# I Think About This a Lot: Jack and Meg White Pretending to Be Brother and Sister

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As a teenager, I had the persistent feeling that I was being lied to. This could be because my parents were kind people who gently tried to soften the rough edges of existence for me, or because back then I was what developmental experts call “an asshole.” But maybe it’s because of the White Stripes. To this day, I am haunted by one of the most bizarre scandals of 2000s rock: Jack and Meg White telling everyone they were brother and sister, when they were really a married couple.

When Jack and Meg White first appeared on the nascent indie-rock scene, [they were almost always referred to as siblings](http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,130930,00.html), by everyone from *Rolling Stone* to *The New Yorker*. This seemed plausible enough — after all, they did have the same last name and siblings had played in bands together before (see also: Toto). Jack would introduce Meg as his “big sister” onstage — I had *seen* him do it. When I saw them at a music festival in my hometown of Melbourne, I was slightly confused by their intense, somewhat smoldering eye contact with each other throughout the show. Then again, they did come from a very faraway place. Maybe that’s how siblings acted in that mystical city called “Detroit,” an exotic place I knew nothing about. “It’s important to be open-minded when encountering people from different cultures,” I thought, probably.

It felt weird, even vulgar, to question whether they were related. In polite society when someone says, “Hey, this is my sister,” you don’t say, “IS SHE REALLY?” because that would be gauche. You usually say, “Nice to meet you,” or, alternatively, “I know,” if you’ve met the sister before. Jack even emphatically denied any untoward rumors about their relationship. “We’re brother and sister,” he said in a 2001 [*NME*](https://www.nme.com/news/music/the-white-stripes-334-1369881) article titled “WHITE LIE?.” “Someone started a rumor about how we used to be married and we played along with it. That was a bad idea, we get asked this all the time now.”

But soon there emerged hard evidence that Jack and Meg weren’t actually siblings. The Detroit *Free Press* revealed that Jack — formerly Jack Gilles — and Meg had gotten married on September 21, 1996, and that he had taken her last name. They were divorced in March 2000, three months before the release of their second album, *De Stijl*. Even after the news broke, the White Stripes stuck to their story, insisting that the marriage certificate was fake. In an [interview](https://www.spin.com/2011/02/meg-and-jack-white-talk-relationship-issues/) a few months later, an exasperated Chuck Klosterman asked about six variations of the question: “But why do you still tell people you’re siblings?”

“People can say whatever they want at this point,” says Jack.

“But why would people try to portray you as previously married?” Klosterman persists.

“Because America loves gossip. Everyone loves gossip,” says Jack, before smiling and telling Klosterman that the people who told him they were divorced were “fucking with you.”

Ahhh, yes. What a classic trick! But wait, that’s not a regular trick. Why *would* Jack and Meg’s family and friends tell journalists they were a divorced couple? Is that what people do? Is that humor? During the deception, didn’t any of Jack and Meg’s acquaintances say “this is weird,” or maybe they did and were promptly shamed for not being progressive enough to understand why a married couple would want to freelance as siblings? Did the lie really make the band more captivating? (Brother and sister: traditional, wholesome, intriguing. Married couple: Bleh, no thanks!) Maybe Jack and Meg just assumed everyone would see that they both had black hair, shrug, and say “checks out,” and the truth would never actually come out.

It wasn’t until years later, after reading an [extensive *Rolling Stone* profile of the band](https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/the-mysterious-case-of-the-white-stripes-75345/), that I fully believed they had been a couple. (Besides the fact that the White Stripes kept denying this as an uncouth rumor, news just traveled slower back then.) It was the most candid account of their history I had encountered at that point. Jack, seemingly baffled that anyone would want to discuss anything as bourgeois as why he pretended his ex-wife was his sibling, asserted: “It’s funny that people think me and Meg sit up late at night, in front of a gas lamp, and come up with these intricate lies to trick people.”

But that’s *exactly what it did feel like*. The White Stripes were surrounded by many other romantic myths that they had seemingly started: that they were the youngest of ten siblings, that the band started on Bastille Day of 1997 (when Meg found a drum kit in their parent’s attic), that Jack lived in an entirely red and white house (to match his and Meg’s co-ordinated red, black, and white uniform), that they turned down a record deal because they didn’t want the record company’s green logo to pollute the color scheme on their album cover.

“I mean, what even *is* a sibling?” I imagined Jack saying in his all-red house, sitting on a snowy white couch while sucking on a peppermint stick. Meg would nod in agreement and continue to rhythmically throw red jelly onto a black canvas. “Is a sibling so different to an ex-wife? Is it so different from a jibber-jabber? From drinking a soda? From lighting a single match in a crowded room? From a blood moon?” Then they would feed their red pet fish chunks of black licorice (the red fish lives in an upturned top hat) and play ukulele on their (red) front porch until the sun goes down.

After the reveal, it suddenly felt like any indie-rock urban legend could be possible. A guy at a party tried to convince me that Tegan and Sara were a couple too, and I supposed it could be true. *Was it* feasible that Kings of Leon were really a group of brothers and a cousin? Is any one gene pool *really* that aesthetically generous? It didn’t help that the early to mid-2000s was probably the last moment in culture when you couldn’t just immediately verify everything on the internet. I technically had the internet, but it wasn’t that quick and I didn’t know where to look. It was so murky that [some corners of the internet](https://www.quora.com/Are-Jack-and-Meg-White-brother-and-sister) still don’t know what to think about Jack and Meg’s relationship.

Now I get the utility of Jack and Meg’s fabricated origin story: It took the focus off their relationship and managed to stem (some) of the more sexist assessments of Meg’s worthiness to be in the band. Maybe by the time it came out, it felt like they were already too deep in the lie. Maybe it’s not so different from a jibber-jabber after all. I hope the all-red-house thing was true, at least.