"Reading" whiteness in consumer research

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The concept of whiteness has been widely debated in the social sciences and humanities but has rarely surfaced as a theme in consumer research. This paper introduces whiteness theory as an additional theoretical perspective available to consumer researchers to add to those that are well established. The empirical section of the paper comprises a textual analysis of articles published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* from 1974–2004. The findings suggest that consumer research is dominated by "white faces" and "white spaces," resulting in many investigators consciously or unconsciously performing whiteness. The ways whiteness can be re-articulated to stimulate more interest within consumer research are discussed.

Keywords: whiteness theory; textual analysis; ideology

In the last decade, there has been considerable interest in exploring whiteness as a theoretical construct in a range of academic disciplines. Despite a rapidly expanding research base, whiteness rarely surfaces as a theme in consumer research. When whiteness has been addressed, it has tended to be framed in the context of its exclusion rather than inclusion. Stern (1998, 385) refers to the *Journal of Consumer Research* as a "research polylogue, dominated by white, heterosexual voices" but rarely acknowledged as such. Peñaloza (2001) maintains that European whites are rarely considered an ethnic group that represents a particular world-view. Yet when the consumption practices of White, Anglo-Saxons, of Protestant descent (WASPs) as a distinctive ethnic group have been examined, they reveal a shared ideology underpinning their consumption that dates back centuries (Hirschman 1985a; Witkowski 1989).

Whiteness theory appears to show potential for offering insights into the relationship between whiteness, identity and consumption (Lopez 2005; Taylor 2005; Rasmussen et al. 2004; Foster 2003; Ware and Back 2001; Nakayama and Martin 1999; Babb 1998; Jacobson 1998; M. Hill 1997; Frankenberg 1997). Whiteness theory provides an explanation of ethnic and racial differences based on power, privilege and oppression. Whiteness is a marker against which other cultures, "the other," are measured. A central objective for whiteness theorists is uncovering how whiteness develops and dominates particular racial and ethnic groups over time and space. Moreover, whiteness offers the possibility of unearthing the foundations of all racial and cultural positions that might have otherwise remained invisible – white individuals, white "others" or a diverse range of ethnic groups (Frankenberg 1993). The analysis of whiteness in consumer research simultaneously reveals information about consumer researchers and their values. It is important to recognize from the outset that

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whiteness theory presented in this paper is only one way to conceptualize and investigate whiteness. Other investigators may wish to use a socio-cultural framework that does not rest on investigating whiteness through the lens of political ideology which whiteness theory supports.

Whiteness theorists maintain that the concept of whiteness is created by politics and culture, and is based on racial hierarchy whether in relation to physical, social or cultural characteristics (Lipsitz 1998; Harris 1993). From the 1840s to the 1920s, pseudoscience emerged that created a racial hierarchy of white and non-white races. The architects of racial hierarchy positioned white Europeans at the top and other non-Europeans on intermediate rungs. Indians and African Americans were in competition with each other as the "lowest race of mankind" (Jaimes 1995, 134). The racial hierarchy legitimated inequality between the races and was reflected in their perceived social, cultural and economic inferiority. Historically, Europeans have also been stratified and designated as white or non-white. Benjamin Franklin in his classification of the world's population in 1751, made the distinction between the English that were considered white, while Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians, Swedes and Germans were considered non-white (Jacobson 1998). An over-emphasis on white consumers, and the perception that they are the most lucrative of consumers, could be considered a legacy of the long-standing historical orientation emphasizing non-white inferiority.

It is important to integrate whiteness in marketing discourse for a variety of reasons. First, it is important for marketing scholars to be aware of the extent to which whiteness is embedded in consumer research and how whiteness structures our views of what is *appropriate scholarship*. Theoretical insights help us to understand the world but also structure the world that we see. Integrating whiteness theory into marketing scholarship is important since it could reveal blind spots, missed opportunities and legitimate new avenues of enquiry. Second, similar comments to those above are also applicable to practitioners in industry and commerce in terms of helping them employ a *wider frame of reference* (Burton 2005). Whiteness theory could assist practitioners by helping them to think more broadly about how whiteness structures their view of consumer behaviour and consumer markets.

A third reason why whiteness needs to be acknowledged in marketing scholarship is because whiteness is a *distinctive epistemological standpoint*. Whites may not be aware of this bias in their knowledge of the world and how it structures their work. However, many people of colour have looked to a different epistemological standpoint through which social, institutional and textual relations can be examined and made visible. Fourth, whiteness provides a distinctive *methodological approach*. The recent emphasis on language, word play, discourse analysis and the interpretation of texts, including literary ones, has been instrumental feature in the growth of literature on whiteness. However, it needs to be recognized that whiteness theory is not limited to these particular methodological approaches. Finally, it is important to be able to identify and understand the *different dimensions of whiteness*. What form can whiteness take in marketing and consumer research? How is, or might, whiteness be operationalized? What social, economic, historical and political factors structure different dimensions of whiteness in marketing and consumer research?

The paper is structured as follows. The first section begins with a theoretical overview of the whiteness literature. The second section assesses the relationship between whiteness and epistemology. The third section presents whiteness as a specific methodological domain. The substantive part of the paper focuses on an empirical

analysis of published papers in the *Journal of Consumer Research* from 1974–2004 in order to illustrate the ways in which whiteness has been used in consumer research. Two methodological approaches are used to "read" whiteness in the sample of papers. The first approach is a content analysis of all the published papers within the selected time-frame in order to assess the extent to which whiteness is embedded in the text. A second approach comprises an *explication* or a *close reading* (Stern 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 1993) of three papers to provide a more detailed examination of whiteness.

Whiteness as ideology

Ideology is a system of beliefs and values that emanate from and promulgate the world-view of the dominant group in society. The maintenance and promulgation of the dominant group's ideology is used to sustain and legitimate the power of the dominant group over perception of social reality, and also to legitimate this group's control of social relations and institutions. Eagleton (1991, 5) notes that ideology may be used by dominant groups to legitimate their social control through at least six different strategies:

> A dominant power may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it: by *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to [make them appear] self-evident and inevitable: by *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it: by *excluding* rival forms of thought… and by *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself.

The latter strategy is referred to as *mystification* and often takes the form of masking or suppressing external social challenges to the dominant group's control. The term ideology is also applicable in another sense, to a particular world system or value-and-belief system of a particular group or class of people (Eagleton 1991; Hirschman 1993; Crockett and Wallendorf 2004). Hirschman (1993) maintains that this is the way ideology has traditionally been used in consumer research, and it is the way that it is deployed in this paper.

A view-point shared by whiteness theorists is that race is the organizing discursive category around which has been constructed a system of socio-economic power, exploitation and exclusion, i.e., racism. The ideology of whiteness constitutes racism, not necessarily in the form of hatred, but it takes the form of systematic preferential treatment for whites. Whiteness can take the form of whites "*interests,*" "*points of view,*" "*material well-being,*" "*self-image*" and notions of "*appropriate behavior*" that are portrayed as the norm (A. Thompson 2004, 30).

The dominance of whiteness in economic and social life in Western societies is reflected in their systems of knowledge production (Ladison-Billing 1994). Ladison-Billing (1998) refers to the euro-epistemological dominance as master scripting that silences multiple voices and perspectives that legitimates the dominant white, upper-class, male perspective with respect to "standard" knowledge that students need to know. Within the sphere of education, this euro-epistemological stance is reproduced in the classroom (Cooks 2003; McIntyre 1997; McLaren 1994, 1997) and reflected in teaching materials (Carter 1999). There is a lack of non-white materials in textbooks other than those that specifically address cultural differences that in practice usually relate to international marketing. Small numbers of institutions teach modules in multicultural marketing despite students wishing to pursue careers in this specialism and demand from companies that wish to hire them (Robbs and Rose 2001; Tharp 2001).

A. Thompson (2004, 45) notes that journal publication guidelines also reinforce the status quo and the power of whiteness in academic research when she notes:

> The assumption that all legitimate scholarly knowledge is built on existing scholarly knowledge – that black, brown, and/or women scholars' contributions, for example, can readily be incorporated into the white male knowledge base – privileges whiteness and maleness at the core. Ignoring the contested character of knowledge, it insists on slow, gradual epistemic change on existing terms.

She observes that this process is also reflected in author-date citation systems, in which key people in the field have to be cited, sometimes to the exclusion of lesser-known individuals that have different views. Thompson maintains that as far as whiteness is concerned, professionals who master a professional style are to some extent mastered by it. Successful scholars have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and may exclude or marginalize others that challenge established patterns of thought.

The dominance of whiteness in consumer research has been noted by several investigators (Hirschman 1986; Costa and Bamossy 1995; Venkatesh 1995; Peñaloza 2001; Burton 2002, 2005). Consumer research continues to be dominated by a white, male, middle-class perspective that foregrounds whiteness. Little attention is given to the "white other" or "white trash" (Wray and Newitz 1997) in consumer research. Whites in the lower socio-economic groups that are not perceived as lucrative market segments (Hirschman 1993), have attracted relatively little attention from consumer researchers with few notable exceptions (R. Hill 1991; Hill and Stamey 1990). More contributions from ethnic minority scholars may help to contest the dominance of whiteness, but it needs to be acknowledged that in Anglo-Saxon countries, we are all socialized into a white, Euro-American epistemological tradition.

Whiteness as an epistemological domain

Alternative ways of seeking knowledge in consumer research are a product of different ontological and epistemological approaches. Hudson and Ozanne (1988, 509) note: "Multiple realities exist because of different individual and group perspectives." Feminist ontology and epistemology reflect men's and women's differing standpoints and views of the world. Hirschman (1993) has been critical of the masculine ideology that has dominated consumer research and academia in general. Equally lacking is a strong racial and ethnic ontological and epistemological tradition in consumer research (Peñaloza 2000; Costa and Bamossy 1995). The concepts of racial ontology and epistemology are of particular relevance to our assessment of white and non-white readings of whiteness (Ladison-Billing 1994). Central to our understanding of whiteness is an appreciation that it is not a variable, but a theoretical lens or analytical tool through which social, institutional and textual relations can be examined and made visible. Whiteness is open to rival interpretations, "competing narratives of what happened in the past and what is happening right now, alternative descriptive frameworks and interpretations" (Mills 2004, 26).

Whiteness scholars argue that reflexivity on the part of white individuals in assessing their white identity is marginal or non-existent; it is irrelevant or invisible because it represents the norm. Whites take their experiences as representative: it is *the* authentic reality; race is about other people. This sentiment is articulated by Dyer (1988), "at the level of racial representation … whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race" (48). Yancy (2004) maintains that the social ontology of whiteness is a

species of racism since whites attempt to avoid discussing their own social, political, economic and cultural investment in whiteness. McIntyre's (1997) attempts to encourage teachers to reflect on their white identity and confront their whiteness found that they deflected their responses by talking about degrees of racism. Similar responses have been noted by other researchers since no one wants to be perceived as a racist (Best 2003; Martin et al. 1999; Frankenberg 1993). Aal (2004, 305) notes: "Wow white people, especially those who are better educated, are very good at antiracist language to allow themselves to feel good about themselves without actually having to change." Likewise, Hirschman (1985a, 1985b) suggests that consumer researchers are often unwilling to confront attitudes and behaviour that we believe ourselves to have been civilized out of.

Sartre (1956) uses the concept of essentialism, a focus on human existence and the possibilities open to people in the world in which they live, which is of value in connection with our discussion of whiteness. He argues that people have the freedom to make themselves what they are, and it is "bad faith" to argue that as human beings we have no choices in what we think and how we live our life. Individuals have the power to recognize and negate falseness, evilness and absurdity. To hide a displeasing truth, or to present as truth a pleasing untruth is an instance of bad faith – it is a case of self-denial. However, Barthes takes issue with the position advanced by Sartre of a world free from constraints, and instead turned his attention to the social contexts in which text is produced. This final point is particularly relevant in the context of academic research, since the social and political contexts of academic cultures at particular points in time determine what is deemed to be important and valuable knowledge. For example, many scholars over a period of decades have recognized the marginalization and exclusion of discourse that is critical of mainstream marketing.

The apparent unwillingness of white individuals to recognize their specific ontological and epistemological standpoint, has led some scholars of colour to believe that there are significant contradictions for white folks in their engagement with a white standpoint (Baldwin 2000). As a consequence, the non-white reading of whiteness may be an alternative and fruitful way of making whiteness visible. One of the first scholars to recognize that people of colour have looked to a different epistemological frame to describe their experiences and frames of reference outside of the dominant paradigm was labour historian W.E.B. Du Bois ([1903]1994). In his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois introduced the concept of *double consciousness*, emphasizing the ability of African Americans to simultaneously view the mainstream and margins of society. However, it needs to be recognized that everyday knowledge about racism and white privilege has existed much longer than academic studies of the phenomenon.

hooks (1997) maintains that there has been considerable attention in academic literature directed at the way white minds perceive blackness but little interest in the representation of whiteness in the black imagination. Black people have long recognized whiteness as a privileged signifier. She observes that although there has never been any official body of black people in the United States (anthropologists or ethnographers), whose central focus has been to study whiteness, "black folks have, from slavery on, shared with one another in conversations 'special' knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close scrutiny of white people" (75). This form of knowledge exists through details, facts, observations and psychoanalytical reading of the white "other," whose function it was to help black people cope and survive in a white supremacist society.

Whiteness theory as a methodological domain

It is important to differentiate between *whiteness theory* and *critical race theory* and their distinctive epistemological and methodological approaches, since both are separate but parallel discourses situated within the critical research tradition. A similarity is that both theoretical approaches have their roots in the critical theory of the Frankfurt school that seeks to reveal and challenge dominant ideologies and promote social justice in society. Both theories investigate whiteness albeit it in different ways, and from different *epistemological* standpoints (see Table 1). In reality, the differences between the two approaches are much more complex than the binary distinction suggests. As noted below, a more recent trend has been to differentiate between various strands of critical race theory that resonate with different ethnic groups, rather than specifying race as a homogeneous entity. Likewise, there has been much recent attention directed at teasing out the ways in which whiteness is culturally, socially and politically constructed in different cultural settings to produce different forms of whiteness. For example, white immigrants from former Eastern bloc countries are often regarded as culturally inferior to northern Europeans, which suggests a stratification of whiteness.

Critical race theory is longer established and has its roots in critical legal scholarship dating from the 1970s. It was developed by people of colour as an alternative narrative grounded in the experiences of people of colour themselves (Ladison-Billing 1994; Baldwin 2000). Critical race theory is not a united theory but a collection of theories including LatCrit (Latina/o Critical Race Theory) and TribalCrit (Tribal Critical Race Theory) reflecting the ethnic ancestry and epistemological standpoint of the researcher. Critical race feminists have also argued that gender is a distinctive strand of critical race theory due to their additional standpoint of women of colour (Wing 2004).

These various strands of critical race theory are also associated with particular methodological traditions including storytelling, folklore counter-stories, ethnic autobiography, ethnography, oral history and participatory action research (Ladison-Billing 1994). One purpose of critical race theory is to make whites think about racism, and thus they centre race, but may do so in a way that troubles white privilege. Examples of critical race theory in consumer research include Peñaloza's (1994) account of Latino assimilation using critical ethnography. Crockett and Wallendorf's (2004) account of political ideology and consumption within the African-American community also employed a critical ethnographic approach.

Whiteness theory has been developed predominantly, although not exclusively, by white scholars since the early 1990s as a way to explore their particular epistemological standpoint. The focus of this methodological approach is to uncover the different dimensions of whiteness from a position of dominance by analysing power, privilege and rewards of whiteness, and it is intimately associated with anti-racist discourse (Aal 2004). Current scholarship is overwhelmingly of US origin; however, this is changing with the publication of texts that take an international perspective (Bonnett 2000; Levine-Rasky 2002) and more interest within Europe (Bonnett 1998; Jackson 1998), South Africa (Steyn 2005), Australasia (Wetherell and Potter 1992) and the Far East (Ashikari 2005). Arnesen (2001) maintains that a more accepting methodological focus on language, word play, discourse analysis and the interpretation of texts, including literary ones, has been instrumental feature in the growth of literature on whiteness (Morrison 1992; Hale 1998; Ferber 1998; Jackson and Heckman 2002).

Exploring how whiteness is depicted in the cinema via the relationships between characters, the context in which the movies are set, and what are deemed appropriate roles for whites and people of colour are just some of the ways in which whiteness has been investigated (Seshadri-Cooks 2000; Foster 2003; Giroux 1997; Dyer 1988). Labour historians have been the most prolific authors during the first decade of whiteness scholarship, using a variety of archive media to construct accounts of whiteness (Roediger 1991, 1994; Kolchin 2004). Consumer researchers may be interested in historical aspects of whiteness in retailing (Hale 1998) and links between art history, whiteness and commodities (Rosenthal 2004).

Sociologists have engaged in in-depth interviewing and ethnographic work in their quest to uncover contemporary manifestations of whiteness. Frankenberg's (1993) seminal work *White Women Race Matters* is a landmark text in this methodological tradition. However, many scholars report difficulties when requesting white respondents to critically reflect on their whiteness. Giroux and McLaren (1989) argue that for whites to think about what it means to be white is a radical move. When white consumers have been questioned, they are often reluctant to identify the range of available options, or discuss the process of labelling for fear of being considered racist (Martin et al. 1999; McIntyre 1997; Best 2003). Barrett's (2001) experience suggests that when people take the concept seriously they find it a liberating experience, an invitation to critically reflect on an issue they had always held to be natural.

Papers within consumer research that *explicitly* and *deliberately* deal with whites as a distinctive cultural group are very thin on the ground. Two papers were identified, authored by Hirschman (1985a) and Witkowski (1989); however, it needs to be recognized that neither of these two papers used *whiteness theory* to inform their empirical work. This raises an important issue, specifically that literature written from a white epistemological framework does not have to be informed by the political commitment of critical theory. Both of these papers were written from a socio-cultural perspective and, though containing references to the power and positioning of whiteness, did not address the issue of radical social action to undo whiteness. Perhaps this is not surprising given the emergence of whiteness theory in the 1990s and the publication of the two papers in the 1980s.

Whiteness theory and critical race theory are parallel discourses but should not be confused. Whiteness theorists centre *whiteness,* while critical race theories centre *race*. They are two separate theories representing two epistemological standpoints, two somewhat different but overlapping methodological traditions, comprising two broad communities of researchers and two different literatures. Some scholars might argue that separating out whiteness theory and critical race theory, as opposed to incorporating whiteness theory within the boundaries of critical race theory, is to symbolically privilege the position of whiteness ideology. This issue has even made the headlines of some daily newspapers in the United States (Fears 2003). Some critical race theorists have strongly objected to what they perceive as shifting the focus from race to whiteness. This sentiment is articulated in a very direct manner by Allen (2004, 133), who argues: "The need for change is immediate people of color do not have the time to wait for whites to take some slow bourgeois journey of white self-discovery." In other words, critical race theorists can already identify the multiple sources, manifestations and power of whiteness, making whiteness theory and its distinctive epistemological approach adopted by white scholars an unnecessary diversion.

Another critique concerns the appropriation by whites of theoretical approaches and methodological traditions developed by people of colour. It has already been

noted that critical race theory and its associated methodological traditions have been specifically developed by people of colour to explore their own reality. Yet a growing number white researchers are employing critical race theory to inform their work, without acknowledging this important epistemological distinction. A. Thompson (2004, 31) highlights this debate when she notes: "There is such a long history of whites appropriating the tools, ideas, and insights of people of color that some scholars of color would prefer that whites refrain from using them, at least for the time being." She adapted her research design to take into account these concerns by using critical race theory as a *framework* for the research as opposed to *developing* the theory. She also refrained from using counter-stories since this methodological tradition is deeply embedded in critical race theory.

A final critique is advanced by Fields (2001), who objects to whiteness being perceived as a cultural characteristic aligned with notions of identity and agency. She maintains that this approach replaces racism with race, and equates race with racial identity. Race and racial identity tend to be reduced to empirical data and tools of analysis. This approach results in what she regards as a false parallel between objects and others racism, thus "skirting around" the political, social and economic aspects of power.

Whiteness theorists on the other hand, maintain that foregrounding whiteness emphasizes the view that the white bias deserves to be a *focus of critique* from within the very community that constructed white dominance in the first place. The highlighting of whiteness is warranted in order to lead to a greater undoing of whiteness bias. Furthermore, as we have already indicated, the white majority dominate the marketing community, its journals and texts, and in this respect they are in a powerful position to disrupt the power of whiteness within the discipline.

A middle-range, compromise position is to recognize the importance of making sense of different alternative epistemological positions from the critical race and whiteness theory to gain a more comprehensive and rounded view of whiteness. For example, one of the reasons that some scholars of colour began to study whiteness was because they recognized that they could only go so far in addressing racism by focusing on minorities. Instead they had to employ a wider frame of reference that challenged the mainstream. Collaborating together to challenge whiteness could prove to be an important strategy since multiple perspectives can generate a much richer

Table 1.   Typology of whiteness theory and critical race theory as methodological domains

	Critical race theory	Whiteness theory
Date emerged as a distinct theoretical approach	1970s	1990s
Initial "host" discipline	Legal studies	Labour history
Research focus centres	Race/ethnicity	Whiteness
Race/ethnicity of researchers	People of colour	White
Race/ethnicity of researched	People of colour	White
Methodological tradition	Storytelling, counter-stories, oral history, ethnography, participatory action research	Textual analysis, discourse analysis, in-depth interviewing
Examples in consumer research	Peñaloza (1994); Crockett and Wallendorf (2004)	Hirschman (1985a); Witkowski (1989)

dialogue relating to appropriate research topics, research questions, theoretical and methodological approaches concerning consumption and consumer behaviour.

There is a rapidly expanding research base upon which consumer researchers can draw in this respect (see Yancy 2004; Knadler 2002; Roediger 1998; hooks 1997).

Whiteness as ideology in consumer research: an empirical assessment

This paper extends the somewhat controversial issue of whiteness theory by using textual analysis to uncover the ways in which whiteness is embedded within consumer research. In this respect the paper draws on the methods of humanistic research inquiry. Barthes (1984) maintains that theory is a discursive practice, and the discursive practice of theory is one that questions and challenges received ideas and orthodoxy that dominate any language. Literary criticism treats the writing produced by marketing theorists as text, which can be read with a keener eye for detail, by examining the cultural specific nature of the language that we use. It is also an appropriate method for historical research since scholars can analyse the communication of ideas over time. Stern (1990, 329) maintains that literary criticism can offer "insights into meaning that can add richness and subtlety to historical analysis." The tradition of literary criticism that resonates closely with the study of whiteness is the *socio-cultural critic approach*.

The socio-cultural critic's domain is the interaction between humanity and society using historical, Marxist and feminist thought and focusing on unearthing power relations and minority voices exposing common assumptions about what are natural, superior, inferior and making visible common themes and ways of thinking. Recently, this approach has been extended to assumptions held by researchers or embedded within the research process itself (Stern 1989a). For example, the socio-cultural critic approach has been used to study how classism, racism and sexism shape literature. Feminist scholars have used literary criticism to challenge the gender neutrality of texts in consumer research and advertising (Stern 1993). This paper will extend this discourse by deconstructing the ethnocentric character of consumer research that is dominated by the white "gaze." The socio-cultural approach takes seriously the political responsibility of the critic to move intellectual work outside of the academy to reshape society. Merod (1987) maintains that professional intellectuals should relinquish their self-concern that prolongs insularity and to speak to one another as people who have power to promote change; moving from a position of moral ambivalence, embodying collective interests but only partially, while cultivating one's own self-interest (Gouldner 1979).

Within consumer research the re-reading of published papers is an important aspect of critical-reflexive reinquiry. C.J. Thompson maintains that published papers focus on the reality of consumer behaviour being represented by their author(s), whereas critical-reflective reinquiry focuses on the representations of consumer research narratives. He argues: "This mode of interpretivist analysis can provide insights into the background assumptions, disciplinary values and normative interests that systematically shape theoretical analyses of consumption phenomena" (C.J. Thompson 2002, 142). At various points in time, the criteria changes within the academic community about what are important research questions, legitimate lines of inquiry, and appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches. Whiteness is an ideological construct that dates back several centuries but was only integrated into the humanities and social sciences during the 1990s through the publication of several landmark texts (Roediger 1991, 1994; Frankenberg 1993). The re-reading of

consumer research papers from the vantage point of whiteness offers an additional lens that consumer researchers can use to reflect on their own work and that of others.

Part I analyses papers published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* from its foundation in 1974 to 2004. A total of 857 papers were identified. The *JCR* is not representative of all research undertaken by consumer researchers; it is a very specific sample. However, it is widely regarded as the leading consumer research journal among the marketing community (Hult, Neese, and Bashaw 1997) and the one that is most consistently cited (Baumgartner and Pieters 2003). Papers published in *JCR* operate as a kite mark of quality within the *Association of Consumer Research* and are exemplars for other researchers in the field to emulate. It is for these reasons that *JCR* was chosen as the object of this study. Analysing all of the articles in the sample provides a comprehensive overview of 30 years of published work. The study presented here offers a benchmark upon which consumer researchers can build in the future.

Papers were carefully read to determine if, and how, whiteness was used within the text. The hermeneutical interpretation provided here is empirically guided but can be subject to internal evaluation through the interpretation process itself. The articles are available to consumer researchers who can assess the interpretation offered in the paper. Four main themes were generated by the data: *whiteness invisible*, *whiteness noted*, *whiteness embedded* and *whiteness challenged*. Each of the categories contains papers that demonstrate a different relationship to the ideology of whiteness. The papers within the *whiteness invisible* category make no mention of whiteness or ethnicity, and hence whiteness is invisible theoretically, epistemologically, methodologically or in the context of marketing practice. The *whiteness noted* category comprises papers that make reference to the ethnic or racial group of the respondents or data, for example, African American, Latino, Asian American, and Caucasian or white. However, racial and ethnic issues are not specifically addressed in the papers whether in the context of theoretical propositions or analysis. The *whiteness embedded* category was reserved for papers that specifically address the issue of whiteness and white ideology. There were few papers in this category, and they were written before whiteness became an important research area in the humanities and social sciences and therefore do not directly engage with the new literature. However, it is obvious from their conceptual approach that whiteness as a construct is embedded within their discussion, although in different ways. The *whiteness challenged* category includes papers that focus on ethnicity and therefore challenge the essentially white bias in the consumer behaviour literature. The ethnicity of the participants is made clear and the theoretical frameworks used in the papers make reference to cultural differences, for example through discussing assimilation and/or border crossing, which are followed through in the analysis. However, these papers do not *explicitly* engage in a discussion of whiteness; it is not the focus of the paper (see Table 2).

Like all attempts to generate an idealized typology from real people, events or phenomena, it is not perfect. But it does help to organize and facilitate a better understanding of the complexities of how whiteness is integrated within consumer research. Nor is it being suggested that papers within each of the categories represent a particular behavioural approach to knowledge generation that approximates a particular scientific style of research (Hirschman 1985b). There are several authors whose papers appear in two or more of the categories, suggesting that situational contexts are

important including the issues under investigation, the research resources available, the viewpoints of collaborators and so forth.

Part II comprises a close reading of three papers to examine if, and how, the authors incorporated whiteness in the text. A paper from each of the first three categories identified above, whiteness invisible, whiteness noted and whiteness embedded, were used to illustrate various readings of whiteness within consumer research. The papers are also illustrative of three different aspects of consumer research. One paper is a study of consumer behaviour and consumption in the United States, another a cross-national study of consumer perceptions and attitudes towards advertising in five countries, and the final paper comprises a historical account of consumption in the eighteenth century. Three interrelated issues were addressed: whiteness as *domination* (implicit or explicit) within the text, what a critical reading of whiteness reveals about the *audience* for consumer research and the *intellectual responsibility* of scholars with respect to their goals, strategies and purposes of their intellectual work.

Part I: analysis of published papers

Whiteness invisible

Papers in this category comprised 96.7 per cent of the sample consisting of 828 papers. In the absence of interviewing each of the authors about the reasons for omitting the ethnic status of their subjects, the reasons can only be a point of conjecture and rival interpretations. One interpretation of the findings is that all of the respondents within samples were European whites. As a consequence there was no need for authors to report the ethnicity of respondents in their manuscripts since it would perform no useful function. Although entirely possible, this scenario is highly unlikely. There is a tradition in consumer research, as there is in other areas of marketing research, of using university students as respondents. Most of the samples within papers published in the *JCR* are drawn from the United States, where ethnic minorities comprise over one-third of the population (Waters 2002). It is therefore highly unlikely that samples comprise individuals of exclusively white ethnic origin.

A different interpretation is that ethnic origin did not influence the research design or outcomes in any meaningful sense, and it was therefore omitted. This is a similar outcome to that reported by Wong (1994) in her analysis of social psychology texts and journals. She concluded that psychological scholarship is in danger of becoming "raceless." Social psychology researchers continue to subscribe to the concept of universalism "the belief that attitudes, behaviors and cognitive processes of the 'generic subject' are generalizable to the population of racial minorities" (137–8). The description of participants as "generic subjects" assumes the reader knows that they are white. Since considerable swathes of consumer research has imported theories and methods from psychology (Mittelstaedt 1990), it is feasible that neglecting to document whiteness is a dysfunctional effect of this importation. However, since not all of the papers in this category are rooted in psychology it is not a completely satisfactory explanation.

An alternative interpretation is that consumer research is steeped in a Euro-epistemological tradition that foregrounds whiteness. Consumer researchers regardless of their ethnic ancestry are being influenced by white ideology and are consciously or unconsciously *performing whiteness* in the sense that they are reinforcing whiteness through their work consciously or unconsciously. In reality, it is likely that various

Table 2.   Reading whiteness in consumer research: an empirical analysis of JCR papers

Author(s)	Date of publication	Title of paper
Whiteness invisible		Vast majority of papers
Whiteness noted		
Tybout and Yalch	1980	"The Effect of Experience: A Matter of Salience?"
Hirschman	1992	"The Consciousness of Addiction: Toward a General Theory of Compulsive Consumption"
Tepper	1994	"The Role of Labeling Processes in Elderly Consumers' Responses to Age Segmentation Cues"
Scott	1994	"The Bridge from Text to Mind: Adapting Reader-Response Theory to Consumer Research"
Patterson, Hill, and Maloy	1995	"Abortion in America: A Consumer Behavior Perspective"
Thompson and Hirschman	1995	"Understanding the Socialized Body: A Poststructuralist Analysis of Consumers' Self-Conceptions of Body Images"
Macklin	1996	"Preschoolers' Learning of Brand Names from Visual Cues"
Mick	1996	"Are Studies of Dark Side Variables Confounded by Socially Desirable Responses? The Case of Materialism"
Thompson and Haytko	1997	"Speaking of Fashion: Consumers' Uses of Fashion Discourses and the Appropriation of Countervailing Cultural Meanings"
Holt	1997	"Poststructuralist Lifestyle Analysis: Conceptualizing the Social Patterning of Consumption"
Mick and Fournier	1998	"Paradoxes of Technology: Consumer Cognizance, Emotions, and Coping Strategies"
Peñaloza	2001	"Consuming the American West: Animating Cultural Meaning and Memory at a Stock Show and Rodeo"
Pechmann and Knight	2002	"An Experimental Investigation of the Joint Effects of Advertising and Peers on Adolescents' Beliefs and Intentions about Cigarette Consumption"
Kozinets	2002	"Can Consumers Escape the Market? Emancipatory Illuminations from Burning Man"
Burroughs and Rindfleisch	2002	"Materialism and Well Being: A Conflicting Values Perspective"
Kates	2002	"The Protean Quality of Sub Cultural Consumption: An Ethnographic Account of Gay Consumers"
Joy and Sherry	2003	"Speaking of Art as Embodied Imagination: A Multi-sensory Approach to Understanding Aesthetic Experience"
Martin	2004	"Using the Imagination: Consumer Evoking and Thematizing of the Fantastic Imaginary"

Table 2.   (*Continued*).

Author(s)	Date of publication	Title of paper
Whiteness embedded		
Hirschman	1985a	"Primitive Aspects of Consumption in Modern American Society"
Witkowski	1989	"Colonial Consumers in Revolt: Buyer Values and Behavior During the Nonimportation Movement, 1764–1776"
Whiteness challenged		
Wallendorf and Reilly	1983	"Ethnic Migration, Assimilation, and Consumption"
Deshpande, Hoyer, and Donthu	1986	"The Intensity of Ethnic Affiliation: A Study of the Sociology of Hispanic Consumption"
Stayman and Deshpande	1989	"Situational Ethnicity and Consumer Behavior"
Mehta and Belk	1991	"Artifacts, Identity, and Transition: Favorite Possessions of Indians and Indian Immigrants to the United States"
Webster	1994	"Effects of Hispanic Ethnic Identification on Marital Roles in the Purchase Decision Process"
Peñaloza	1994	"Atravesando Fronteras/Border Crossings: A Critical Ethnographic Exploration of the Consumer Acculturation of Mexican Immigrants"
Koslow, Shamdasani, and Touchstone	1994	"Exploring Language Effects in Ethnic Advertising: A Sociolinguistic Perspective"
Oswald	1999	"Culture Swapping: Consumption and the Ethnogenesis of Middle-Class Haitian Immigrants"
Thompson and Tambyah	1999	"Trying to be Cosmopolitan"
Brumbaugh	2002	"Source and Nonsource Cues in Advertising and Their Effects on the Activation of Cultural and Subcultural Knowledge on the Route to Persuasion"
Luna and Peracchio	2002	"Moderators of Language Effects in Advertising to Bilinguals: A Psycholinguistic Approach"
Crockett and Wallendorf	2004	"The Role of Normative Political Ideology in Consumer Behavior"

factors are interacting to produce this effect and four possibilities are offered. First, consumer research has been dominated by the experiences of affluent, white, Anglo-Saxons of European descent since they have been perceived as the most affluent, desirable consumers. Ethnic minorities and the white "other" have not been highly appealing target markets and as a result have been marginalized within research samples (Hirschman 1993). A second issue is related to the one above, and concerns the audience for consumer research scholarship. Until fairly recently, marketing practitioners were perceived as one of the principal stakeholders for consumer research, while consumer research for consumers and policymakers was constrained (Bazerman 2001). The dominance of white affluents in research samples is explained by scholars writing for the audience perceived to be the most influential who happen to be practitioners. However, it has also been noted that many more practitioners in the United States, at least, have an interest in targeting the ethnic market, so the issue of academics delivering work to fulfil the practitioner agenda is questionable.

A third feature relates to the existing norms within the consumer research community concerning what constitutes acceptable scholarship and is reflected in the peer review process. It has clearly been acceptable for whiteness to remain invisible in consumer research and has been sanctioned (knowingly or unknowingly) by the consumer research community that have served as reviewers for published papers. Finally, journal guidelines act as powerful regulators of appropriate scholarship. A. Thompson (2004), who is a whiteness and feminist theorist, has provided a very perceptive and detailed discussion of how journal guidelines can reinforce whiteness.

Whiteness noted

Papers in the *whiteness noted* category typically identified the ethnic profile of their sample, and this was acknowledged in their methods section. But it was rarely followed up in the analyses and tended to be marginalized. This approach was used in 17 papers comprising 1.9 per cent of the sample. Whiteness was revealed in three different ways: by authors noting the variety of ethnic groups in their sample (11 papers), identifying respondents as Caucasian or White (five papers). One paper also used the ability of respondents to speak English as a discriminating factor in their research in Canada. Joy and Sherry (2003, 262) state: "Informants were chosen mostly on the basis of age, gender, frequency of visits, their knowledge of art and their ability to speak English. Our limited knowledge of French required that we interview only speakers of English."

The first *JCR* paper in which authors specifically noted the ethnic origin of individuals within their sample was published in 1980, six years after the journal was launched (Tybout and Yalch 1980). The next paper that noted the ethnic origins of the sample did not appear until 12 years later in 1992 (Hirschman 1992). Historical trends in published work therefore reflect a growing awareness of the ethnicity as an important variable but not that important to warrant interrogation. There was also a historical trend among papers in this category. Papers published in the mid-1990s tended to identify their respondents as Caucasian or white. For example, Tepper (1994, 505) notes of her sample "Participants were 20 females and 18 males, all Caucasians from a middle-class socioeconomic bracket." However, papers published since 2000 identified the specific ethnic groups in their sample. In the papers that reported the percentage of ethnic minorities in their sample, the numbers were

relatively small. For example, Kates' (2002) ethnographic study of gay consumers contained a sample of 44 participants, of which 35 were identified as white, four black, four Southeast Asians, and one Native American. Likewise, Burroughs and Rindfleisch's (2002) paper relating to materialism and well-being, used a sample comprising 85 per cent whites, 6 per cent African Americans, 3 per cent Hispanic and 2 per cent Asian.

Two other trends among papers in this category were evident. First, they tended to use qualitative methodological approaches including in-depth interviewing and participant observation rather than traditional quantitative and statistical methods. Second, the papers were overwhelmingly concerned with what might be broadly termed social aspects of consumption, or humanistic research enquiry (Hirschman 1986). Papers focused on cigarette consumption among adolescence, consumer resistance, materialism, gay consumers, aesthetics, imagination, abortion, the socialized body and the elderly. Thus while ethnicity was acknowledged within papers in this category, they largely remained dominated by the ideology of whiteness.

Whiteness embedded

The category entitled *whiteness embedded* was reserved for papers that *directly* engaged with the concept of whiteness within the text. Only two papers (0.2 per cent of the sample) could be described as acknowledging whiteness as an ideology that was reflected in consumption and consumer behaviour, and therefore whiteness was embedded in the text. Despite there being only two papers in this category, it is important to make the distinction between these and others that have a different orientation in the *whiteness challenged* category. There is another important point to make about these two papers that concerns the timing of their publication. Both papers were published in the mid-1980s, before those written from a critical race theory appeared in *JCR* from the mid-1990s onwards. This may reflect the white dominance within the consumer research community, which has subsequently been challenged by non-white scholars, in much the same way that it has in anthropology and is reflected in the content of the discipline's texts. Another observation is that both of these papers would not be regarded as mainstream, since both draw on sociohistorical analysis, which is largely marginalized in consumer research. Historical analysis is a key component of critical theory, using history as a resource to understand and challenge the ideological basis of current social relations and inform the future.

Hirschman's (1985a) paper, entitled "Primitive Aspects of Consumption in Modern American Society," demonstrates that ancestry and kinship are important drivers of consumption and consumer behaviour in modern societies. Ethnic groups in the United States function as kin based units bounded by common ancestry. Her assessment of the consumption behaviours in four racial/ethnic groups (Blacks, Italian, WASPs and Jews) indicates a continuation of ancestral traditions that in some instances date back centuries. In the case of WASPs, whiteness was integral to their identity. Hirschman (1985a) maintains the symbolic investment in whiteness is integral to their collective identity and manifested in their choice of clothing, pastimes, pets, food, home furnishings and religion.

Witkowski's (1989) paper covers similar ground within the historical context of the non-importation movement in the United States, which occurred between 1764 and 1776. His analysis of consumption patterns between British and American

consumers made whiteness visible between the colonizer and the colonized. His paper is considered in-depth in part II.

Whiteness challenged

There are two ways in which whiteness can be confronted in consumer research that correspond to a *weak* versus a *strong* challenge. The *weak* approach comprises published papers that focus on different cultural/ethnic groups. The publication of papers written from the perspective of different ethnic and racial groups challenges the Euro-epistemological dominance of whiteness in consumer research. A *strong* challenge would be research that directly engages with the concept of whiteness, makes it visible, interrogates it and questions its dominance in consumer research. There have not been any papers published in *JCR* that could be considered a strong challenge of the ideology of whiteness.

Papers that directly engage with ethnicity are few in number. Since its foundation, the *JCR* has only published 13 papers in this category representing 1.4 per cent of the sample. If we measure representativeness in terms of the number of papers focusing on ethnicity compared with the ethnic population in the United States, the findings suggest that ethnicity has been a particularly marginalized area of consumer research. Wallendorf and Reilly's account of Hispanic consumption, published in 1983, was the first paper on ethnicity to be published in *JCR*. It is significant that the article appeared nine years after the journal was launched. Table 2 also reveals that it has been in the period since 1990 that this work has really made its mark. Many published papers featuring non-white people relate to the consumer behaviour of Latinos, reflecting a significant growth segment in the United States during this period. It is noteworthy that many of the authors of these papers are also people of colour.

The sample of papers demonstrates what many consumer researchers may have intuitively predicted (Hirschman 1985b). Ethnicity papers in *JCR* are relatively few in number, they focus on a small number of ethnic groups and therefore our knowledge of "the other" is extremely limited. There is not a strong ethnic/ racial epistemological tradition within the sample of published papers reflecting an ideology of whiteness.

Part II: in-depth textual analysis of published papers

Paper 1: whiteness noted

As noted above, the whiteness noted category was reserved for papers that acknowledge non-white respondents in their sample but do not explicitly use the non-white data in their data collection and analysis. The paper chosen for the analysis of consumption and consumer behaviour is Douglas Holt's paper entitled "Poststructuralist Lifestyle Analysis: Conceptualizing the Social Patterning of Consumption in Postmodernity." This paper was chosen because the author purports to "unravel the social patterning of consumption according to important social categories such as social class, gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, and generation in advanced capitalist countries in which post-modern cultural conditions make tracing these patterns difficult with conventional approaches" (Holt 1997, 326). How various groups construct lifestyles by attributing meaning to consumption objects and practices that are embedded in their historical contexts would seem to be an appropriate paper to

assess the role of whiteness in postcolonial societies. This is particularly the case since a historical perspective is often necessary to understand the different forms whiteness can take over time. Furthermore, the author maintains that he examines variations in consumption according to race and ethnicity, thus promising to challenge the dominance of whiteness in consumer research. The use of novel approaches to understanding consumers holds the promise of moving beyond simplistic and standardized consumer categories. However, in reality although race/ethnicity and whiteness were noted in the paper, they were not interrogated. It was for all of these reasons that the paper was chosen since it is fairly typical of those in this category.

The research methodology used was ethnographic interviewing comprising in-depth interviews in the participants' own homes, followed up by a postal questionnaire. Twenty-three adults participated in the interviews, drawn from one medium-sized university town (State College) in a rural Pennsylvania county. However, despite the author collecting "over 900 pages of transcripts," the demographic characteristics of the respondents are ambiguous with respect to race and ethnicity. Holt states: "The resulting sample provided significant variation across important social categories such as class, gender, generation, and life stage, while variation in race/ethnicity was limited because of the location of the study" (Holt 1997, 329). In reality there is no evidence that participants were anything other than white, except for a short note at the end of the paper to indicate that one of the respondents identifies herself as Hispanic. Within the text her Hispanic ethnicity is not mentioned; the author is certainly not upfront about the precise nature of the limitations of his sample. Furthermore, the respondents are overwhelmingly white, middle aged and middle class. Most hold, or have held, professional positions, and 12 out of the 23 participants have undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. A further three have undertaken some form of further education. Most participants are white and privileged, with little acknowledgment of the "white other" or non-white people.

While the author aims to provide a study of the social patterning of consumption in the United States his account focuses quite narrowly on white, Anglo-Saxons of European descent. Whiteness remains invisible in the account despite being embedded within the text. There are numerous references in the text to race and ethnicity being important in consumption, but this issue is never fully integrated into the discussion. Holt (1997, 345) notes: "Rap music resonates with middle-class white youth precisely because its associations with African-American men from inner-city ghettos signifies virility, authenticity and danger." Yet there is no evidence presented in Holt's account to support the behaviour of middle-class white youths; rather than interrogating and questioning perceived white views of rap music, he merely reproduces and reinforces them. Also, one needs to ask whether an African-American male have written this in the same way. Because of the lack of ethnic minority scholarship, we have no way of knowing, but at least the use of whiteness theory puts the issue on the table for further discussion. Stern (1993, 557) has used the sex-reversal method to reveal male and female differences under the surface of the text to expose "male dominant ideas about masculinity and femininity." Juxtaposing whiteness with blackness to reveal white ideas about blackness is a strategy that could be used more proactively in consumer research to uncover the extent of whiteness. Furthermore, Holt never questions the centuries-old myth of virility among black men, or the view that all African Americans live in inner city ghettos, or that they have a monolithic culture.

Another way in which the dominance of whiteness was revealed was in the author's use of hypothetical cases. In his discussion of one aspect of consumption Holt (1997, 333) notes:

> Patio furniture is assumed to express the Achiever lifestyle regardless of how it is understood and used. So, to take a hypothetical example, the behavioral view would not distinguish between people who understand patio furniture as an expression of middle-class comfort and success and so use it primarily as an exterior ornamentation supplemented by an occasional ritualized family meal and others, such as ethnic minorities and working-class people, who think of the patio as a social hub and use it for continual informal, often unplanned gatherings for extended family and friends.

Holt provides no data to support the different uses of patio furniture between middle class, working class and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, there is no explanation why the behaviour of the "white other" and ethnic minorities should be the same. This passage infers that there are no middle- or upper-class individuals within ethnic minority groups, which is clearly untrue especially in connection with the expanding number of consumers in the African-American middle class (Crockett, Grier, and Williams 2003). Implying that all ethnic minorities share a monolithic culture with respect to their use of material commodities seems an odd view to promote given the emphasis on postmodernism that stresses the opposite. There are clearly limitations with this paper along a number of dimensions when analysed through the lens of whiteness theory, especially how the author presents the characteristics of his sample. However, the paper does provide an account of white, Anglo-Saxon culture in the United States and thus a platform for others to interrogate further.

Paper 2: whiteness challenged

The whiteness challenged approach comprises published papers that focus on different cultural/ethnic groups, but they do not directly engage with concept of whiteness. The paper by Durvasula and others (1993), entitled "Assessing the Cross-national Applicability of Consumer Behavior Models: A Model of Attitude towards Advertising in General," addresses the important topic of whether consumer behaviour models designed in the United States are applicable in other countries and cultures. It has long been recognized that marketing thought has mirrored problems and interests in the land in which it was developed and is dominated by experiences in the United States (Bartels 1976; Venkatesh 1995). Durvasula and others (1993, 626) state: "The purpose of this study is to illustrate procedures for testing the cross-national applicability of consumer behaviour models and, in particular, a model based on the literature on attitude toward advertising in general."

The authors adopt an interesting methodological approach by collecting data from respondents in the United States, New Zealand, Denmark, Greece and India. In this respect the authors should be commended for producing one of only a small number of papers that focuses on cross-national differences published in *JCR*. The sample of countries was chosen because they have varying amounts of advertising expenditure as a percentage of their gross national product. The sample of participants consisted of 553 undergraduate business studies students, evenly divided by gender, although individuals from white, Anglo-Saxon countries contributed well over half the sample without the reader being given any explanation (179 New Zealand, 110 United States, 89 each from Greece and India, and 86 from Denmark). The authors concede that the

samples are not representative of the populations of the countries, but they constitute matched samples. The authors state: "Although these samples are not representative of the populations of these countries, they are relatively homogeneous in a matched-samples sense (i.e. in terms of education, area of study, and age) and are considered appropriate for cross-national theory testing" (Durvasula et al. 1993, 628). Data was collected via questionnaires, and only the Greek sample received a translated version in their native language.

The methodology used for this project is similar to that adopted by many investigators who examine cross-national differences. Reading the paper through the lens of whiteness reveals several legacies of Anglo-Saxon whiteness. First, it has already been noted that the sample is dominated by whiteness without any explanation. This feature is sending messages about which countries are the most important within the research design, almost replicating racial hierarchies. Second, despite the paper's focus on cultural differences, there is no analysis of the ethnic ancestries of individuals within national samples. For example, we do not know whether the sample in the United States or New Zealand were whites of European descent. The ethnic composition of the participants in the sample is invisible, not considered important enough to warrant attention. The hidden presumption is that societies are culturally homogeneous, and the default category in Anglo-Saxon countries is white. The ideology of whiteness is being confused with nation (Nakayama and Krizek 1999). This approach is symptomatic in much international research in which geographical boundaries are equated with nation and culture, which could potentially result in erroneous conclusions (Lenartowicz, Johnson, and White 2003; Stern 1999).

It is also noteworthy that details of the sophisticated statistical analyses used gives the paper a veneer of scientific objectivity, which simultaneously masks important caveats in terms of the ideological and philosophical underpinnings of the sample selection procedures. The authors go to considerable lengths to address the reliability of their data and the rigor of their statistical analyses. They state:

> The equivalence of measures and the relationships among the constructs were examined at a national level (i.e., each country's data analyzed separately), a multigroup level, and a pooled-data level. Whereas the national-level analysis examines model measures and relationships in each country separately, the multigroup approach looks for the presence of an invariant pattern of measurement and construct relationships across countries. The pooled-data analysis employs a technique for "deculturing" the data and then examines whether a common core of relationships exists across cultures. (Durvasula et al. 1993, 629)

Another way in which whiteness is revealed in this paper is through the medium of the English language. It has already been noted that only the questionnaire intended for the Greek participants was translated. Even the authors concede, albeit on a practical level, that "the translation of the questionnaire into students' native languages would have made for stronger inferences" (635). Using English as the language in which the research is conducted, with participants for whom English is not their first language, amounts to centring whiteness. This comment is as much to do with ideology as it has with competence in the English language. Language is one mechanism by which ideologies of whiteness are reproduced, and in this respect language becomes synonymous with power (Steyn 2005; Taylor 2005; Wetherell and Potter 1992). Whiteness is intimately related to the English language, but its reading will be different according to the standpoint of the participant. The use of English is unlikely

to be perceived the same in India, which underwent colonization by the British for 200 years, and Denmark, an affluent, white, advanced society that has historical links with British English (Yano 2001). Furthermore, there are differences of opinion between Indian academics, some of whom consider the imposition of English during colonialism as a form of violence (Shome 1999), and others who view it as an agent of decolonization that effectively connects those who have historically been linguistically disenfranchised to a global system (Valsh 2005). Japan occupies a rather different location as an affluent, non-English, non-Western culture that has achieved remarkable economic success without sacrificing its traditional culture and language (Kubota 1998).

It is predicted that in the next decade or so the number of people who will speak English as a second language will exceed the number of native speakers. The centre of authority regarding the English language would shift from native speakers and evolve into a global language (Yano 2001). The issues of language dominance and literacy (Wallendorf 2001) are issues that consumer researchers will need to address now, and in the future, whether in the context of national or cross-national research.

Paper 3: whiteness embedded

The only article to discuss whiteness in significant depth is Terrence H. Witkowski's (1989) paper entitled "Colonial Consumer in Revolt: Buyer Values and Behavior During the Nonimportation Movement, 1764–1776." Relatively few papers published in the *JCR* are written from a historical perspective, and this is symptomatic of much research in marketing (Jones and Monieson 1990; Hollander, Nevett, and Fullerton 1990; Holden and Holden 1998). Yet Lopez (2005) maintains that it is difficult to assess the issue of postcolonial white identities without understanding the process of colonization and its continuing influence in postcolonial societies. Witkowski's account blends the concept of colonialism, consumption and identity through a historical reading of accounts of the relationship between the colonizer (Britain) and the colonized (United States). The hierarchical relationship between these two related, white cultures provides some fascinating insights that have contemporary relevance.

In the 1760s, most of the purchases of made by Americans were locally produced, but 27.5 per cent of expenditure were items produced in other British colonies, especially the Caribbean or England. Most manufactured goods were almost always made in, or shipped through, England. The elites set themselves apart from the ordinary colonist by adopting some of the purchasing behaviour of the upper classes in Europe, resulting in goods advertising one's social position. Once established such consumption patterns would be emulated by others resulting in further imports, especially from England. One consequence of increasing importation was that America went into deeper debt to the mother country. The majority of Americans were descended from British stock and until the 1770s considered themselves to be "the king's subjects in good standing" (Witkowski 1989, 220). Many affluent Americans wished to live as well as their peers of equivalent social standing. The material artefacts of colonists' homes were closely related to those of English origin.

The non-importation movement began in 1764 and continued until 1776. The main focus of the movement was to reverse imperial policies on taxation, which would stop the flood of imports from the mother country. The purpose was to inflict economic hardship on English merchants and manufacturers, who would then lobby Parliament for changes in legislation. The non-importation movement became America's first

organized consumer revolt. English goods were disparaged in the media, but local artisans advertised their English, particularly London, connections. However, the appeals of the movement were not unequivocally shared among the population. Moral rhetoric appeals of patriotism had more influence among the more disadvantaged members of society than the upper classes, "servants, seamen, common laborers, and struggling artisans supported patriotic simplicity more vigorously than the upper classes … and women showed more enthusiasm than men" (Witkowski 1989, 223). Non-importation was a desire for cultural independence; a rejection of tea drinking was a rejection of the cultural meaning that was embedded in that quintessentially English pastime. How successful the non-importation movement was in the longer term is a point of conjecture. Witkowski maintains that luxury goods from England were replaced with those from other European countries (France, Spain and Holland) during the non-importation ban, and when the non-importation movement disbanded, English imports were once again imported with vigour.

Witkowski provides a valuable insight into the historical legacy of English whiteness that is still apparent in consumption patterns within postcolonial societies (Lopez 2005). This feature remains observable in the consumption patterns of WASPs in the United States, their language use and religious affiliation (Hirschman 1985a). Furthermore, a historical approach makes visible the differences that existed among white populations that have tended to become homogenized over time (Jacobson 1998). This raises the issue of authenticity concerning who can speak on behalf of the white population and on what basis (Cheng 2004). Witkowski also makes the distinction between the relationship between social classes and their proximity to whiteness. The upper classes had the most affinity with English and European whiteness as reflected in their consumption patterns, far more than the lower social classes and the latter more so than other ethnic groups. This is an important point since it reveals that whiteness can be an inadequate basis of social solidarity and shared consumption (Bonnett 2003).

The account also provides a basis for understanding acceptance and resistance of whiteness, and more specifically different kinds of whiteness in consumption. Furthermore, this raises the issue of whiteness as consumption *performance*, a mode of behaving, acting and consuming into which individuals can be socialized regardless of their ethnic ancestry. The issue of whiteness as performance opens up the debate about the process of how individuals within contemporary societies become white, and how the "white other" becomes upwardly mobile by modifying his/her consumption preferences.

Discussion

Foster (2003) maintains that most motion pictures are spaces of "white face" and "white space" where citizenship and identity claims are played out. Likewise, Toni Morrison's (1992) work has provided insights into literary devices, rhetorical tactics and topics in American fiction, and demonstrated that until fairly recently the assumption of writers, regardless of their own ethnicity, was that the audience for their work was white. These observations have some resonance with consumer research since many investigators are consciously or unconsciously *performing whiteness*. The term performing whiteness in this sense is writing from a white theoretical, epistemological and methodological standpoint regardless of one's racial or ethnic ancestry in order to conform to disciplinary norms. Consumer researchers publishing in *JCR,* as a group,

represent certain ethnic/racial and national interests (Hirschman 1993). These characteristics can place ideological "blinders" on our research that are as powerful as those created by racism.

Benefits: in what ways will consumer research be extended and enriched by engaging in whiteness?

This paper has primarily dealt with learning to correct the "blind spots" of seeing whiteness as wielding an ideology that dominates and crowds out other views. A much more substantial issue for consideration in the future is more discussion of the missed opportunities and new avenues of inquiry, referred to at the beginning of the paper. There are potentially two ways of "undoing" whiteness-dominated space in published research. At one level are studies that are conceived/framed within whiteness ideology but give voices to people other than white consumers. As one example, Tommy Whittler (2009) has undertaken a study of African-American Harley Biker clubs as something of a reinquiry of Schouten and McAlexander's work. It challenges the whiteness ideology but from within it, by focusing on leisure/luxury consumption. A second way is to challenge both the frame of whiteness ideology in shaping what is an appropriate topic for consumer research and also giving voice to non-white consumers. Mixing across these ways, four broad benefits could occur.

Recognizing the political ideologies advanced through consumption symbols

A mono-cultural, mono-ideological journal where the majority of participants are drawn from the same whiteness-shaped backgrounds would seem to pre-empt exploration into the many race-related political conflicts aired through consumption goods. What if instead of one more study of the quest for individuation through consumer embellishments, we sought to listen to the voices of Muslim women wearing the seemingly de-individuating Islamic dress of the hijab. And what interesting mind-altering insights we might glean from listening to the stories of the growing number of young white American and British women who are now seen covering themselves in public with similar such scarves. Another approach might be to consider more carefully that the display of such a simply constructed consumer object could spark heated political debates of a rather different "white" cultural context in France, where to wear the hijab is viewed as an affront to the Republic, and in Turkey, where mainstream European and American opinion like to consider Turkey as an example of an Islamic democracy and political parties rule on the headscarf in a way that reflects a wider political agenda (Temelkuran 2008). Would we think that whiteness ideology has little to do with that in these different cultural contexts? Would we think that concerns for defending the privilege of whiteness has little to do with it?

   Another approach might be to critically analyse the anti-ads of some activist groups that politicize a product or brand in a way that overtly and provocatively challenges whiteness ideology. For example, a posted image of an elegant feminine white hand adorned with a sparkling gem, but with blood spilled on and about it. In the background, literally faded out, are crying children of color, with all images framed by the title "blood diamonds" or "conflict diamonds." What if we rethought about acquisition from a perspective outside of the whiteness ideological frame and the voices of white participants to see that there are requisite interim processes and steps of overarching relevance. What does it mean when Mexican immigrants agree to the US government's

offer of a two-year tour of duty in Iraq in exchange for American citizenship, when citizenship is sought because the US has the highest living standard in the world, and research has demonstrated that a life in the military can be less discriminatory than employment outside (Lundquist 2008). Would this be a consumer-relevant issue – the acquisition of the material good life through military enlistments?

Rethinking theoretical consumer research concepts developed in whiteness contexts

What if the concept of cultural capital were investigated in the product/country context of cell phones in Nigeria or Jamaica, where a host of knowledge-based tactics have developed among people earning less than $2 a day who truly have a need to know how to affordably use them. We might find that cultural capital wed to product-knowledge in such a context cannot be divorced from its life-altering effects for the individual and his/her community (much in contrast with the mere symbolic social-esteem enhancing purposes it serves in its original context). For example, rather than space devoted to the credit uses/abuses of white Western buyers (Burton 2007), we studied credit issued through micro-finance operations. More than 30 years ago, Muhammad Yunus loaned several dozen entrepreneurs in Bangladesh a total of $27. His lifetime commitment to micro-finance earned him a Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. The Grameen Bank he founded now operates in 100 countries and has loaned approaching $7 billion in small sums to nearly 7 million borrowers, 97 per cent of whom are women and 98 per cent of the loans have been repaid (*Foreign Policy* 2008). The default rate is near zero due to the women of each village collectively agreeing to repay the debt if a fellow villager defaults. From a whiteness frame of reference, it is difficult to imagine, but an interesting issue for consumer researchers who would like to know more, and how this context might inform understanding of such concepts as frugality, social influence and family consumption, which have been developed largely through lenses and voices of whiteness. These lines of enquiry would prevent poverty and inequality remaining the elephant in the "global" class-room, something that everyone knows is there, but never mentions.

Rethinking the privilege consumer research gives to the symbolic uses of consumption

What if in the place of a study dealing with consumption for the purposes of identity construction, maintenance and enhancement, we conceived and considered relevant a study of consumption for bodily survival. The acquisition and consumption of clean water, nutritious food and basic health care in many parts of the world are life-saving consumer issues. The issue of water has been particularly high profile with several special issues devoted to the issue (see Lall et al. 2008). In the spring of 2006, the membership of the Board of the Society for Cultural Anthropology began a delibera-tion on a resolution, and subsequently endorsed a boycott actions against the Coca-Cola Company. What they termed the "Coke Complex" was concern about the company's use of unjust practices that had environmentally detrimental effects concerning the use and appropriation of water in developing countries (Fortun and Fortun 2007). It could be argued that whiteness ideology and its emphasis not only on consumerism, but hyper-consumerism, obsessed with luxury and leisure consumption within consumer research has precluded much attention to this.

Reorienting consumer research to facilitate societal change

The dominance of whiteness in other disciplines has led to discussions of how whiteness can be challenged through re-articulating whiteness (Aal 2004; Yancy 2004; Knadler 2002; Rodriguez 2000), white people giving up their racial privilege (Roediger 1994; Ware and Back 2001) and generating new journals to provide a forum for the debate (Ignatiev and Garvey 1996; Garvey and Ignatiev 1997). Marketing whiteness presents challenges in three different contexts – within the academy, among practitioners and engaging consumers with the concept. Within marketing Peñaloza (2000) has noted the relatively small number of ethnic minority scholars among consumer researchers, a group that continues to remain dominated by white, middle-class, male members. The inclusion of more ethnic-minority members may go some way to challenge the existing status quo, but it must be recognized that all researchers regardless of their own ethnic ancestries have been socialized in the "intellectual imperialism" of higher education knowledge systems that foreground whiteness (Churchill 1998, 334). This is not to suggest that ethnic-minority scholars and practitioners have little to offer, quite the contrary given their life and work experiences; the point is more about raising awareness of the Euro-American epistemological spheres in which we all work.

How consumers' understanding of whiteness influences, and indeed limits, their consumption choices and the meanings they give to particular aspects of consumption are important research issues. A first step towards undoing the dominance of whiteness ideology within consumer research, may be to set out to identify the consumption-oriented catalysts that fuel individuals' desire to undo their own whiteness biases. Consumption of films, travel and dress can be constructed in an attempt to undo whiteness bias. These seem to manifest markers that are likely tied to overarching values and attempts to recognize and undo white privilege. Some of these examples could then be used in training PhD students.

Obstacles to seeing a more diverse body of work

Obstacles to undoing whiteness can be challenged by focusing on the publication process, including assessing journal guidelines, but there are many other barriers that need to be addressed. The training of PhDs is an important consideration given the pivotal role the process plays in socializing the next generation of scholars (Burton 2003). In rethinking our programs, what course requirements, "reading exercises," travel experiences might we require that would foster seeing "whiteness" dominance and encourage a more diverse body of work? How can we undo the tradition of mentoring where faculty members recruit students to work on a project conceived in such a way that the faculty member holds the cultural capital, which derives from frameworks and skills bound to whiteness? As a discipline we have diverse body of PhD students from a variety of cultural backgrounds. So what are other impediments to these students of completing dissertations that draw from their non-white cultural experiences?

Some attention should be given to the historical movements in the curricula of PhD programs, which have worked to privilege whiteness. During the 1980s, the long tradition of requiring business PhD students to master a second language was replaced with the requirement that they master a computer language and technology. This was the conscious trade-off, as lacking in equivalence as these domains are. Individuals

currently at the level of full professors, placed in positions on editorial boards and as mentors of PhD students, are ones who were not required, and thus may have never, studied languages and cultures other than their own. One could argue that if not replaced, this language requirement would have challenged the whiteness frame for this cohort group. One could argue that the absence of such frame-breaking experiences may have led to an intolerance of less than impeccable skills in the writing and speaking of English.

The alliance of the discipline with transnational corporations can also be contemplated as a potential obstacle for thinking outside of whiteness ideology, as many seek profits through the marketing of leisure and luxury goods. Why are global non-governmental organizations (NGOs) not studied instead? (Burton 2008). They are doing much to correct the white blind spots of citizens of modern Western nations (see for example "One World": http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTjO24mLulk), exposing them to the costs of whiteness ideology and its hyper-consumerist values and expansionist goals for people often of colour in developing countries. Could not the infrastructures they have developed in many developing countries open pathways (liaisons, translators, locations for fieldwork) useful for researchers seeking to work outside the framework of whiteness and its privileging?

Costs: what are the consequences for consumer research journals for sticking to the status quo?

Marketization is rapidly transforming education and the institutions. Globalization is resulting in students having their lives shaped by global processes: economic, social, political and cultural. Education systems that have a primary focus on the nation-state and consumers that are linked to local systems may increasingly become obsolete, marginalized and perceived as of limited relevance to the real world. Institutions that thrive and prosper could be those that prepare students for the emerging "global knowledge society." This could mean adapting the curriculum to place greater emphasis on foreign language skills, cultural knowledge that promotes cultural sensitivity, and thinking outside of disciplinary boundaries and cultural frames of reference (see for example, Suarez-Orozco and Quin-Hilliard 2004). Of equal significance is the richness of cultural diversity that exists within our own societies (see Burton 2005; W. Jones 2003). Whiteness theory offers researchers considerable potential and opportunities for the future should they wish to take them.

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