&showbyline=True&subtitle=&detect=&abc=abc&date=True
51. <http://norwayhousemanitoba.blogspot.com/2007/11/better-than-bullet.html>
52. <http://origin.www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2008/09/04/winnipeg-police.html>
53. <http://portage.siteseer.ca/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1155617>

54. <http://sketchythoughts.blogspot.com/2007/05/some-initial-thoughts-on-racial.html>
55. <http://tgcts.blogspot.com/2008/06/only-stain-in-dumas-affair-is-on-race.html>
56. <http://thechristianmanifesto.wordpress.com/2008/06/06/christian-rapper-forcefully-detained-by-winnipeg-police/>
57. <http://theelectricpencil.wordpress.com/2008/07/24/18th-canadian-dies-after-being-shot-with-taser/>
58. http://thegallopingleaver.blogspot.com/2008_07_01_archive.html
59. <http://truthnottasers.blogspot.com/2008/07/winnipeg-police-chief-calls-youths.html>
60. <http://unambig.blogspot.com/2008/07/tasered-teenage-death-not-tragedy.html>
61. http://uwasc.blogspot.com/2008_03_17_archive.html
62. <http://video.aol.com/video-detail/global-winnipeg-dumas-inquest-ends-06-20-08/3617923886/?icid=VIDURVNWS04>
63. <http://westmountexaminer.com/article-cp45709027-Inquest-report-clears-Winnipeg-police-in-aboriginal-shooting.html>
64. <http://wiinimkiikaa.wordpress.com/police-murders-inquiries/>
65. http://winnipeg.ctv.ca/servlet/an/local/CTVNews/20050207/winnipeg_shooting_050206?hub=WinnipegHome
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