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HOW THE INTERNET SHAPES RACIAL DISCOURSE:
STUDENTS OF COLOR, RACISM, AND RESISTANCE IN ONLINE SPACES

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

How the Internet Shapes Racial Discourse:

Students of Color, Racism, and Resistance in Online Spaces

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Contemporary theories of racism, like Bonilla-Silva's (2010) *Racism Without Racists*, assume a subtle, covert presentation of racist ideologies. This assumption is based on the prevalence of societal norms that make overt racist language or actions taboo. The Internet represents a distinct social environment, and communication in many online contexts is not bound by the same norms as face-to-face interaction. How does the Internet affect the presentation of racial ideologies, and how do these distinct presentations affect young people of color? This study seeks to answer these questions using data gathered from in-depth interviews with undergraduate students of color and archival data from a campus-based website. I present a framework for understanding how structural characteristics of the Internet shape the expression of racist ideologies, change the way students of color engage in racial discourse, and facilitate the development of student racial and activist identities. I find that on one hand, decreased accountability in online spaces can

facilitate increased expressions of explicitly racist ideologies, which have tangible influences on the way students of color conceptualize the significance of race and approach interracial interactions on campus. On the other hand, however, on the Internet students of color perceive more peer support when faced what they perceive to be hostile racial interactions, are more likely to be openly critical of microaggressions or racial slights, and perceive increased agency in shaping their campus racial climate. I conclude that while the Internet can increase the risk of exposure to overtly racist ideas, it may also provide students of color with a unique set of tools with which they can engage in acts of critical resistance and counter dominant racial ideologies. I discuss the implications of these findings for the way we understand race, racism, and racial socialization in the information age, the surprisingly coarse racial discourse witnessed during the 2016 elections cycle, and the way online social media is being utilized in contemporary social movements for racial justice.

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DEDICATION

There are far too many students, faculty, friends and family without whom this project would not have been possible. I thank you for investing in me.

This dissertation is dedicated first to my children, Malachi, Karis, and JD. These three are my inspiration, my biggest supporters, and my most consistent time managers. They make sure that I wake up at the crack of dawn, even on weekends. I know they will be confused to learn that I am no longer a PhD student, but excited to know that means I might have more money to pilfer. My mother, who read my sister and I the Chronicles of Narnia as children and sparked a lifelong love of reading, not knowing that reading and thinking about reading would one day become my profession. My father, who demonstrated an applied passion for justice and raised me to think beyond my own self-interest. My little sister, Reese, who I look up to in so many ways – may the Black Inklings never die! Tiffany, who has taught me that I am capable of taking on more than I ever thought possible, but has also made sure that I never had to do it alone. Ms. Ferdinand, who introduced me to the Hobbit; Mr. Onefrey who introduced me to The Lord of the Rings; and Mr. Snow, who demonstrated how my love of reading could be useful in school. Dr. Hank Allen, for making me a sociologist and never giving me higher than a B- on any of my undergraduate papers, thereby prepping me for the rigor of graduate school. Dr. Jerry Root, for teaching me to think critically about my assumptions, and how to disagree with and love someone at the same time. Julian Thompson, a dear friend and colleague- if I were to buy JT a beer for every chapter and draft he has read over the past few years, he would drink for free until we both reach tenure. Dr. William Sites, one of the most effective instructors I have ever encountered, and someone I hope to see on the basketball court before I retire from intramural sports for good. Dr. Gina Miranda Samuels, who leads the Qualitative Seminar at SSA, and gives

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Over the past half-century survey results have demonstrated significant changes in racial attitudes. For example, approval for interracial marriages increased from 5% in the mid-1950s to almost 90% in 2015, and support for integrated schools increased from 50% in the mid-1950s to 95% in the mid-1990s (Krysan and Moberg 2016). These shifts seem to point to a decline in prejudiced attitudes, but measured decreases in explicit prejudice may be less indicative of actual declines in prejudice, and more indicative of the decreased social acceptability of prejudice.

Unlike racism during the Jim Crow Era, which was characterized by social distance, beliefs of biological inferiority, and overt discrimination, post-Civil Rights Movement racial ideologies are understood to be more subtle (Sears and Henry 2003). There are a number of theoretical and empirical traditions that examine this shift from overt to more covert presentations of racism. These frameworks, including laissez faire racism (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997), color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2010), and two-faced racism (Picca and Feagin 2007), analyze race-neutral language and practices in order to identify underlying systems of racial inequality, racist ideologies, and bias.

While contemporary theories of racism explain how expressions of racism have become more nuanced in many social contexts, they cannot account for the more explicit presentation of racist ideologies on the Internet. For example, according to some, overt racist language is taboo in public discourse (Bonilla-Silva 2015). In contrast, each day there are thousands of posts to Twitter, a popular online social media site, that use racial slurs in a derogatory manner (Bartlett et al. 2014). The Internet represents a new and dynamic ecological context that is playing an

increasingly large role in structuring adolescent social interactions. Over 90% of youth surveyed by the Youth and Participatory Politics Survey have access to the Internet, and over 50% of youth send messages or chat online on a daily basis (Cohen et al. 2012). Because of our understanding of how people of color experience and are affected by racism is built on the assumption that they are primarily encountering less explicit forms of racism, it is important to understand how the Internet changes the way that young people of color experience race in online spaces.

How does the Internet affect the presentation of racial ideologies, and how do these distinct presentations affect young people of color? This study seeks to answer these questions using data gathered from in-depth interviews with undergraduate students of color and archival data from a campus-based website. I suggest that while the Internet can increase the risk of exposure to overtly racist ideas, it may also provide students of color with a unique set of tools with which they can counter dominant racial ideologies. My investigation, therefore, not only seeks to present a framework for understanding how structural characteristics of the Internet shape the expression of racist ideologies, but also how students of color engage in racial discourse and resistance against racism in online spaces.

This study will have implications for the way we understand changes in racial discourse, including not only the uncharacteristically coarse language around race during the 2016 election cycle, but also the way online social media is being utilized in contemporary social movements. The freedom of expression offered by the Internet may make it an effective tool for resistance against dominant racial meanings and systems. A recent survey of 3,000 youth between 15-25 found that around 40% of Black and Brown participants engaged in online participatory politics, defined as interactive peer-based engagement with public, social and political issues (Cohen et

al. 2012). Can youth of color use social media to develop and promote racial consciousness, construct racial projects that defy racial inequality, and promote antiracist ideologies? How does the Internet support or resist the system of racial oppression in the United States?

Literature Review

Contemporary accounts of prejudice and racism

In the psychology literature, prejudice is defined as an individual-level attitude that reflects an overall evaluation of a group (Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman 2005). One way to investigate prejudice in a context where explicit prejudice is frowned upon is through the study of implicit prejudice, or racial attitudes that respondents are unwilling to admit or are unconscious of (Olson 2010). In one example of this type of research Correll and colleagues (2002) asked participants to play a computer game that showed either White or Black individuals holding either guns or other nonthreatening objects. Participants were tasked with making the decision whether or not to fire on suspects based on whether they were armed, and the researchers measured differences in response time based on the race of the subject in the pictures. Not only did participants shoot Black characters with guns more quickly than they shot White characters with guns, they decided not to shoot unarmed Whites faster than they decided not to shoot unarmed Blacks. Experimental research on implicit prejudice illuminates the cognitive processes that precede discrimination and has deep implications for the way race is experienced, even in the absence of explicit racial bias.

Sociological explanations of the shift in racial attitudes tend to focus less on individual attitudes, and more on structure, or the relationship between racial attitudes and racial inequality. For example, Bonilla-Silva (2015) suggests that prejudice is a collective attribute, not an individual disposition, because it is an "ideological expression of Whites' dominance (p 77)."

Racist ideologies, for Bonilla-Silva, exist to justify and support systems of racial inequality and are dependent on one's social position in a racialized system. According to color-blind racism theory, Whites frame issues of racial inequality in individual terms, rather than racial terms, thereby ignoring and sustaining unequal systems while purporting to not see race (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Color-blind racists can maintain White dominance without using explicit racist language or interpersonal hostility.

In a similar vein, Bobo and colleagues (1997) suggest that under the Jim Crow system, society needed explicit racist ideologies to justify the harsh treatment of Blacks. But in the post-industrial economy, society needs a gentler racist framework to maintain White privilege. As an example of this, Bobo and colleagues (1997) present survey results indicating that between 1972-1986, support for integrated schooling rose from 84% to 93%, while support for government desegregation efforts dropped from 35% to 26% (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997). Laissez-faire racism is exemplified in this support for equality in principle, but not in practice, as the racial order is maintained without overt racism.

Picca and Feagin's (2007) two-faced racism theory suggests that the egalitarian attitudes Whites display in public settings, termed the front-stage, may not be consistent with their private racial attitudes, shared only in protected settings, or the backstage. Social norms that frown upon open discrimination in public spaces encourage presentations of egalitarian racial views in many social contexts. This distinction between front stage and backstage racial performances, therefore, suggests that changes in post-Civil Rights Movement racial performances may not correspond with actual changes in racial attitudes.

The implicit bias, color-blind, laissez-faire, two-faced racism, and microaggression frameworks assume that overt expressions of prejudice, explicit racism, and overt discrimination

have been replaced with more subtle forms of racist language or presentations of egalitarian racial views. In two-faced racism theory, racial presentations in public settings are distinct from presentations in private interactions. The Internet, however, can be at once public and private (Daniels 2013) and therefore represents a hybrid social space. Racial messages online are distinct from in-person presentations of race in several ways, and these differences impact the way they are interpreted by college students of color.

Race on the Internet

There are over 3.5 billion Internet users in 2016 (World Internet 2016). More than just an information highway, the Internet also offers users the chances to interact across social and geographic boundaries. Online interactions are termed computer mediated communication (CMC) (Christopherson 2007), and as this technology has become more accessible and popular over the past 20 years, research describing the landscape of Internet interactions has grown. There are several noteworthy characteristics of CMC that structure the expression of prejudiced language online. Online communications have increased potential for anonymity, are often text-based, take place in contexts that are less likely to be moderated, are governed by distinct social norms and rules, have fewer immediate social consequences, and are driven by user-generated content.

Anonymity online can refer to both technical anonymity, where there is no identifying information in interactions or posts, and social anonymity, which refers to when users perceive anonymity but in actuality can be identified through user names, email addresses, or even real names on social networking sites (Christopherson 2007). Some early research on the Internet suggested that increased anonymity in virtual interactions would preclude racial discrimination (Kang 2000). Unaware of racial differences as they connect online, virtual relationships would

be built on common interest and would not be hindered by segregation or racial attitudes. Humans rely on visual cues like skin color and phenotype to categorize each other into racial or social groups, and stereotype activation is automatic in face-to-face interactions, In contrast, the visual cues that activate stereotypes may not be immediately available in some forms of computer-mediated communication.

In contrast to these early hypotheses, research over the past decade has shown that the Internet is not such a racial utopia. For example, a study of an online special interest community reported that White and Black users got along perfectly- until minority members happened to mention their race (West and Thakore 2013). After months of online group interactions without incident, users who self-identified as minority were excluded from group discussions and activities. This discrimination took place even though the community interactions never included any visual components and were strictly text based. Similarly, another study found that when a popular online video game gave players the option of playing with Black avatars, both minority and White users of Black avatars reported negative gameplay experiences based around user responses to their avatars of color (Kafai, Cook, and Fields 2010). In both of these examples, actual physical cues, such as skin color, were not necessary in order to instigate racial discrimination.

Anonymity can stimulate the perception that actions on the Internet are completely separate from consequences of social norms in the physical world. Rather than increasing positive cross-racial interactions, individuals can use the Internet's anonymity to express taboo racial ideas without public social sanctions. McKenna and Bargh (2000) suggest that computer-mediated interactions are less bound by common behavioral norms and can therefore be more hostile and aggressive. Indeed, one explanation for the increased racism in online

communications is the online disinhibition effect, which refers to an increase in hostile or toxic communication resulting from the perceived freedom from mainstream societal norms (Lapidot-Lefler and Barak 2012).

Websites driven by user-generated content, like Wikipedia.org, have changed the way researchers think about collaboration (Tapscott and Williams 2008). The Internet encourages a user-generated, participatory culture, which is characterized by "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creation and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices (Daniels 2009)." While there are some positive implications for these new knowledge generating and dissemination processes, the Internet makes it easy for non-traditional special interest group formation across geographic boundaries. For example, several authors have explored the Internet as a fertile ground for the proliferation of racist hate sites (Leets 2001; B. G. Glaser and Strauss 2009). Users and posters on these sites are able to hide behind anonymous usernames in order to express extreme racist views without recourse. Other hate sites are cloaked, and disguise themselves as mainstream websites in order to spread their message of hate to unsuspecting or accidental visitors (Daniels 2009).

Hateful posts on mainstream sites may be even more common than actual hate-based web domains. News reporting websites, while not as profitable as print newspapers, have been attracting a growing percentage of news readers (Grabowicz 2014). A popular component of online news sites is the comment section, which allows readers to interact with each other and discuss articles and current events. Many news sites allow for users to contribute anonymously, and in recent years racist comments on news sites have become commonplace. In scrolling down to the comment section on any article on politics, crime, education, or popular culture, one is

likely to encounter a hostile racialized debate between users- even when the article is not written on a race-related subject. This has become so pervasive that many news sites have taken steps to either prevent anonymous commenting, or attempt to put other moderating strategies in place, such as both human and robot monitoring of content (Hughey and Daniels 2013).

In order to understand the impact the Internet has on the way people talk about race, we need to have an idea who is behind the comments. Are 90% of all racist comments on news reporting sites written by the same .1% of the population that creates racist hate sites? Or does the Internet allow for "normal" citizens to communicate racist views that they would uncomfortable sharing in public? I argue the latter, and while there is no data quantifying the percentage of our citizenry who express explicit prejudice attitudes online, there are several examples in the literature that support the idea that racist commenting is not limited to extremists.

In comparing online responses to in-person responses to the same social problem, we can more clearly isolate the online disinhibition effect. For example, Coffey and Woolworth (2004) discuss a small town's responses to a string of violent incidents, including both a town hall meeting, and an online discussion board. Residents who attended the town hall meeting were peaceful, and race was not discussed in relation to the crimes. An online discussion board started in response to the incidents, however, told a completely different story. Not only were Black and Hispanic youth blamed for the violent crimes, but posters also used racist language and advocated for both violence and vigilante justice against adolescents of color. In-person, residents did not discuss these violent incidents in racial terms. On the Internet, however, race was front and center. Additionally, the online forum was a local discussion board, not a national, public website, which implies that posters were community members.

Cyberbullying, or online bullying, is a form of harassment that may not always be based on race, but has been of growing concern to researchers and practitioners concerned with adolescent development. Cyberbullying can include flaming, where users use hostile or aggressive language towards others (Lapidot-Lefler and Barak 2012), or trolling, where users communicate harshly in a way designed to incite a response from the intended target (Moore et al. 2012). Adolescents are more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than users in other age groups, and cyberbullying takes place in online contexts with low supervision (Slonje, Smith, and FrisénN 2013). Cyberbullying may present an even bigger threat to minority youth, as in unmonitored online contexts incidents of racial bias are more likely to go undetected.

The Effects of Prejudice, Stereotypes, and Discrimination

How do the effects of online prejudice and racism compare with the effects of in-person discrimination? While adolescents may encounter prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination more often online, we do not know whether they attach the same meaning to these events as they do with in-person discrimination.

Stangor et al. (2003) explain individual differences in perceiving discrimination with a three-stage model of information processing. The first stage of response to discrimination is an asking stage, where individuals question whether their experience is indicative of discrimination. The accessibility of discrimination as an explanatory category is dependent on both contextual and individual factors. For example, people of color are more likely to perceive discrimination when they have increased intergroup contact. Conversely (and counter-intuitively), living in segregated communities may be protective of stigmatized group members: minorities in segregated communities have higher self-esteem because they compare themselves with other in-

group members, as opposed to comparing themselves to the dominant group (Crocker and Major 1989).

Immediately here, we see several potential differences between in-person and online instances of discrimination. First, the asking stage of discrimination may be less complex for online discrimination, as prejudiced language and ideas are more explicit. Moreover, while physical segregation limits in-person cross-racial interactions, and therefore exposure to discrimination, Internet access transcends physical boundaries. An adolescent playing video games on the South Side of Chicago can find herself chatting with adults or children from around the world.

In the second stage of response to discrimination individuals interpret the potentially discriminatory events that were identified in the first stage. Perceiving discrimination here is strongly related to negative coping outcomes, such as psychological stress and depression (Taylor and Turner 2002; Sellers et al. 2003). Research has identified both adaptive and maladaptive responses to perceived discrimination. Claude Steele's (1999) famous work on stereotype threat showed that when an individual is presented with information about their own group's stereotypes, their performance decreases on a variety of tasks. Leonardelli and Tormala (2003) find that even when individuals do not personally experience discrimination, but instead witness discrimination against other members of their in-group, this negatively impacts self-worth (Meier and Stewart 1991).

Even when adolescents of color are not the intended targets of hate speech or online discrimination they may witness offensive images, jokes, or ideas that are insulting to their racial or ethnic groups. The literature suggests negative psychosocial effects of sustained exposure to so much prejudiced content. It is likely, however, that youth of color develop coping

mechanisms adapted to the Internet context. If Internet activity is frequently coupled with exposure to some form of discrimination, for example, youth may rationalize this ugly behavior as being endemic to online communities, where hostility and trolling reign supreme.

Another coping mechanism in response to prejudice may be for an individual to distance themselves from other racial or ethnic groups. Exposure to prejudice can cause individuals to, "feel more negatively toward interactions with both a single, prejudiced out-group member, and with out-group members in general (Tropp 2003, 131)." This phenomenon was explored in Tatum's (2003) *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* In-group cohesion can be an adapting coping mechanism in response to discrimination. In the next section, I will discuss examples of Black activism and discussion groups online, which at times are in-response to perceived discrimination.

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) update on Intergroup Conflict Theory suggests that social identity is driven by the desire for positive self-esteem, which is gained by evaluation of the in-group in comparison with other out-groups. They introduce the concept of social creativity, defined as the tendency for group members to "seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 43)." Over 50% of all teens have created media content online, and over 30% have shared the content they created (C. J. Cohen and Kahne 2012). The Internet, therefore, is a technological resource that youth of color can use to define their own sense of race and self, even when presented with negative stereotypes or discrimination.

Racial identity plays a unique role in the way an individual responds to prejudice and discrimination, in that is it simultaneously an adaptive coping mechanism and a coping outcome. For example, In Pahl and Way's (2006) longitudinal study of 135 Black and Latino adolescents

they found that perceptions of discrimination at the first stage of the study predicted growth in racial identity. But while racial identity development may follow experiences with discrimination, the prior existence of racial identity has also been found to buffer the negative effects of perceived discrimination on mental health. As an attribute that moderates the negative effects of discrimination, increased positive racial identity is associated with decreased depressive symptoms and increased self-esteem (Mandara et al. 2009).

There are only a handful of studies that measure the impact of Internet-based discrimination on adolescent development. Using a sample of 264 high school students, Tynes and colleagues (2008) looked at the effects of both vicarious (indirect) and individual (targeted) online racial discrimination on mental health outcomes (2008). Descriptive statistics showed that over 70% of both Black and White students experienced vicarious discrimination (witnessing racist images, jokes, or language), and 29% of Blacks and 20% of Whites experienced discrimination directed at their person. Online discrimination was found to be related to increased depression and anxiety, especially for females. In a later study, Tynes (2012) also found that ethnic identity and self-esteem promoted resilience amongst those who experienced online discrimination. While the expression of prejudice is different in form online, it seems that its negative impact on psychological well-being remains constant. This study will aim to elucidate the way adolescents interpret and respond to online racial attacks, with specific attention paid to differential effects online and in-person.

Racial Inequality and the Internet

Early Internet research on the digital divide found that users of color had less access to both computers and the Internet, at home and in schools (Daniels 2013). This digital divide, especially as it relates to school aged children, had implications for current and future inequality,

as poor students of color not only had unequal access to technology based resources, but would also be hindered in an information age economy by a lack of technological competence. In addition to the digital divide and differential access to technology, research suggests that digital segregation may feed off and contribute to prejudiced attitudes in society.

An example of digital segregation processes can be found in the adoption of certain online social networking profiles. While some social networking sites are directed towards specific racial or ethnic groups, such as BlackPlanet or MiGente, others are not explicitly race-based. MySpace and Facebook are two online social network sites that began in 2003 and 2004, respectively (Everett 2011). In 2009, MySpace was the eighth most popular website on the Internet, and Facebook was the third most popular (Hargittai 2012). Research has shown that Facebook profiles form an important part of individual identity, and Facebook is used to bolster self esteem and provide a form of social enhancement for users (Zywica and Danowski 2008). Facebook profiles are a source of social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007) and users often judge their online friends by the types of pictures and friends they have displayed on their profiles (Walther et al. 2008) or number of friends (Tong et al. 2008). The effects of online social networking on in-person interactions varies based on the type of online activity that is being studied. For example, on college campuses, time spent perusing through Facebook negatively predicts social engagement, White time spent commenting or responding to groups positively predicts social engagement (Junco 2012).

There was a "White flight" in online social networking between the years 2005-2009 as groups of White, and largely well-off White youth left MySpace in order to join Facebook (Boyd 2013). MySpace was described as ghetto, trashy, and unsafe, while Facebook represented a clean-cut and more exclusive space. This research identifies the way technology can support

existing social structures, and even sustain systems of race and class based inequality. A quantitative analysis of social network users found that MySpace users were more likely to be poor, Latino, and less educated than Facebook users, who were more likely to be White, well-off, and educated (Hargittai 2013). Differential adoption of certain social networking sites can lead to parallel but unequal bridging social capital in online networking. Online stratification processes can make the Internet a facilitator of racial inequality, even as people of color have increased access to computers and the Internet.

Racial Inequality and the Internet: Resistance

More recently, critical researchers have rejected the idea of a digital divide, for several reasons. First, as the Internet has become more widely accessible and affordable, especially with mobile technology, there is less of a quantifiable digital divide in terms of access to computers and the Internet (Daniels 2013). For example, although a higher percentage of Whites have in-home broadband access, Black and Latino youth are more likely to use their cell phones to access the Internet (Cohen et al. 2012). More importantly, perhaps, is the way the framing of the digital divide denies people of color agency in regards to their own purposes and uses for the Internet. Rather than solely being a source of increased inequality, the Internet can also function as a tool for resistance against an oppressive system.

A number of recent studies situate themselves within critical race theory to analyze online content and explore the meaning and construction of race in online spaces. Using a modified version of critical discourse analysis, coined critical technocultural discourse analysis, Brock's (2009b) research explores the cultural, social, and political dimensions of Black bloggers posts and user comments brock. The cultural appropriation of the Internet as a social space for Black thought represents a departure from the assumptions of the digital divide; people

of color not only adopted this new technology, they also adapted it for use as a tool for cultural expression and community.

Similarly, in Brock's (2008a) analysis of Black blogs following Hurricane Katrina, he uses a DuBoisian conception of racial meaning construction to suggest that the Internet was not only a cultural phenomenon, but also a Black cultural phenomenon. Black bloggers were critical of both government actions as well as the language used in mainstream media descriptions of events following Katrina, and used the Internet as a tool for resisting these dominant racial meanings. While mainstream media ignored the perspective of poor struggling Blacks, the Internet served as a scaffolding to support these Black writers and journalists to create and disseminate a counter-narrative that questioned the actions and motivations of the government in regards to racial inequality and prejudice in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Twitter is a form of online social media that allows users to post their thoughts in 150 words or less. These posts are automatically sent to all of the posting users' followers. While only 9% of Whites who use the Internet use twitter, 25% of Blacks who use the Internet use twitter (A. Smith 2011). Additionally, Blacks make up 25% of all Twitter users, prompting discussion about the extent to which twitter has become a Black space (Brock 2012). Brock (2012) explores the use of twitter by Black activists to counter racial stereotypes and encourage civic participation. Research has found that minority journalists are grossly underrepresented in traditional news sources, including print, broadcast, and online journalism (Wilson and Costanza-Chock 2011). Given this lack of opportunity for people of color to have a voice in mainstream media, Twitter for Black activists and journalists is an Internet-based avenue through which an individual, without the backing of a major news organization, can reach significant numbers of individuals who are concerned with race and public events.

In fact, research on youth and politics has found that 45% of youth surveyed received news from Facebook or Twitter at least once per week (Cohen et al. 2012). When news or issues are shared online, they have a chance to spread between social networks, forming groups around relevant social issues. Cohen and colleagues' (2012) work on youth involvement in participatory politics gives us a powerful example of the way the Internet can be used to facilitate adolescent involvement in political issues. Participatory politics is defined as online political activity that is interactive, peer based, not subordinated under a formal institution, and addresses public issues (Cohen et al. 2012). Examples of participatory politics include the swift Internet Blackout response against the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), which halted Congress' support of the bill, and the change.org petition which successfully prevented an expensive change in Bank of America's debit card policies.

In addition to the evident efficacy of participatory politics, research suggests that through the Internet, barriers to youth political participation may be low. Forty-three percent of Whites, 41% of Black, 38% of Latino, and 36% of Asian youth report experiences with online participatory politics. Education also plays a role, as college students are nearly twice as likely (50%) to engage one weekly participatory politics activity as are those who are not enrolled in college (27%).

The study also finds that youth who engage in participatory politics are more likely to engage with individuals online who have views different than their own. Research on integrated schooling identifies one key outcome as *cultural flexibility*, defined as the "ability to cross different social and symbolic boundaries and to utilize variable cultural tools to negotiate multiple sociocultural environments (Carter 2012, 117)." While engaging in participatory politics can in itself be viewed as a positive outcome, as youth gain a voice in response to relevant social

issues, their interactive engagement may also be beneficial to their ability to navigate racial difference, both online and in-person.

Among youth, Blacks and Latinos are more likely to use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter than White or Asian youth (Cohen et al. 2012). While for some these numbers may indicate that Black and Latino youth may be using the Internet for more social than academic purposes, others have documented the ways Facebook and Twitter are used to facilitate productive racial projects. For example, a thematic textual analysis of race related groups on Facebook found that the social network site was being used to engage in complex discussions of user experiences with race (Tynes et al. 2011). Another study explored how Facebook was used to create and maintain a virtual ethnic network among college students with common backgrounds, but who were studying in separate countries (Narayan, Purkayastha, and Banerjee 2011).

This research indicates that social media may play an important role, especially for college students of color at predominantly White institutions. Hurtado (1997) uses the term institutional climate to refer to a combination of 1) the historical legacy of an institution, 2) the structural diversity of an institution as seen in numerical representation, 3) the psychological climate of an institution, especially relating to its students perceptions of group and race relations, and 4) the behavioral climate of an institution, which focuses specifically on interracial relations, between groups and individuals (Hurtado 1998). How does online cross-racial communication impact college campus institutional climates?

The Diversity Project at Berkeley, a school with high numerical diversity but low integration, found that while many students express the desire for more cross-racial interaction, in practice racial groups tended to socialize in separate spaces (Duster 1991). When social norms

limit cross-racial interactions on campus, social media may represent one of the primarily social locations in which students of different racial backgrounds engage in meaningful interaction with each other.

In addition to strengthening between-group connections, social media may help facilitate within-group solidarity and racial consciousness. Pitts' (1975) study of the development of racial consciousness at Northwestern in the late 1960s followed Black student organization efforts in response to on and off-campus discrimination. Student organizations struggled not only to attract student participants, but also in competing with other student organizations with similar goals and interests. Pitts tells a story of successes and failures as Black students fought for change at Northwestern in an era where student social action consisted of physical demonstrations, requiring large numbers of like-minded students to occupy the same space at the same time. While today's students of color may be less likely to stage full-on protests on campus, they may find it easier to organize and engage students around justice or administrative issues online than in-person. Social media can be effective in facilitating student political voices, though the question remains whether this can also translate into more effective political action, or influence.

The goal of this literature review was to survey and compare online and in-person racial landscapes, with attention to adolescent experiences. That race operates different online than in face-to-face interactions should not come as a surprise, as the Internet is a distinctive social space with its own set of social rules, expectations, and sanctions. I have shown that expressions of prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination may be more common online than in-person. Next, I explored how the Internet structures racial stratification. Finally, I explored research that emphasizes the role the Internet plays in facilitating resistance against racial oppression for both

adolescents and adults. In the next section I briefly discuss the methodology used for this dissertation, and preview the empirical chapters that follow.

The Dissertation Study

This dissertation study uses in-depth interviews with undergraduate students of color and archival data from a campus-based website to explore the ways the Internet shapes racial discourse. Chapter two explains the methodology in greater detail, including discussion of the research site, sample, procedures, analytical framing and analysis. This research design improves on previous studies of race on the Internet by combining online and in-person data sources, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of how online racial discourse impacts real world attitudes, ideologies, and behaviors.

Chapter three explores how students of color perceive racial discourse on campus. I make the argument that norms of political correctness and the color-blind ideology severly .imit racial discourse on campus. I find that White students avoid talking about race out of fear of being labeled racist, while students of color avoid talking about race in order to avoid being labeled militant. An exception is that White students feel more comfortable discussing race in classrooms, as students perceive that the institutional commitment to the freedom of inquiry lessens the chance that problematic racial comments made in class will be coded as racist. Students of color, however, do not perceive this same freedom to speak about race in classrooms. The stifling nature of such a limited in-person racial discourse gives students an incentive to turn to the Internet as a social space with fewer limitations around discussing race. In a sense, the rest of the dissertation will push back against this chapter, as I demonstrate how students experience racial discourse differently in online environments where a distinct set of norms and structural limitations provide unique opportunities for racial discussions.

In chapter four I explore how the Internet can facilitate a more explicit expression of racist ideologies. Contemporary theories of racism assume a more subtle presentation of racism. But the Internet can structure distinctive social environments where users perceive themselves to be free of societal norms and standards around what types of race-related messages are deemed appropriate. I suggest that contemporary theories for understanding racism cannot account for the differential expression of racism in online spaces. Furthermore, I present evidence that being exposed to more explicit presentations of racism in online space can significantly alter the way students of color understand race and racism, and has implications for the way they approach interracial interactions on campus.

Chapter five explores how students of color exhibit different responses to microaggressions in online spaces than on campus. Racial microaggressions are defined as racial slights that are coded as being related to race by the victim, but are may be seen as being aracial by the perpetrator. The literature on racial microaggressions largely focuses on the impact these acts of discrimination have on the wellbeing of students of color. Studies of racial microaggressions on college campuses identify counterspaces as social locations where students of color are protected from microaggressions and where their racial/ethnic identities can be confirmed. This chapter explores the way students of color create *online counterspaces*, which differ from on campus counterspaces in several important ways. Most notably, students engage in *online racial checking* and are more likely to respond critically to microaggressions online than in-person. The Internet structures a unique engagement with racial discussions and racial microaggressions that increase the agency students of color have in shaping the campus racial climates.

In chapter six, I explore the effects online counterspaces and online racial checking have on activist and racial identity development among students of color at North-U. I suggest that participation in online counterspaces and online racial checking has contributed to the development of a new form of student resistance, which I call *digital racial organizing*. Digital racial organizing is a concept influenced by the pre-Civil Rights Movement organizing tradition, critical race theory, and the participatory politics framework, and refers to the way young students of color engage in online activities geared towards developing increased critical and racial consciousness in their peers. In this sense, digital racial organizers see individual ideologies as sites of activism, and seek to train other students to view the world through a critical lens in order to resist not only individual acts of racism online and on campus, but also White supremacy more broadly. Furthermore, because there is a dearth of formal opportunities for racial identity development on campus, digital racial organizing emerges as an important socializing tool that raises the racial consciousness of students of color.

Conclusion

This dissertation explores the influence of the Internet, a growing, distinct ecological context that has become central to the way we communicate, learn, and socialize, on the ways college students of color talk about and experience race on campus. Drawing both from online archival data and in-depth interviews with undergraduate students of color, the study seeks to understand not only how expressions of racist ideologies change in online spaces, but also how young people of color are able to use digital tools to engage in acts of resistance against racism. I interact with contemporary theories of racism and highlight areas where they cannot account for the shifts in racial discourse that we see on the Internet, and discuss how the way students use

online spaces for resistance can help us better understand contemporary movements for racial justice.

CHAPTER TWO:

METHODOLOGY

As a first year graduate student, I was assigned Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2010) seminal text, *Racism without Racists*.[1] In the book Bonilla-Silva presents color-blind racism, a racist ideology that sustains unequal racial systems without reverting to hostile language around racial differences. Bonilla-Silva suggests that racist ideologies use language to legitimate racist social systems. It follows, then, that while during the Jim Crow era racist language needed to be explicit in order to justify a harsh and formal racial stratification system, contemporary racial systems, which rely less on the explicit and legal separation of races, can be sustained with more subtle, gentle expressions of racism.

It struck me that while this framework explained the presentations of racist ideologies in many contexts, including most college campuses, it did not explain why overt racism persisted- and even seemed to be the norm- in some Internet-based contexts. For example, I noticed the proliferation of racist comments on mainstream new sites, something that has since been explored empirically (Daniels 2013). And, fresh off my undergraduate years, I had recent personal experiences that gave me first hand knowledge of how common racist language seemed to be when playing video games online.

How could I reconcile these experiences with overt racist language with Bonilla-Silva's theory? I hypothesized that the Internet represented a distinct social environment, and communication in many online contexts may not be bound by the same norms as in face-to-face interaction. I suggest that this is relevant because as young people send more time socializing

[1] The course was *The Social Meaning of Race*, taught by my advisor, Charles M. Payne, a class that I later taught for

and learning in online spaces, it follows that their online interactions will have an increasingly large impact on their lives and wellbeing. Research on racial socialization finds that preparing Black children for experiences with racial bias can lessen the negative impact that stereotypes have on their outcomes (Hughes et al. 2006). But what happens if we socialize children to prepare them to deal with color-blind style racism, and fail to recognize that they are actually being exposed to overt expressions of racism in online spaces, where adult moderation is less prevalent? How does the Internet shape racial discourse, and what impact to the distinct expressions of racial ideologies in online spaces have on young people of color?

In 2013 an event occurred at a private, selective, urban Northeastern University (hereafter North-U) that gave me the opportunity to explore these questions empirically. The North-U campus had recently been rocked by the appearance of a controversial Facebook page entitled, "Politically Incorrect North-U Confessions," (hereafter PINC). The page was purportedly designed to give North-U students an outlet through which they could anonymously share their honest opinions about race, religion, gender, sexuality, and any number of other topics that they may have felt uncomfortable discussing in person. In practice, however, the site became a safe haven for hate speech.

In this dissertation study I use data from the PINC website, as well as in-depth interviews with students of color at North-U, in order to understand how the Internet shapes the way the Internet shapes racial messaging, racial discussions, and racialized interactions. There are both limitations and opportunities associated with doing research on a college campus. In this case, the benefits of doing research at North-U far outweigh the drawbacks of sampling from a highly educated and relatively privileged population. Because the PINC was endemic to the North-U community, online racial discourse had a more direct and measurable impact on students of color

than does less-targeted anonymous racial discourse in other online contexts. Furthermore, by using both online and in-person data I am able to draw more robust inferences than may be possible with just one type of data source. Finally, I center the experiences of students of color on campus in a way that is not only uncommon in the literature, but also speaks to the real world consequences of the distinctive stylistic and substantive markers of online racial discourse.

Over a period of 18 months, nearly 900 comments were posted to the PINC page. This study uses a sample of 91 comments that were posted to the page. The structure of the site only lets a certain number of posts be viewed at one time. For example, once 40 new posts have been added to the site, the previous 40 posts are no longer accessible. The convenience sample taken here represents all of the comments available for download on the days I visited the site.

My analysis of this website data is guided by Brock's (2010) critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA), an analytical tool designed to contextualize racialized content in online environments. Rooted in critical race theory, CTDA "analyzes interfaces to understand how the Internet's form and function visually, symbolically, and interactively mediate discourse (Brock 2009, 345)." This tool puts an emphasis on the technological context of racial discourse in Internet spaces, in order to understand how the digital ecology facilitates racial meanings in online interactions.

In this case, technological context of the PINC page structured a safe space for students at North-U to anonymously post explicitly racist language without needing to worry about how they would be perceived by their peers. Anonymity can complicate research design because there is no way to tell who is behind anonymous comments on a news site or interest-based web forum, which limits the conclusions you can draw from anonymous online data. The structure

and content of the PINC page, however, provides more clues about some group identities of the anonymous posters than do anonymous online comments in many other technological contexts.

For example, in order to submit to use the page, users had to be connected to North-U. Users were instructed to submit "North-U related" content to the page moderators, ensuring that while comments were made anonymous, they originated from a specific imagined and geographic educational community. Furthermore, as many PINC comments made specific references to settings, groups and individuals at North-U, it was clear that the users behind the racist comments were members of the University community.

While we know, in a general sense, that the comments on the PINC were made by individuals connected to North-U, there are still limitations associated with these anonymous comments. First, it is still impossible to make concrete assertions about the identities of the posters on the website. For example, while many students of color assumed that many of the posters behind insensitive insensitive comments were White, it is impossible to be certain about their social identities. Additionally, I cannot make assertions about the prevalence of the attitudes or ideologies expressed on the PINC. Because users could post to the site multiple times, it is possible that the bulk of the racist comments were instigated by a select few students.

These concerns are largely parried by other aspects of the study design, including in-depth interviews with students of color. I cannot speak to exactly who the posters of PINC were, but I can speak to how students of color interpreted the website, and the inferences they made about their White peers as a result of exposure to the abusive language therein.

This is notable, because most research on race on the Internet takes its data exclusively from online spaces. This research is important for understanding the online racial landscape from the proliferation of hate sites (Daniels 2009) to the use of online tools for the production of

counter narratives (Brock 2007). It is limited, however, in its ability to speak to the real-world impact of online racial discourse. There are several exceptions, including Coffey and Woolworth (2004) who combine data from community meeting observations with data from an online forum, and Tynes et al. (2012) who surveyed high school aged youth about their experiences with discrimination in online spaces. This study makes a significant methodological contribution in its ability to triangulate multiple sources of data and analyze not only the content on an anonymous, campus-based website, but also students perceptions of the site and the way it impacted their thinking about race on campus.

Most studies on the expressions of racist ideologies or prejudice also use Whites as research subjects. Almost everything we know about prejudiced attitudes comes from social psychology research done with subject populations made up of White undergraduate students. Even Bonilla-Silva's color-blind racism theory was built on interviews with Whites in Detroit. The way we understand the logics of racism and the expressions of racist ideologies, therefore, have been built around empirical work with Whites. This is not without reason, as we need data from Whites in order to understand the presentation of racist attitudes and the way prejudiced attitudes impact cognition and real world decision making.

In this study, however, I follow the critical tradition of centering the perspectives of people of color (Leonardo and Zembylas 2013), by drawing my sample from students of color at North-U. I am interested in learning how students of color experience and discuss race on campus and whether online conversations about race are distinctive. In exploring their reactions to the PINC page, I have the unique opportunity to gauge the real-world impact of an online racial event that was endemic to the North-U community. Did the PINC influence the way that students of color think about race, engage in racial discussions, or experience interracial

interactions? How does the Internet, as a distinct social space, constrain and facilitate conversations about race on college campuses? How do online and in-person racial discourses differ? How do college students of color interpret online racial antagonisms, and to what extent do their adaptive responses to racial antagonisms differ in virtual environments, versus real-world environments? How do online discussions of race impact university racial climates?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted in-depth interviews with students of color at North-U. Interviews were conducted with 38 students of which 23 were female, 15 were male, 5 identified as Latino, 3 identified as Afro Latino or mixed with Black and Latino, 19 identified as Black or African American, 5 identified as multiracial or mixed with Black and White, 5 identified as Asian, and 1 identified as Indian. A more detailed description of the sample can be found in Table 1.

The purposive sample was recruited from student cultural organizations and minority student leadership groups. I emailed the leaders of cultural student organizations introducing the study and requesting permission to come to the group's meeting to present the study to students. At group meetings, I introduced the study to students and asked for volunteers to sign up for an interview timeslot using a private online poll. In addition, a poster advertising the study was displayed at the North-U Diversity Office, a space that hosts student cultural meetings, and provides group study and meeting locations. No subjects were recruited from these posters. Some additional subjects were recruited in-person or individually by email based on their public engagement with issues of race on-campus or online. Finally, in the course of conducting interviews, I was occasionally approached by students interested in the research project. In these instances, I explained the project to interested students, and personally invited them to participate.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

Gender			
	Female	23	61%
	Male	15	39%
Race			
	Black	19	50%
	Latino	5	13%
	Asian	5	13%
	Multiracial	8	21%
	Indian	1	3%
Year			
	First	8	21%
	Second	12	32%
	Third	9	24%
	Fourth	9	24%
Major			
	Social Sciences	14	37%
	Hard Sciences	8	21%
	Humanities	4	11%
	Arts	2	5%
	Economics/Public Policy/Math	8	21%
	International Studies	4	11%

I chose to recruit students of color from cultural organizations because they are contexts that draw students who want to talk about race, interact with other students of color, or who are interested in learning about their racial /ethnic identities. By sampling from these organizations, it is possible that I missed students of color who did not feel the need to have such an on-campus community for a range of reasons. Some students might not have wanted to join because they felt completely comfortable in White spaces and did not feel the need to connect with other students of color. Other students might not have wanted to join because their sense of racial identity was sufficiently strong that they did not want to engage with students of color who were coming to the organizations as a way to interrogate their racial identities. These examples, from opposite ends of the racial identity spectrums, demonstrate that few assumptions can be made about why

students of color choose to be a part of these cultural organizations. This is evidenced by the variance in class background, racial identity development, and level of social comfort in mainstream spaces on campus found in this sample.

Participating students were asked to schedule an interview lasting between 45-60 minutes and were offered a $10 Starbucks card as an incentive. These in-depth interviews were guided by an original open-ended survey instrument[2]. The questions asked were influenced by Hurtado and Carter's (1997) framework for understanding institutional climate and Tynes' (2010) online victimization scale. But I also used Small's (2009) sequential interviewing strategy, so that what was learned with each case or participant influenced subsequent interviews, as questions were modified or added to reflect what had already been learned. Participants were asked questions regarding their experiences on campus at the North-U, their perceptions of the meaning of race on campus, and their experiences with racialized interactions online. I explored their reactions to racist attitudes posted anonymously online by fellow North-U students through the PINC, and sought to understand how those events impacted not only their individual racial identities but also their perceptions of the University's racial climate.

Interviews took place in a private room and were recorded with a digital audio recorder. Throughout the research process, a number of students wanted to stay behind after their interviews to continue our conversations about race. Several students indicated that they enjoyed the opportunity to process their experiences with race both in-person and online. In these situations, I sometimes turned the audio recorder back on if students began sharing examples or stories that were relevant to the study aims. In other cases, I simply included notes on the

[2] See Appendix A for instrument.

conversation with my other notes on the students' appearance, mannerisms, and demeanor during the interview.

There were also several moments throughout the data gathering process where students shared stories that were sufficiently traumatic that I decided to pause the interview and offer to connect these students with campus resources, including both counseling as well as being connected with administrators in the North-U diversity office with whom I had developed a rapport, and thought would be willing to pursue incidents of bias that the research subjects had experienced. In none of these cases did students elect to stop the interview. In several of the cases the students expressed a willingness to get in touch with my contacts in the diversity office, but to my knowledge no students followed through with those connections.

I used an abductive grounded theoretical approach to data analysis and wrote memos throughout the analytical process to facilitate an iterative interaction between data and theory (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). In line with the abductive process, throughout my analysis I was cognizant of when findings were surprising or outside of the scope of the project's original theoretical framing (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). When surprising findings were outside of the scope of the projects original framing, I both explored new literature and theorized based on findings that that contradicted existing theories. Using Timmermans and Tavory's (2012) modified approach to grounded theory, I approach the data with a theoretically informed analysis that builds new theory for understanding how the Internet shapes racial discourse, and the way students of color respond to microaggressions in online settings.

Upon beginning the interview process, I almost immediately began to uncover unexpected and theoretically surprising findings that changed the direction of the study. As I have described, I went into the study looking to push back against contemporary theories of

racism that assume a subtle, covert presentation of racist ideologies. This assumption is based on the prevalence of societal norms that make overt racist language or actions taboo, which can be muted in technological contexts like the PINC. How does the Internet affect the presentation of racial ideologies, and how do these distinct presentations affect the way students of color think about race, racism, and interracial interactions on campus?

While I did hear about student experiences with more explicit presentations of racism in online spaces, this idea, that theories of racism cannot account for race on the Internet, was far from my most interesting finding. I also found that despite being exposed to brutal language in online spaces, students of color didn't shy away from online environments. Instead, they used online social media to construct spaces of critical resistance. The latter half of this dissertation explores these new online-based methods of resistance to racism and their influence on online racial discourse, student racial identity development, and behavior modifications.

Interviews were transcribed and imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, for analysis. Participants were assigned pseudonyms in a codebook. Data extracts from the interviews are presented with minimal editing to preserve the voice of the participating students. Exceptions are when quotes discuss people or events that could be used to identify the participant. In these cases, minor details are changed in order to protect the identity of participants.

The first step of analysis was to create a coding log, which took note of demographic characteristics and contextual data. Second, I engaged in open coding of the interview data. This first round of thematic coding highlighted emerging themes and patterns, and was accompanied by extensive memoing, both for each participant, as well as for the themes that surfaced across participants.

Next, I engaged in focused coding of my initial codes. In this stage I began to test some of my theories and assumptions by looking for code saturation and disconfirming information. As focused codes took shape, they began to highlight differences in participant experiences, behaviors, and responses to external forces.

Finally, I engaged in theoretical coding and began to use concepts developed during the focused coding stage to build theory. In this stage I developed frameworks for organizing my focused codes, sought to elucidate the relationships between existing codes, and compared my findings with existing theories.

Throughout the analytic process, I engaged in a constant comparison between theory and data, taking note of the relationships between codes, prevalent themes, existing theories, and emergent theories. Each of my four empirical chapters begins with an overview of the theory I interact with to interpret the data presented in that chapter, and makes note of the places where surprising findings necessitated new theory building. The theoretical frameworks generated from this project deviate from contemporary theories of race and add significantly to the way we understand contemporary expressions of racism, how young people of color respond to discrimination, and the innovative ways students of color are harnessing technology to engage in acts of resistance.

The findings in this dissertation reflect the ways students of color have experienced racial messaging, online and face-to-face, at North-U. There are some limitations to generalizability that stem from using data from a college aged sample, as well as the distinct characteristics of North-U as a research site.

College students have long been lab rats for research on race. They are in a unique developmental period, learning about themselves, their views, and the world in a context that is

characterized by increased independence. At the same time, however, students are subject to University rules and regulations. Racial discourse on some campuses, therefore, can reflect students being cautious with their language. The color-blind style of racial discourse on college campuses may be less prevalent in contexts with fewer formal and informal social controls, or where middle-class values like political correctness have a lesser hold.

Furthermore, North-U places a high value on the freedom of inquiry and academic rigor, which also influences the flavor of racial discourse on campus. In chapter three I discuss how these institutional values and norms shape the way that students of color experience racial discourse on campus. Certain types of racial discussions, therefore, may be endemic to academic contests.

North-U is also a highly selective institution and the styles of racial discourse represented in this dissertation may reflect a relatively privileged and highly educated sample. While students of color represent a more marginalized population on campus, the students of color at North-U may be less vulnerable than other groups of color in less elite or less protected social spaces.

Despite these sampling limitations, the theory built here can be extended to other contexts. Future research projects look for disconfirming information by drawing from samples from colleges and Universities that are less selective, less White, and from more vulnerable populations that are not yet college aged, or are not college attending.

CHAPTER THREE:

Race on campus:

The structure and limitations of in-person racial dialogues

In September of 2016 the Dean of Students at the University of Chicago sent all incoming students a letter explaining the University's policies towards freedom of expression (Jaschick 2016). He explained that the University's commitment to academic debate meant that it would not support the creation of intellectual "safe spaces," or spaces free of content that could potentially be offensive to students. Then, during orientation week, all first year students were required to attend an Aims of Education address where the faculty speaker reinforced these ideas, suggesting that while students could disagree with peers or speakers who expressed ideas they found offensive, they could not expect the University to punish those people (Stone 2016).

The publication of this letter sparked a national debate around the perceived conflict between free speech on one hand, and campus speech codes, which limit offensive language, on the other (Jaschick 2016). What these ideas communicate to many students of color across the country is that some colleges and Universities may be loath to intervene in situations where students encounter racially offensive ideas or microaggressions. While colleges and Universities often respond to overt hate speech with statements indicating their institutional commitment to diversity (Jaschick 2017), there is less precedence for them to respond as openly to harsh racial climates that are rife with microaggressions and layers of stereotypes (Yosso et al. 2009).

In this chapter I explore racial discourse on campus at North-U. How do students of color experience and interpret the ways Whites talk about race? How do students of color make the choice to engage, or not engage, in race talk in different settings? What relationship exists

between the structures of on campus racial discourse, intellectual safe spaces, and spaces dedicated to freedom of inquiry? How do racial discussions serve to either challenge or reproduce the racial status quo? How do the ways that students of color engage in racial discourse reflect their understandings of the institutional racial climate?

I argue that students of color at North-U are embedded in a context that reproduces White privilege and insulates Whiteness from critique. I highlight several discursive practices that reinforce structural and symbolic patters of racial oppression on campus, including the color-blind ideology, norms of political correctness, and the discourse of violence- which positions students of color who talk about race as aggressive. I find that in response to experiences with these discursive practices, students of color adopt coping behaviors including silence, avoidance, and self-alienation. These strategies of navigating White spaces can be protective, but also have the unintended consequence of reinforcing the prevailing racial order on campus by limiting the extent to which Whiteness is challenged. Finally, I explore the way the norms and trends around racial discourse shift in classroom settings, where students of color perceive that freedom of inquiry trumps concerns with feelings of safety, color-blindness, and political correctness. I contend that students of color can experience settings dedicated to freedom of inquiry as contexts where racist ideas can be masked by intellectual freedom, and are less vulnerable to critique than they would be in other contexts.

The overarching message of this chapter is that racial discourse is not only severely limited on campus, but also structured in ways that privileges White comfort and perspectives. As the opening empirical chapter in a larger project around how the Internet shapes racial discourse, I am highlighting the on campus norms and structures at North-U that limit racial discourse and increase power differentials between Whites and students of color. By identifying

the characteristics of in-person discourse that shape racial discourse, I will be able to make more explicit connections with online structures that provide a different set of constraints and opportunities around racial discourse.

In the next section, I briefly review the idea of safe spaces on college campuses as it relates to the structure of racial discourse on campus. I also engage with critical Whiteness theory, which elucidates the ways in which "safe" race discourses can serve as rhetorical shields for Whiteness, which is reproduced in contexts where racial discussions are strategically limited in order to preserve the racial status quo.

Background

Safe spaces and trigger warnings are pieces in a larger debate around free speech on college campuses. Proponents for freedom of expression argue that any restrictions on language on college campuses limits intellectual and social development by constraining discussions in order to make people feel comfortable. Often, the counter to freedom of expression is seen as being political correctness, defined as ''an implicit social convention of restraint on public expression (Loury 1994, 430)." The term politically correct started being used as a conservative critique of attempts at regulating speech in the 1980s (Bush 1995). In the early 1990s, President George H. W. Bush went as far as to describe political correctness as a form of McCarthyism that was threatening colleges and Universities (Banning 2004).

Research finds that in classrooms, college students use the term politically correct to refer to discussions about race, class, or gender that challenge the status quo (Banning 2004). Pejorative framing of political or social criticisms as politically correct can delegitimize those critiques and limit their potential influence on dominant modes of thinking or behavior.

Research has shown that norms around political correctness influence the way students discuss sensitive topics, like race, on campus. One study of students active in college Republican groups found that those students felt silenced by the perceived need to be politically correct, and believed their conservative views were not welcome on campus (Carlisle 2016). Other research suggests that moderate or liberal students are the most worried about political correctness, as they would not want to accidentally say something that could be perceived as racist (Hentoff 1991).

White students, regardless of ideology or political leaning, can feel limited by norms of political correctness. This furthers the idea that norms of political correctness are protective for students of color or other marginalized populations. Indeed, some colleges and Universities have implemented formal campus speech codes to limit hurtful language, which is indeed seen as being a policy that should limit the extent to which students of color are targeted by offensive language (Herron 1993). But critical studies of Whiteness question whether speech codes- or politically correct, safe language- can be enough to reduce the dangers inherent in racial discussions for students of color.

Leonardo and Porter (2010) write that there is no such thing as a safe space for racial discourse. Drawing on Fanon's (1963) concept of colonial violence, which refers not only to physical violence but also the psychological impact of racial domination, Leonardo writes that racial discourse in safe spaces, even when characterized by norms of political correctness, is violent towards people of color. Safe racial discourse, then, is only safe for Whites. In safe spaces, race is discussed in a value-neutral, dispassionate manner. While this may be done with the goal of creating a space where mutual respect overrides disagreements, it also ignores the fact that race is an inherently violent and painful topic to discuss- for people of color in particular.

For students of color, kind racial discussions neither acknowledge this violent history, nor allow for the type of critical and honest response that might characterize a more critical resistance against an oppressive system.

This can be seen in classrooms where the ways Whites discuss race are viewed as intellectually legitimate, but critiques coming from offended students of color may be coded as emotional and out of place (Gillborn 2009). Diangelo and Sensoy (2014) use the term *discourse of violence* to refer to the way Whites articulate feelings of being attacked by racial discourse. Using evidence from a four-week long cross-racial dialogue with 13 college students the authors identify five effects of the discourse of violence and find that Whites 1) position themselves as innocent in racial matters, 2) position people of color as perpetrators of discursive violence, 3) maintain White solidarity, 4) stabilize ideologies of individualism by focusing on attitudes, and not racial systems, and 5) reinforce a narrative of an ideal imagined community, where individuals are not defined by their social position – including race, gender, sexuality, or class.

These discursive strategies are similar to Leornardo and Zembylas' (2013) concept of White intellectual alibis, which refer to White attempts to talk about their identities as anti-racist as a way to avoid being labeled racist. The authors question individual-level anti racism, stating, "we problematize the tendency for White educators to forge personas that favor non-racism, a form of image-management, rather than aligning themselves with anti-racism, a political project." White intellectual alibis, then, function as protective mechanisms that insulate Whites from accusations of racism. By claiming a status as anti-racist, Whites can eschew the need to engage in consistent anti-racist political actions. This is especially useful on a college campus, where norms of political correctness can give Whites an incentive to position themselves as not-racist, and White intellectual alibis accomplish this without necessitating anti-racist actions.

I also draw on Bonilla-Silva's (2010) color-blind ideology to understand how Whites talk about race. Bonilla-Silva lists four color-blind frames Whites use to discuss race, including abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of racism. Using these frames individuals can justify racial inequality without ascribing to prejudiced attitudes.

One criticism of the critical Whiteness literature is that it contradicts the critical tradition of DuBois and Fanon, who center the perspectives and experiences of people of color, by making Whiteness the focal point of analysis (Leonardo and Zembylas 2013). In this chapter I take insights from critical Whiteness theory, but re-center the perspective of people of color by using data that explores how students of color at North-U perceive White discursive strategies during race talk, how they engage in race talk in White spaces, and how campus social structures have a differential impact, based on race, on the ways students engage in racial discourse.

Findings

These findings explore how students of color perceive and experience racial discourse on campus, and the ways these patterns of discourse reproduce unequal race relations. Students of color believe that racial discourse on campus is limited both because of the color-blind ideology, which allows Whites to ignore race, and norms of political correctness. Students of color suggest that both they and White students tend to avoid discussing race in many contexts. I find, however, that the motivations behind this avoidance, as well as the impact it has on students, differ by race.

Students of color in this sample believe that Whites attempt to avoid racial discourse in order to preserve their White intellectual alibis, or identities as non-racists. Avoidance breeds silence, which creates safe spaces for Whites- spaces where the color-blind ideology goes unchallenged- while also insulating White privilege from critique. Next, I show that students of

color limit their own engagement with race talk in order to make their White peers more comfortable. This practice may facilitate social integration for students of color, but also can reinforce norms of silence around race and contribute to feelings of self-alienation. Finally, I explore student experiences with academic racial discourse. Students describe classrooms as settings that can facilitate the acceptance of racist ideas as legitimate intellectual positions, due largely to the way the ideals of freedom of inquiry are operationalized. Students of color may choose not to engage in classroom racial discussions because of a lack of trust of their peers or professors. This sentiment is reinforced by personal and vicarious narratives of negative classroom experiences.

Something's missing:

The conspicuous absence of racial discourse on campus

When asked how people talk about race on campus, Amanda, a Black female student, says:

> They don't, unless you are with other people who experience the shitty end of racism.

The prevailing thought among students in the sample is that Whites prefer to avoid talking about race, and choose to tiptoe around racial conversations when they are unavoidable. Daniel, a Black male student, echoes this sentiment when sharing his experience with talking about race:

> Never around the friends who are – who are not Black or not Latino… not a lot of people want to talk about race. I – I believe that a lot of White students just don't see it as a problem… they think that you can move forward and try to mend whatever racial tensions our nation has been through. They think, okay that means we shouldn't talk about race, race shouldn't matter, and they don't understand that actually, now that we've gone through decades and century – centuries of these tensions, you know, race is part of our identity. It's not something we can wipe away.

Daniel suggests that one reason Whites may avoid talking about race is that they see racism as a relic of the past and are not aware of its contemporary significance. By minimizing racism, one of the frames of the color-blind ideology, Whites build an imagined ideal community where racial differences are irrelevant. For Daniel, this discursive strategy is an affront to his racial identity, which cannot be understood outside of historical context.

Sara, a Black female student, highlights another way she believes Whites avoid talking about race:

> Unless like you are a minority, umm or yea, I don't think White people on campus just want to talk about race… people always want to look for the factor that it isn't racial, to like, "oh this is an economic issue."

In addition to avoiding talking about race, Sara finds that Whites attempt to change the focus from issues of racial difference by suggesting aracial variables. Reframing racial inequality in economic terms not only positions Whites as innocent of racism, but also reinforces individual-level thinking about racial differences, which in turn supports the color-blind ideology. In Sara's experience, not only do Whites avoid racial discussions, but they also redirect attention away from race when it is relevant.

This point is further illustrated by Jerry, a Black male student who discusses how White students have responded to him talking about race:

> I like talking about race, so it's like, some people don't want to talk about race and they're like, they get offended. Some people actually get offended, like, you know, bringing up race at North-U and I'm like, "yo, this is like, an intellectual discussion." I've heard people talk about all types of like, messed up things and like, what counts as what, but race is off the table.

What makes racial conversations so uncomfortable that Whites are perceived to be offended when race is brought up? Jerry believes that Whites who think about racial differences on an individual-level may feel implicated by racial discussions, which position them as the

oppressor. Following this logic, we might assume that taking offense is a defensive response that allows Whites to position students of color as perpetrators of violence. Jerry feels as if he is being silenced by Whites acting offended at his bringing up race, because he believes he is expected to back down from the subject in order to not continue to offend his White peers. Talking about race makes Whiteness visible and can expose White dominated spaces to scrutiny, potentially connecting contemporary systems of inequality to the ugly legacy of race relations in the US.

Jerry continues to talk about how he believes Whites may fear not only the product of race conversations- attention paid to inequality- but also the process of actively taking part in the discussions:

> People are afraid to talk to other people about something like race, because race is such – it can be such an inflammatory, sore subject and people can go off and you know, you can set people off because you know, people do end up saying the wrong things, people can say racist things and they don't realize that they're saying it, so you know, again, there is that sort of fear that I see.

Jerry suggests that Whites may be scared to talk about race, because if they say something that counters norms of political correctness, they could be labeled racist. Cristina, a female Indian-American student, has experienced Whites reacting defensively when they believe racial discussions accuse them of being racist. She relates:

> I'm talking to my friends about race and, uh, and I start using this jargon in any way, you know, like, they feel uncomfortable. And either they go like, "oh, there she goes again!" Or, umm, they, you know, if they feel comfortable enough, bring up that they feel targeted and they're just like "I'm not a racist. Why do people think that?" … that's because nobody has talked to these people about, like, systemic privilege.

While many students of color perceive avoidance of racial discussion from White students, Cristina notes that only the friends who are most comfortable with her are open about this avoidance being tied to a fear of being labeled racist. Similar to Leonardo and Zembylas'

(2013) idea of White intellectual alibis, here Cristina posits that Whites want to avoid being seen as racist on an individual level, but cannot recognize their social positions in a racist system.

Another example of discursive strategies being used as intellectual alibis comes from Micaela, a female Asian student, who discusses some of what makes racial discourse on campus distinctive:

> I think [that] everyone is so smart that I think they are always politically correct all the time and that was something that I was not like, uh, I wasn't used to coming into college… people think that they have to be 100% politically correct and not offend anyone.

This perceived correlation between intelligence and political correctness indicates a preoccupation with saying the right thing. Smart students know how to navigate post-racial environments without upsetting their peers. Recognizing and avoiding potential moments and controversy is a skill that Micaela believes protects Whites from being labeled racist. In another example Chris, a Latino student, shares his interpretation of Whites negotiating conversations about race:

> So, in person, people aren't going to say things that they might feel. But, you can clearly tell, that there's umm... I won't say racial tension, but there's some things people won't say. Or they want to be very politically correct about saying things.

If Whites engage in the strategic use of politically correct language, this may protect them from explicit accusations of racism, but does not keep students of color from believing that Whites are hiding their true feelings or thoughts about race. Along the same lines, Jelani, a Black male student, gives insight into the type of language that students code as politically correct, and notes that North-U is a place where students avoid saying things that offend others. He adds:

> Sometimes you can feel someone kind of walking on pins and needles, in a conversation.

When students of color detect the cautionary discursive style with which Whites approach racial discourse, they are left to interpret this apparent anxiety around race. They may

assume that Whites are being insincere, which can have a negative impact on the way interracial relationships are viewed.

In addition to sensing Whites walk on pins and needles, students recognize specific discursive practices that protect Whites from offending someone or being called racist. This is evidenced by a quote from Rebecca, who senses more than just caution when Whites talk about race:

> People are very umm, careful with being [politically correct]… when they're actually having a discussion about race, wanting not to be too incendiary, umm, knowing at least a little bit about the idea. Like okay, like your check your privilege, or like umm, knowing where they sort of have the right to speak and not to, or being weary of that. So there's a lot of caution I feel.

There are three dimensions to the way Rebecca perceives the strategies used by Whites to protect themselves. The first is avoiding language that can be offensive or controversial, which would put the speaker at risk of being labeled racist. Second is demonstrating knowledge, as if understanding race on an intellectual level precludes prejudice or racism. Rebecca suggests that some Whites feel that by demonstrating racial competence with language, they can produce intellectual alibis that reduce the degree to which they feel personally targeted by racial discourse. Third, Rebecca talks about Whites checking their privilege.

The caution that Rebecca is describing- especially the idea that Whites want to "check" their privilege- can actually function as a heuristic that guides their thinking about issues of race, helping them be critical of one's own biases. But because Rebecca perceives that this checking is undertaken with caution and defensiveness, she believes that when Whites use buzzwords like "privilege", this functions more as a White intellectual alibi than a framework for understanding the advantages of certain social positions. When students of color perceive that Whites can use politically correct racial terminology to shield themselves from accusations of racism, they often

code the use of the terms as evidence of caution, not racial competence. The act of checking one's privilege can be interpreted by students of color as mere lip service, and not indicative of true attempts at deconstructing White dominance.

In this section I explored the way students of color experience racial discourse on campus, and the judgments they make about how their White peers avoid and navigate these discussions. First, students of color believe that Whites are able to maintain innocence in racial matters by avoiding racial discussions. Second, when students of color broach the subject of race, they feel that frame these attempts at racial discourse as abrasive. Silence around issues of race, it seems, protects Whiteness from criticism. Third, when students of color perceive that Whites are being intentional about using politically correct language, they believe this language insulates Whites from accusations of racism, and therefore code those actions or individuals as insincere.

When students of color recognize these discursive strategies, they can make judgments about the motivations of their White peers. But without talking to White students, it is impossible to state for certain what attitudes or ideologies drive this discursive tiptoeing. For some Whites, this could be hiding their racism. But in other cases, Whites who identify as antiracist could engage in the same behaviors as a way of checking their own biases. It is possible therefore, that some students of color misjudge their White peers. I suggest that these individual-level judgments are indicative of the way students of color experience racial power dynamics on campus. In the next section I explore how the ways students of color experience White discursive practices can shape their style of engagement with racial discourse.

Political correctness in color: Differential impacts

While students of color are subject to the same norms of political correctness as Whites, they perceive these norms to operate in different ways. It is apparent to some students of color that being politically correct can be empowering for Whites, minimizing their chances of being labeled racist. In contrast, some students of color feel that being politically correct mutes their feelings and concerns about race. In this section I interrogate the idea that silence and politically correct language can protect Whites, while also preventing students of color from being able to publicly live out all aspects of their identities on campus.

Students of color learn through their personal experiences and peer narratives about what spaces are suitable for racial discourse. Here Rebecca, an Afro Latina student, talks about this process, and refers to where race is discussed:

> There is a sort of limiting it to a certain kind of space. Umm, people are not always willing to get in to conversations like, on the way to lunch; or like over the dinner table; or like at a house meeting. That would be like a huge thing, I think, for a lot of people to even think of even bringing it. With a lot, and maybe not just with race, but all with issues in general, but if you bring up, oh going to a protest, people are like, "woah, wait a second. Let's not get too hasty here." Umm, and so, limited to a certain kind of space, and sort of fitting in with that, caution about like not wanting to offend and not really wanting to say things you're not really sure about. In a way like, to the detriment of like a productive conversation.

Because Rebecca is met with resistance when talking about race or protests- an activity that might be interpreted as being radical or extreme- she adapts by limiting these discussions to certain social spaces. In the last section, some students reported that they only felt comfortable talking about race with other students of color. Rebecca may be referring to informal spaces where students of color interact, or cultural organizations that are designated spaces where race talk is welcome. In either case, some students of color have gotten use to limiting the extent to which they speak about race on campus, in order to make their White peers feel comfortable. Rebecca also recognizes the cost of not engaging in racial discussions, and acknowledges that

the practice of limiting racial discussions to certain spaces prevents the types of difficult conversations that she might consider productive. From a critical perspective, conversations about race challenge the racial status quo (Leonardo and Porter 2010). Therefore it is in the interest of Whiteness to limit these conversations to select and marginal spaces, such as cultural student groups.

Even students who are comfortable wielding race in conversation can be disappointed by the way their efforts are received. Jerry talks about learning this the hard way:

> I remember my first year, talking about reparations and people laughing at me at my lunch table… I remember they looked at me and they were like, reparations (laugh) – one girl, she hit me. She was like (laughs) you're so funny. I was like, (laughs) I can't believe this just happened to me… when events and experiences like that happen it's like, how can I trust when I'm talking to somebody that they're going to be aware of like, what reparations really kind of means.

For Jerry, fear of how his critique would be interpreted did not stop him from speaking out. But this experience of not being taken seriously caused him to reflect on how the quality of racial dialogues may be dependent on the context in which they take place. Both Jerry and Rebecca suggest that these are not discussions that can happen in traditional White spaces. For many students on this campus, the only places that offer productive spaces for racial discourse are cultural organizations where the agenda and norms are set by students of color, or informal spaces amongst students of color. In White spaces, however, students of color may choose not to talk about race, even when it is clearly relevant.

Incidents such as those captured in the above examples teach students of color what to expect when talking about race. For Rachel, a Black female student, they explain the hesitancy she feels to participate in racial discussions:

> I feel like there's a lot of 'just smile and get through it', or just kind of, again, adhering to respectability politics, or just finding a way to… just get by to the next day but not really unpack, umm, something that's problematic. And I also feel a lot with this University in

> particular, there's a lot of efforts to just maintain like a pristine, surface-level image and reputation.

This notion of smiling through an uncomfortable interaction suggests that students of color may mirror the insincerity they perceive from their White peers when talking about race-even though they believe this insincerity has different meanings for Whites than for themselves. White insincerity, according to some students of color, can serve as a vehicle of moral self-preservation that allows Whites to effectively avoid accusations of racism or being implicated in racist systems. But for students of color, when the same self-limits are placed on participation in racial discourse, this means that they are not standing up for themselves even in the midst of hurtful racialized discussions or interactions. Part of the reticence to engage, for Rachel, comes from what she calls respectability politics, defined by Smith (2014) as a politically moderate sentiment that separates "respectable" Blacks from more radical expressions of Black rage. Rachel makes sure that her behavior does not reflect negatively on Black people at large by avoiding responses that would be coded as militant. But while limiting her engagement in this way is meant to protect her racial group, Rachel also inadvertently protects the racial status quo.

This is a conflict for Rachel and other students of color who sometimes feel it is their responsibility to speak out when similarly uncomfortable situations come up. Rachel continues to speak about what factors are behind some of the hesitancy she feels in talking about race:

> If it's somebody who I don't know, I feel like I have to sensor myself, or act a certain way, or use certain words so I won't be ostracized, so the conversation won't go in the place where I'm uncomfortable, or feeling like if someone says something that I have to be the person to kind of check them, umm... and that's my responsibility regardless of what setting I'm in. Even if I'm trying to study, or like if I'm just trying to eat lunch, I have to be the kind of defender.

This is an example of a student occupying a dual role: the race-defender, and the non-agitator. Rachel feels that talking about race, or calling White students out for talking about race

in a problematic fashion, could result in her being ostracized by her peers. But this knowledge or fear of a negative response to her talking about race does not free her from the perceived responsibility to stand up for herself and her people when the situation calls for it.[3]

There are some students who would be unbothered by the idea that Whites around them are uncomfortable when they talk about race. Many of these students self-identify as activists and look for opportunities to talk about race on campus. For other students, however, the social consequences of talking about race so openly or critically are enough to give pause, and so they make decisions on whether or not to respond on a case-by-case basis. In one instance, Kim, a Black female student, talks about why she choose to not voice her discomfort at a White friend making a comment about a mutual acquaintance, calling him the "big Black guy":

> Sometimes it's hard for me to actually address certain things like that. But, I think one of the biggest things I don't like on campus is how some of the White people or just non-Black people feel so comfortable saying things. And, like you said, did I say anything... Like no I didn't because I don't even feel comfortable saying that… And l think that sometimes like Black people are more reserved in saying certain things about race or like another race, whereas White people just say whatever they want… they don't think there will be consequences.

This quote seems to be in conflict with the idea that Whites avoid talking about race. But this contradictory assertion, that Whites can not only avoid talking about race, but also make racially insensitive remarks with impunity, elucidates the way students of color perceive the racial power dynamics on campus, the way Whiteness operates, and the lack of agency students of color feel in discussing race on campus. Students of color believe that Whites not only strategically avoid talking about race, but also have access to discursive tools- like politically correct scripts- which they can use to speak about race in seemingly neutral terms. Furthermore, students of color believe that the norm of silence around race makes it taboo for them to respond

[3] This idea will be explored further in the next section, which focuses on academic and classroom discourse.

critically to these apparent innocuous comments. The imagined consequences of talking about race, for Kim, are different than the imagined consequences for Whites making problematic racial comments.

Along the same lines, Amanda, a Black female student, talks about how she thinks about and responds to White students asking about her experience at the University:

> They'll be like ohh, umm, like, "do you like school here?" And I'll be like, "not really" and they'll be like, "why?" and it's usually a White person I'm talking to and they are like, "why don't you love it?... I love it here." … And I'm like hesitant to always say like, "well, because you are White you probably like it a little bit more than I do"… But you know you don't want to come off as this like militant, even though it's not a militant thing to say… Anytime you bring up race around a White person unless they like understand they are going to be like "rwar" [roar]...so umm, so I'm always hesitant.

Amanda feels her race has a significant impact on her experience as a student, but is uncomfortable communicating this truth to her White peers. Doing so would challenge the idea of an ideal imagined university community, where a common intellectual pursuit overrides racial differences. Amanda's silence furthers this myth of an ideal imagined community and diverts attention away from negative experiences that could shine the light on ways the University could create a more racially inclusive climate. Amanda gives an example of another racial experience that was more explicitly problematic, but still not something she felt she could respond to:

> I was in the dining hall one time and these White kids were talking about Chief Keef[4] and like this White boy, like said nigga, under his breath, but like looked directly at me, and I was just like… I'm one person in a table of White boys. If I was like, "hey that's not cool don't say that," all of a sudden them I'm labeled as this like crazy angry Black woman… It's just like you have to pick and choose your battles... the fact that he said it was just alarming to me, but he looked me in the face, because like he saw me passing by and I knew that, he knew what he was doing was wrong especially in my presence… And I was just like, where is your head like, you are supposed to be an intelligent person but you're really dumb… there are just like tons of other micro aggressions that I just encounter everyday.

[4] A popular rap artist.

By definition, microaggressions are racial slights (Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder 2008). Whether use of the n-word can be classified as a microaggression is up for debate. Some research has operationalized it as such (Pérez Huber and Solorzano 2015), but it also represents a racial epithet that could also be classified as a form of hate speech, more explicit than a typical microaggression.

In this case, the student who said the n-word was reciting a song lyric by Chief Keef, a popular rap musician. One can infer that while the student may have known he was saying something taboo, he may also have thought he was falling short of using hate speech because he was quoting the lyrics of a song, similar to the way a student may feel comfortable saying the n-word while reading Twain's (1926) *The Adventures of Huck Finn* out loud in class.

This is an example of the informal rules of racial discourse being modified for White students, but not for students of color. Confronting the student for using the n-word could cause Amanda to be labeled, in her words, a "crazy angry Black woman." She assumes that because the student said the n-word as a song lyric, he may think it is clear that the word was not directed at her, and he meant no harm. Amanda seems to believe, therefore, that the good intentions of White students can sometimes override the social taboo of racist language. But good intentions do not change the way this language impacts some students of color. Amanda believes she could hurt her own social standing by responding critically, and suffered what she coded as an abusive interaction in silence in order to avoid fulfilling a stereotype.

Amanda's silence is a direct response to her perception of the campus environment, where talking about race is taboo. She continues:

> Like White people just don't get it and you, have to pick and choose whether or not you want to remind them that like this isn't some post racial utopia or something… it's like tiring and exhausting and you're just like, so as a result like you just, I think I just go to gravitate towards like Black people because they just get it more.

It is possible that making a habit of "picking and choosing" one's battles can decrease sensitivity to racial slights as students of color habitually rationalize their avoidance of uncomfortable situations. This would explain how willing Amanda was to ignore the use of the n-word. But there are also other variables at play that influence what situations she feels comfortable responding to head on. Students may choose to respond not when they are most offended, but when their response is most likely to be effective. In this example, Amanda may believe the incident represents evidence of a hostile racial climate. But she also believes this explanation would be seen as being combative by some Whites, who would explain the incident as innocent or a misunderstanding. When students of color are rejected, ignored, or ridiculed for speaking out about race, they may be less prone to engage at the next opportunity.

In this section I have shown that students of color and Whites occupy the same spaces on campus and are privy to the same norms of silence and political correctness around race. Yet many students of color are convinced that these social structures have a differential impact, by race, on the way students engage in racial discourse. While students of color believe White students are protected by silence, students of color feel isolated by it. Staying silent around issues of race not only allows problematic racial discussions to go unquestioned, but also demonstrates to students of color that belonging on campus may be contingent on the suppression of their racial identities in certain contexts.

Freedom of inquiry and the sanctification of racism

When I asked students how race was talked about in the classroom, a few told me that they intentionally sought out classes with a focus on race, and so regularly engaged in racial discussions. Most students, however, saw the classroom as a space that rarely explored race as a topic, but could actually feel oppressive when race was brought up. This was attributed to the

general intellectual culture at the University, faculty who were not equipped to lead race-based discussions, and uncomfortable student interactions.

Cristina grew up in both India and the US, has a strong identification with her heritage, and now is heavily engaged in feminist, racial and social justice issues. She contrasts the critical racial discussions she has with like-minded peers, with the way race is talked about in classrooms:

> There are lots of people who don't know how to talk about it in sensitive ways. And, uhhh, you see them, piping off in class, when we talk about race in class… I mean, you just have like, White males like really intensely discussing race in a way that takes away from the agency of any colored student, like students of color in class. Umm, making assumptions and just kind of being like, "one Black," and "Black people this".... Like they don't have the vocabulary… So many students here don't know, have not heard the word privilege, except in mocking context.

Cristina suggests that there is a certain type of language needed to discuss race. As mentioned earlier, privilege can be a useful concept for helping young people understand the structural nature of racial inequality, as exemplified by Macintosh's (1988) invisible knapsack of privilege analogy. But Cristina also points out how terms like privilege are used on campus in a mocking way, not as the social lens they should be, but as examples of politically correct terminology propagated by those who are too sensitive about race or gender.

Furthermore, when White students make assumptions or generalizations about race that go unquestioned in a classroom, students of color are stuck in a perpetual bind; speak up and risk offending their peers, or remain silent and suffer abuse. Rebecca continues:

> Minority students feel attacked when, umm, when people who are not equipped to talk about race talk about race, which happens a lot, and in classrooms. So like, in an academic environment, so like everything suddenly seems legit and it's just like, "yo, we're talking about this an academic way, anything flies, this isn't about sensitivity. This is about us discussing race."

There is a sense that White students do not tread as carefully when talking about race in the classroom as they might in other contexts. Many students of color explain this shift with the idea of freedom of inquiry, which is described as being an important value at North-U. Students of color believe that for White students, freedom of inquiry outweighs political correctness in the classroom, and the pursuit of intellectual discourse is more important than making others feel comfortable. Ideas that may be offensive in other contexts, can be expressed in the classroom as dispassionate discourse.

Students of color do not perceive the same freedom from the norms that keep them silent about race on campus, as they must still perceive the need to adhere to respectability politics. In the midst of classroom discussions about race, even when they feel attacked, they are expected to leave their emotions behind.

Ahmed, a Black male student, gives his take on how freedom of inquiry interacts with racial discourse:

> Being at North-U there's like a you know... be able to freely express yourself… You know, say whatever is on your mind type of thing, to come to a better conclusion. But I think there's a fine line between you know, being curious about someone else's' different cultures and … being disrespectful to someone else.

The idea that intellectual curiosity can do harm when discussing race is echoed by Jerry:

> We have people who are in the university who are – who want to push for this like, freedom of expression and I'm like, you know, I think there's an issue when we don't really want to grapple with what – what freedom of expression means, because it's like, should you be free to express bigotry and hate when it actually has – it has psychological – like, it can psychologically traumatize an individual? … I feel like the university isn't being very considerate and it's like, you know, your students – students at your university say, "hey, North-U, we're having this particular issue right now, and we think if you did this that it would make us feel safe on campus."

Jerry feels that the privileging of intellectual freedom of inquiry on campus enables Whites to discuss race in a way that may be deemed problematic by persons of color, while also

limiting the way students of color can respond. Engaging with the ideas on an intellectual level can legitimate what are perceived to be racist ideas and can be emotionally exhausting for students. And if students of color attempt to suggest that those types of ideas have no place in an institution that claims to value diversity, they are made to feel as if they are arguing against intellectual freedom, an ideal central to North-U, and no simply a problematic statement from one student.

The way students of color discuss their experiences with freedom of inquiry suggests that this campus-based norm can increase the racial power differential. In classrooms, students of color believe the degree to which Whites are held accountable for problematic racial views decreases, while the degree to which they must limit their engagement in order to not be perceived as militant or too sensitive increases. This power differential can be facilitated by interaction with faculty, as illustrated by Cristina:

> Some professors enable such conversations because professors are also ill-equipped to talk about race in a sensitive way many times, you know? And from what I understand, some instructors feel emboldened by the fact that they are an academic and intellectual superior to students. So they're just like, oh of course I can talk about race. Like, I'm talking about it an objective fashion.

The assumption that knowledge or critical thinking ability invariability leads to racial awareness is flawed. And at least part of the discomfort felt by students of color is directly tied to this assumption, which would seem to give the intellectually minded student body at North-U license to speak freely about race in classrooms without recognizing how racial discussions can be experienced as discourses of violence. Even when White students talk about race in a purportedly dispassionate manner, their comments deal with the lived realities of students of color. A personal component, therefore, is unavoidable. Without proper facilitation, these types of discussions leave students of color feeling as if their classroom was a foreign territory. The

facilitator's role is paramount, but Cristina shows us we cannot assume that educators always structure these conversations in responsible ways. Rachel talks more about the structure of racial dialogues in classrooms, and how they shape her decision to engage:

> I think in the classroom, umm, I think...personally, for me to talk about something that's so pertinent and important to me, I have to trust the people who are listening, I have to know that they're actually going to listen and going to listen...that they're going to care about it and not just wait for their chance to rebut. But, in the classroom you don't have that. So, it's either...I think it's kind of higher stakes, because on one hand you don't want….you know… somebody saying deeply problematic, or like false things about a group that you belong to. But also, sometimes you just don't want to participate at all, because you don't trust the people who are listening to even listen to you, or to even have an open mind about what you're saying. But umm, outside of the classroom, usually I'm already...I choose to spend time with people who would care and would be more sensitive so I feel like I can be more open and candid with them.

Here Rachel contrasts her classroom experiences with her experiences with her trusted circle of friends. She does not trust people in the classroom enough to consistently and honestly engage in race talk. Based on her personal experiences, she has judged that the classroom is not a safe place for racial discourse. The idea that students of color cannot trust their peers or professors to discuss race responsibly comes not only from personal experience, but also from narratives of peer experiences. Ahmed provides an example:

> One of my good friends was in a class and they were talking about Malcolm X and the professor basically called him a terrorist and compared him to a terrorist and then luckily he was in the class and he spoke to say something, but you know if he wasn't there then nobody would of kind of challenged that viewpoint.

Experiences like this, where a Civil Rights hero is likened to a terrorist, demonstrate why students of color may not trust their peers or instructors enough to want to engage in classroom-based racial discussions. A contradiction then, is that some students of color feel a responsibility to respond in these types of situations- and are troubled by the idea that these types of problematic statements might go unchallenged in other contexts. One can imagine the emotional and intellectual cost of having to divert energy from learning to defending one's self and one's

history in the classroom- or even of knowing that a circumstance like this could arise, and then that student would have to decide how to respond. Conversely, not responding could increase feelings of self-alienation if students feel guilty for not standing up for their race or ethnicity.

The decision how to respond becomes even more difficult given narratives of negative experiences responding in classrooms. For example**,** Tameka talks about responding to a class discussion that compared slavery in ancient Greek civilizations to slavery in the US:

> He said something that I thought was just way wrong and I – I raised my voice – I didn't yell, but I raised my voice to match his tone, I looked him in the eye, I was like, "this is not correct. You are profoundly misunderstanding this book," and you know, he's like, "wait, I don't want you to get angry, I don't want you to turn into you know, an angry woman. Just calm down, just calm down." And I was kind of like, okay so I'm having an intellectual argument with you, but then you disqualify my thoughts and opinions because you want to like, automatically subject me to the typical angry Black woman that you see on TV shows?... I was just kind of like, shocked – I couldn't even like, finish my thought.

Tameka saw this interaction as an indication that the student did not see her as an individual, and instead saw her as the representation of a stereotype. This is the exact response other students, such as Amanda in the previous section, seek to avoid. When challenges to Whiteness are deflected by accusations that ascribe stereotypical negative characteristics to students of color, students of color sometimes cope with silence, taking the insult in stride in order to maintain positive relationships with their White peers. Tameka continues to share how she responded in this case:

> I was kind of silent for a while because typically, my first – my typical reaction in that kind of situation is to kind of go off. I purposely did not want to become the angry Black woman that he had just accused me of being, so I sat quiet so I could find my words and we kind of moved on to the [next] subject, so I raised my hand and I was talking about the subject, but I kind of made a snarky comment – I was like, "oh, maybe I should whisper, because I don't want people to think that I'm angry right now."

Tameka described her argument as being disqualified because a White male student labeled her contributions as being inappropriate for an academic setting. In modifying her

behavior and curbing her response to this remark, which calls on gendered and race-based stereotypes to silence her critique, she reified his position, as if her silence was necessary to bring the classroom back to dispassionate equilibrium. It is significant that this interaction took place in a classroom taught by a woman of color. While the professor did not intercede, she laughed when Tameka offered to whisper in order to be accepted as an intellectual equal. Without sustained, consistent, and intentional steps made to ensure an open learning environment, just the presence of a person of color- even one in charge- does not change the ethos of the classroom or prevent or negate negative racial experiences.

In this section I show that privileging freedom of inquiry in classrooms can reinforce racial power dynamics when students of color perceive that Whites are given the space to discuss race with fewer restrictions than they may in other on campus spaces. Students of color feel that White students can, in academic settings, break color-blind and politically correct norms without social recourse. But for students of color, avenues of critiquing problematic ideas about race are limited in classrooms, where they face the pressure of not only being race-defenders, but also conforming to norms of silence in order to avoid being labeled too sensitive or too militant.

Conclusion

This chapter explores how students of color perceive racial discourse on campus. I make the argument that there are social structures on campus that limit the way students talk about race, including norms of political correctness and freedom of inquiry. I find that students of color perceive that White students avoid talking about race out of fear of being labeled racist, while students of color avoid talking about race in order to avoid being labeled militant. Furthermore, I demonstrate that some students of color experience the institutional commitment to freedom of

inquiry as a license to be racist for Whites; when problematic statements about race are couched within intellectual discussions, they seem to be insulated from criticism.

This work should not be taken to suggest that freedom inquiry has no place in higher education. Instead, these findings should help educators think more critically about the potential drawbacks of uncritical and sloppy implementation of ideas around academic freedom. In exploring how this value is operationalized at North-U, the ways it impacts racial discourse, and by extension, how it shapes the educational experiences of students of color, we see that freedom of inquiry can potentially strengthen racial hierarchies. Educators and administrators concerned with establishing and sustaining positive racial climates on college campuses must pay attention must to the ways biased ideas can be camouflaged within the rhetoric of freedom of inquiry. For example, we have seen President Trump's bragging about not adhering to political correctness on the campaign trail (Weigel 2016) evolve into a political agenda that is at times openly discriminatory (Cole 2017). It should not be surprising that the use of more overt racist language, which, as Bonilla-Silva (2010) reminds us exists to support racist social systems, would be followed by political moves that seem to hark back to back Jim Crow era style racial policies.

Institutions of higher education cannot fall into the Trump-trap and allow a preoccupation with freedom of inquiry to protect ideas that are harmful to students, educators, schools, and society. The arguments for freedom of inquiry are often framed in response to phantom challenges, as there does not seem to be a push to end free intellectual thought in higher education. Educators must face the challenge of constructing spaces that simultaneously provide opportunities for freedom of inquiry, whilst also taking into account how discussions pertaining to minoritized identities, oppressive histories, and lived realities can endanger students who occupy intersections of oppressed identities.

This chapter also suggests that the stifling nature of limited racial discourse on campus may give students an incentive to turn to the Internet as a social space that may be more amenable to racial discourse. In the next two chapters, I explore online contexts that structure very different styles of racial discourse. In chapter four, I examine an anonymous website that allowed students to post explicitly racist comments without needing to worry about how their comments would be interpreted as offensive by their peers. And in chapter five, I explore the way some online contexts seem to structure a more equitable racial discourse, where students of color as comfortable or more comfortable than Whites with engaging in critical racial discussions. I will demonstrate that the Internet structures a distinct style of racial messaging, and the norms of political correctness and color-blindness have less of an impact on the way students talk about race.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Color-blind No More?

How Undergraduate Students of Color Interpret and Respond to Online Presentations of Racist Ideologies

Omi and Winant (2015) argue that race is a fundamental organizing principle of social relationships in America: the pervasive influence of race can be seen from the formation of individual identities to the formation of social structures. For young people of color growing up in a racialized nation, race has a significant impact on quality of life: not only is there racial inequality in employment, income, education, and incarceration rates, but youth also have to wrestle with the social meaning of racial and ethnic difference. The already difficult process of adolescents of color finding their place in the world is aggravated by the prevalence of stereotypes and incidences of racial prejudice or discrimination (Spencer, Fegley, and Harpalani 2003).

In 2006 the MacArthur Foundation put $50 million towards research on youth participation in digital media (Ito et al. 2009). This is part of a growing recognition of the changing social and intellectual landscapes occupied by today's youth. The Internet represents a new and dynamic ecological context that plays an increasingly large role in structuring adolescent social interactions.

The Internet is a unique social space with varying sets of social norms and sanctions that structure online racial discourse. In this chapter I explore the differential expression of racist ideologies online. While expressions of racism have become more nuanced in many social contexts, contemporary theories of racism cannot account for the more explicit presentation of racist ideologies on the Internet. Because our understanding of how people of color experience and are

affected by racism is built on the assumption that they are primarily encountering less explicit forms of racism, it is important to understand how the Internet changes the way that young people of color experience race in online spaces. Here I draw on both in-depth interviews with undergraduate students of color and archival data from an anonymous campus-based website where racial messages were common. I explore the distinctive styling of racial discourse online, and the ways students of color experience, interpret, and respond to this more explicit expression of racist ideologies.

Findings

Part 1: Politically Incorrect North-U Confessions

On the top of the PINC is a picture of a construction-style sign reading:

> WARNING: POLITICALLY INCORRECT AREA: ALL P.C. PERSONNEL ENTERING THESE PREMISES WILL ENCOUNTER GRAVELY OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOR AND OPINIONS: RAMPANT INSENSITIVITY AUTHORIZED.

Below the sign were instructions for anonymous posters saying:

> Share your North-U related, politically incorrect thoughts and feelings. We'll say them for you, so you don't have to!

Through a submission link on the PINC page Facebook users could send site moderators their comments, which were then anonymously posted to the page. Posts were numbered so that users could reference previous posts in their comments. And while original posts to the site were anonymous, if Facebook users wanted to reply directly to a comment their profile names would be visible.

The structure of the PINC site represents an intentional utilization of some of the characteristics that make online communication distinct. By making the comments anonymous, moderators provided a way for students to separate their PINC posts from their real world

identities. As illustrated by the following post to PINC, this feature was hugely important for some users:

> I think it's a positive thing that this offers a forum for people to voice some of their most controversial thoughts without fear of character assassination. There are many lived realities on the surface of this planet. Using the type of safe, institutional language and rhetoric favored by the Provost or the US State Department does not always do justice to these realities. Occasionally, even the language and examples which we feel comfortable publishing under our own names do not suffice to articulate a truth.

It is interesting that while the poster laments the need to use safe language on campus to make others feel comfortable, s/he celebrates the increased safety the PINC provides for students who want to post offensive content. The online environment of the PINC, then, creates a safe space for a subset of students who, it seems, are opposed to the existence of safe spaces for those with marginalized identities on campus. These students are concerned about "character assassination," a point that is further illustrated by another poster:

> This page suggests to me that North-U students struggle to navigate a society extremely focused on being politically correct. In my mind the level of political correctness has reached the point of stifling discussion and debate on issues of race, gender, sexuality, etc. I can't have legitimate discussions with anyone outside of my immediate friend group without coming across as a racist.

One form "character assassination" can take, it seems, is being labeled a racist. In the modern world where we have *Racism Without Racists* (Bonilla-Silva 2010), the term racist is often colloquially reserved for old-fashioned, overt racism. To be labeled racist is to be seen as being morally inferior, uneducated, and backwards.

Picca and Feagin's (2007) two-faced racism theory differentiates between the way Whites talk about race in public, the front-stage, and in private, the backstage. Here the poster talks about the difference between their front-stage and backstage conversations. The poster intentionally limits racial discourse to the backstage in order to avoid what is perceived to be an oppressive front-stage campus atmosphere. The PINC page, however, operates in a hybrid space

that functions as both front-stage and backstage; the poster can publicly share the type of thoughts typically reserved for backstage interactions, without facing the consequences that are associated with those types of thoughts being shared on the front-stage.

In this example, the poster does not believe that their conversations about race in the backstage are in fact racist. Instead, this is a label that is unfairly applied to legitimate intellectual positions. Not all users agree, however, that what the PINC protects is simply a matter of semantics. For example, another user has a more radical understanding of the PINC's virtues:

> I hate when people argue against hurtful speech without actually knowing why. People presuppose that racism is bad and political correctness is good without even challenging their own assumptions. Furthermore, I hate how people are criticized for defending this page and defending freedom of speech.

Unlike the previous two posts, which both suggested that the racist label could be unfairly applied to controversial, but defensible ideas, here the poster suggests that racist ideas can be legitimate social positions taken in debate. This post calls into question the idea that PINC was created to foster dialogue. Instead, for this poster, the PINC page represents a protected social space where taboo racist ideologies can be communicated without sanction.

Not all of the posts on the page were race-related or offensive. Some posts were innocuous or personal, such as student crushes, confessions about mental health, or academic struggles. But when I asked students of color about the PINC page, it was universally remembered as a social space dominated by racist, sexist, and homophobic content. In the second half of the findings section I will explore how students of color responded to PINC in more detail. Here, I focus on the race-related content posted to the PINC page.

The following posts taken from the Confessions Page illustrate the tone of racial messaging that was frequently seen on the site:

> Every time I see a Black person with an iPhone, I reach into my pocket to make sure it isn't mine he's holding.
>
> I honestly love going to [a neighborhood fried chicken restaurant] and eating the fried chicken special, some watermelon, and grape kool-aid. Makes me feel like a true brutha from da hood.
>
> As if we need any more proof that Asians can't drive whether it's a car or an airplane. Maybe those pilots should turn to another profession, like cooking. After all, they really outdid themselves with that Korean barbeque à la Boeing today.[5]
>
> I'm predicting that the top three items sold at the upcoming Whole Foods store in [a Black neighborhood near campus] will be organic fried chicken, organic watermelon, and organic grape drink to wash it all down. The real question is, will they accept [welfare] cards and food stamps?

In each of these posts we see the expression of overt racial stereotypes. This is not the type of racism college students typically are exposed to. College racial environments coded as hostile by undergraduate students of color are more often typified by microaggressions and subtle racism (Yosso et al. 2009).

These posts also appear to be attempts at irony or humor. Research finds that White male college students make racial jokes often, but are careful to avoid making these jokes in front of students of color (Cabrera 2014). The PINC page thus exposes students of color to the types of racial jokes, comments, and stereotypes that are typically reserved for backstage interactions.

But while these posts stand out from the way race is talked about in- person, they are consistent with the literature on race-related communication in anonymous spaces on the Internet, where overtly racist and hostile language is much more common (Daniels 2013). What distinguishes the PINC page from the types of racial messaging that typifies some anonymous online spaces, however, is its connection to the North-U community. For example, if a student reads racist comments on a Fox News article, these comments may be hurtful, but they are also

[5] This quote refers to the tragic death of two Chinese students on a plane crash from South Korea to San Francisco, an event that was in the news shortly before the comment was published.

more distant. The posts could have been made by anyone, anywhere in the world. Students may make assumptions about who the anonymous posters are- uneducated, conservative, perhaps members of the KKK- the exact opposite of who they assume they go to school with. These assumptions about anonymous racism on the Internet, whether or not they are accurate, cannot be made about PINC posts with similar content, because they are presumably made by North-U students, about North-U students. For example, another post reads:

> Seriously WTF is up with the onslaught of Black people invading North-U? My first year, there were barely any on campus, and now they're infiltrating the [library] too (of all places.) Now, I'm not usually racist but they really need to stop being so fucking LOUD. Seriously, if I wanted to be surrounded by a cacophony of vernacular I would've taken the [train] down to [a Black neighborhood].

"Onslaught," "invading," and "infiltrating;" this language signifies that Black students are perceived to be part of an unwelcome group of outsiders whose presence is having a forced, negative impact on the North-U community. North-U is near African American communities and students receive racially coded formal and informal messages around safety on campus that symbolically separate the safe campus space from its surrounding community, which is depicted as violent and dangerous (Márquez 2012). This post suggests that Black students are perceived to have more in common with the dangerous other that represents North-U's surrounding communities than with, presumably, White North-U students.

An important point here is that this post appears to be written by a North-U student who is referencing a specific interaction with students of color on campus. Tynes (2012) differentiates between experiences with direct and vicarious discrimination on the Internet. While racist comments in the abstract represent vicarious expressions of racism, this post is an example of a direct expression of racism that targets Black students at North-U. I suggest that this type of

targeting makes the post more hurtful than random, racist posts that appear often in various online spaces.

Another post also speaks directly to the marginal social positioning of students of color at North-U:

> It's odd to note that minorities made up a higher percentage of students in the Intro Chem section in comparison to the General and Honors sections.

By prefacing the statement with, "it's odd," the poster frames this discussion as a legitimate question that is guided by curiosity, not racism. Nevertheless, by suggesting students of color are concentrated in low-level classes the post questions whether students are smart of color enough to handle the academic rigor at North-U. Research finds that students of color are bothered by narratives that suggest they are less prepared for college than their White peers, and may be less likely to seek help as a result (Duster 1991).

Narratives couched in notions of individual deservingness are typically representative of subtle forms of discrimination, but in this example the line between subtle and explicit racism is blurred. I suggest that subtle racism, like the above post that innocently questions the racial distributions in advanced classes, forfeits some of its subtlety when posted in the context of the PINC. Because the post was made anonymously on a site that protects overt racists it can be assumed that the poster knew that what they were saying was offensive. The Internet as an ecological context can therefore not only provide users with more opportunity to express explicit racist ideologies, but can also de-camouflage subtle racist ideologies.

In this section I have demonstrated the distinctive and more explicit presentation of racist ideologies on the Internet. The PINC page provided North-U students with a structured social space where racist ideologies could be shared outside of safe backstage interactions. This shift in the presentation of racism, from subtle to more explicit, is a surprising finding in light of

contemporary racism theories. In the next section, I argue that the distinct presentation of racist ideologies on the Internet has important implications for the way students of color experience and interact with racism. Drawing on data from in-depth interviews with undergraduate students of color at North-U, I explore their reactions to the PINC page, and how their interpretations of the page impacted their perceptions of the school's racial climate, and on campus interactions.

Part 2: Student Responses

Students had three major styles of responding to the PINC. The first was disillusionment, where students found that racial messages on the PINC page were inconsistent with their prior experience or understanding of racism and race relations on campus. The second category of response is characterized by a sense of disempowerment. For these students the PINC represented a new type of racism that confused their adaptive strategies for coping with racism. The third category is confirming, which refers to how some students saw the PINC as a form of evidence, proof of the continuing prevalence of racist attitudes on campus. These response categories are not mutually exclusive, and together demonstrate the way a shift in the presentation of racist ideologies online had a tangible impact on their understandings of race, perceptions of interracial interactions on campus, and the way they talked about race.

Chris is a second year Latino student in the sciences who is involved in several academic student organizations. Chris did not initially perceive race to be a major problem on campus. The PINC page therefore called some of his assumptions into question:

> Before the PINC, like I said there were a few incidents that I mentioned earlier, but I think the overall tone wasn't too bad. Like I had, you know, good friends, I had good spaces, so it didn't seem that real… So then when the PINC page came up, I just realized there are people who hold these things. Maybe they don't say them directly to people, or maybe they don't take action.

The "few incidents" Chris references here were highly publicized race-related incidents involving fraternities, racial epithets, and racially themed parties. While Chris did perceive these events to be racist, he saw them as being isolated events. His evaluation of the campus racial climate was less affected by these events, and more driven by his own positive interpersonal experiences. For Chris, then, the PINC called into question the racial harmony he perceived on campus. He is surprised that people who do not say and do overtly racist things might hold the same attitudes as those students who are behind the few racists events on campus. This indicates that the race problem may be bigger than he had once thought.

Chuck is a third-year Latino student involved in several cultural organizations, and is a member of a majority-White fraternity. He has a small group of racially diverse friends and, like Chris, has had positive interracial experiences. He says about North-U, "race shouldn't matter…we're all academics here." Both Chris and Chuck identify with the myth of the ideal imagined community at North-U, which was called into question by the PINC. Here Chuck talks about his experience with the PINC:

> [They] immediately just started posting just like vile, horrendously racist things and there was like a lot of people that were going like oh yea, like I totally agree with that... Umm, which like at [that] point its like these are... these are my classmates and this is like how they feel about like minority groups… this is something like that you would read about that like the Klan is doing in the 50s not like now.

While Chuck did not perceive subtle racism on campus, he could not ignore the explicit racism on the PINC page. In this way, exposure to the PINC may have accelerated his racial consciousness development. He was forced to confront overt racism, which contradicted his somewhat utopian views of what race should mean on a college campus.

Students who had a more critical lens towards understanding race relations prior to PINC were less disillusioned and demonstrated different types of interpretations of the site. Rachel, a

second year Black female student is involved in a number of campus organizations and actively seeks out opportunities for discussions on race. Throughout our interview, she emphasized that because she grew up in a predominantly African American community, she had a different frame of reference than most students on campus. For her this meant that she was critical of majority White institutions, including the racial climate at North-U. Rachel also talked about differentiating between White students who were allies, versus those who may be ignorant or antagonistic around issues of race. By engaging in this informal peer classification, she determined whether she could feel like she belonged in a certain social space. This adaptive strategy to dealing with perceived racial hostility on campus was made less effective, however, by the anonymity of posters on the PINC. Rachel elaborates:

> Oh, that was astonishing! I remember the first [time] we saw it. It was honestly unbelievable... I couldn't believe that people would honestly be actively submitting things, or actually seize that opportunity. And I thought too, it was so cowardly, because I mean, if you just have raging hatred or ignorance inside of you, but you wanna own it, then go ahead! You know? Like that's your life. But, for you to wanna play both sides and be secretly racist or homophobic, but then you still want me to smile at you when I see you [on campus], or you still want me to sit by you without walking away, or you still want to be welcomed into smaller circles of the campus community that are more [vulnerable]. Like, it's just, it was unbelievable.

On the PINC, Rachel was unable to connect racist ideas to specific members of the student body, and therefore lost her primary strategy for dealing with racism: the identification and avoidance of perpetrators. Rachel felt disempowered by the anonymity on the PINC, which she believed took away from her ability to make inferences about the private racial attitudes held by her peers, and code relationships with White students and campus social spaces and safe or unsafe.

The PINC was also disempowering for Reese, a third-year Latino student who is heavily involved in cultural organizations and has a history of engaging the administration around issues

of race and racism on campus. Reese is a student activist who was profoundly aware of racial tensions on campus and is engaged in conversations with the administration about changing the racial climate and responding to racist events. For example, in response to a colonialist-themed fraternity party, Reese was part of a group of students who wrote a letter and met with administrators about the North-U response. As a student activist, she feels capable, empowered, and skilled at interacting with the power structures on campus. Here she talks about how the racial messages on the PINC changed her view of her place at North-U:

> You asked earlier if I felt that I belonged at the University, and after the PINC I really felt that I didn't. That I was in a place that was unsafe for me, that I was in a place that didn't take what I cared about seriously at all, that really didn't even mind to try to care. Not only did they not care they were never going to because they didn't really want to. And the scary thing about it being anonymous is, then everyone was a possible person who had written that.

Reese's work as an activist was clearly defined when she had a visible target. But because the antagonists on the PINC page were anonymous, Reese began to see herself as a perpetual victim with a seemingly infinite pool of enemies against whom she was unable to protect herself. When pressed by students of color to respond to the PINC, administrators claimed to have limited power over the external website. The only concrete administrative response to the PINC was to demand that the moderators take North-U out of the page name. The makers of the site replaced the North-U name with the school colors in the title of the PINC, thereby still clearly marking its connection to North-U. Reese, and other students, felt disempowered by the PINC page because there was nothing they could do to remove offensive posts or confront the students who made the posts.

While the PINC does negate some strategies for combatting racism that require you to identify your attacker, some students thought that it also gave them different tools for combatting racism. These students argued that the posts confirmed the continued prevalence of racism on a

campus where the dominant color-blind ideology minimized its existence. Kim is a second-year African American student who works with the administration around issues of diversity and is involved with leadership in multiple cultural organizations. Her reflections highlight a different strategy for making sense of the Confessions Page:

> I guess [it was] enlightening to also know that there are people like that, like functioning just regular people out there like that… it made me realize that, I mean that racism is no where non-existent. It's still definitely prevalent and affects like how a lot of people think and it's also just kind of sad, like you never know like how you look in front of someone. You could be talking to like a White person that you think is your friend and they could be like dogging you out behind their back. Like that could be one of the people who are really upholding White supremacy on that page. That could be one of your friends, or your so-called friends and you- and they think that you're like garbage... I think it's good that people still know that racism is out there because a lot of people just think it's dead and that's like not even close to being true.

Kim was somewhat disillusioned by the PINC page, but unlike students who felt disempowered by the PINC page, she was able to identify a silver lining. The page is a clear indication that society is not post-racial or color-blind. In this case, PINC changed the racial narrative on campus, as the site made it clear that North-U, despite its elite, liberal, and "regular" student body, was not beyond the race problem.

David gives another example of using the PINC page as a confirming tool. David is a fourth-year student who is double majoring in the social sciences and race studies. Before the interview he communicated that he was heavily invested in having racial discussions, and knew he was interested in being interviewed when he heard the words "race" and "research" together. David is mixed with Black and Latino heritage, identifies strongly with both groups, and is involved in both Black and Latino student organizations. When asked about the PINC, David said:

> It surprised me that someone would come up with an idea like that but it then again it wouldn't, it really didn't surprise that people held those beliefs. So, it was

> more obnoxious and annoying but for me I actually saw [it] as more of a body of evidence to present to other people to say, "Hey look, all that stuff I was complaining about and talking about. This is it right here in the flesh for you to see or online for you to see, instead of you thinking I am crazy coming up with conspiracy theories. This is it right here." So, I guess this that's how I sort of treated it.

Throughout our interview, it was clear that David was familiar with ideas like White privilege, structural disadvantage, and covert racism. So despite the general absence of presentations of traditional racist ideologies on campus, he was not surprised by the attitudes expressed on the PINC page- even though he was taken aback by their open presentation. David used the PINC page as evidence of the continued relevance of race and existence of racism when communicating with students who were unable or unwilling to acknowledge subtle presentations of racism on campus.

Along these lines, Cristina gives an example of how the PINC page influenced racial discourse on campus. Cristina is a third-year Indian American student who is passionate about race and justice issues, as evidenced by her involvement in cultural and service-oriented organizations, events, and student employment opportunities. Here she talks about changes in informal conversations about race on campus:

> In some ways it kind of took the trigger [of] something as appalling as PINC for people to kind of be like, "Oh wait, we think racism isn't a thing on this campus. Turns out, it totally is… Let's talk about it." Umm, amongst ourselves at lunch, You know? Like, "did you hear about this shit? Uh, like, that's incredible; that's disgusting." You know? … People talk about it more.

In a paper articulating the linguistic style of color-blind racism, Bonilla-Silva (2002) suggests that language that can sound racist is seen as taboo, and that "because the dominant racial ideology portends to be color-blind, there is little space for social sanctioned speech about race-related matters (43)." But Cristina suggests that the PINC shattered notions of color-blindness amongst students at North-U, weakened the color-blind rationale for why race-related

matters did not need to be discussed, and led to an increase in the number of conversations being had about race on campus.

Discussion

Racial discourse throughout the 2016 election cycle has been more abrasive than is typical for politics and public discourse in the color-blind racism era (O'Connor and Marans 2016). This shift in language is not predicted by contemporary theories of racism, which contend that modern racist ideologies are more subtle and less harsh. Some of these changes seem to be related to the distinct way that race is talked about on the Internet. For example, far from the subtle language and silences that characterize many face-to-face racial interactions, each day there are thousands of posts to Twitter, a popular social media site, that use racial slurs in a derogatory manner (Bartlett et al. 2014). And not only has Donald Trump been known to follow and repost comments by a number of Twitter users with White supremacist ties (Kharakh and Primack 2016), but many of his comments around race mirror the type of coarse language that has become common in some online spaces.

This chapter suggests that contemporary theories of racism that assume a more subtle expression of racist ideologies, like color-blind racism, cannot account for the way racist ideas are expressed on the Internet. The PINC is an example of an online space intentionally constructed to bypass societal norms around what types of racial messaging are acceptable in public spaces. Anonymous students expressed racist ideas, not just in the abstract, but also about specific groups of students on campus, communicating that they were unwelcome additions to the North-U community. Furthermore, subtle expressions of racism made in the context of the PINC page were coded as less subtle than they might have been in online spaces. In this sense,

the Internet can both facilitate the expression of more racist ideologies, and highlight the existence of subtle racist ideologies.

I show that these unique presentations of racist ideologies on the PINC page change the way undergraduate students of color experienced race and racism. Some students were disillusioned, as prior to the PINC they took their positive interracial interactions at face value, and assumed they were indicative of a student body that was largely unencumbered by prejudice. After the PINC, however, these students were forced to realize that racism could hide beneath the surface of unproblematic campus interactions.

Other students felt disempowered by the PINC. These students had successful strategies for coping with on campus racism that were disrupted by the anonymity on the PINC. They felt less able to identify, avoid, and counter racism on the PINC page. And for the last group of students, the PINC page confirmed their prior-held beliefs that racism had always been prevalent at North-U, and gave them evidence with which they could attempt to convince others of this belief. For these students the PINC page brought subtle racism into the open, where more students would be able to acknowledge its existence.

These findings indicate that race on the Internet does not fit into the logics of racism offered by contemporary theory. We need new frameworks for understanding the way young people experience race in the twenty-first century, including not only the differential expression of racist ideologies online, but also the way young people engage with ideas about race on the Internet.

CHAPTER FIVE:

How the Internet Facilitates Responses to Racial Microaggressions:

Online Counterspaces and Racial Checking

In 2015 the Black Student Union at California State University, Los Angeles (CSLA) submitted a letter to the President of the University calling attention to the racial attacks and microaggressions experienced by Black students, and presenting a list of demands for the University to improve the college racial environment (Williams 2015). Amongst other demands for anti-discrimination policies and increased racial learning opportunities, the letter called for a new dormitory to give Black students an affordable and safe housing alternative. One year later, CSLA opened the Halisi Scholars Black Living-Learning Community, described by administrators as an inclusive but non-discriminatory space (Beaman 2016).

Other Universities have adopted similar strategies, usually as a response to the demands of students who are fed up with negative racial experiences on campus. University of Connecticut recently opened the ScHOLA²RS House for Black males (McGrady 2016), there is an African-American and African living-learning dormitory for students interested in the African Diaspora at University of California at Davis (UC Davis Student Housing 2016), and the University of California at Berkeley is opening the Andres Castro Arms, a "Person of Color Theme House" that can house 56 students (Berkeley Student Cooperative 2016).

These living communities can be understood as institutionally recognized *counterspaces*, or social spaces where students of color seek to not only avoid hostile racial interactions, but also actively participate in celebrating and affirming their racial/ethnic identities (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000). Counterspaces can include clubs, study halls, or even informal peer groups,

and are often formed in response to student experiences with microaggressions on campus (Yosso et al. 2009).

Microaggressions are defined as intentional or unintentional negative racial slights (Sue et al. 2009). They can reinforce the marginal status of people of color by questioning their intelligence, criminality, or appearance (Yosso et al. 2009). Experiences with microaggressions are interpreted as being related to race by the victim, but are often ignored or seen as being aracial by the perpetrator or bystanders. We know that microaggressions have a negative impact on mental and physical health, and performance at work and in school (Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder 2008). They are also notoriously difficult to defend against and respond to (Pierce 1995). For example, Yosso and colleagues (2009) found that victims of microaggressions are worried that they will be labeled as too sensitive if they complain about microaggressions, but also feel guilty for not speaking up in defense of their race/ethnicity when microaggressed.

According to some, overt discrimination is no longer socially acceptable in post-Civil Rights America (Bonilla-Silva 2010). Microaggressions, however, represent more subtle forms of racial insults that people of color must suffer in silence because they are coded as being harmless and aracial. Microaggressions can be thought of as actions that are filtered through multiple layers of stereotypes (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000) and are therefore connected to institutionalized racism: they represent the systemic nature of racial oppression as marginalized identities are attacked without room for reprisal (Pérez Huber and Solorzano 2015).

The final stage in Huber and Solorzano's (2015) racial microaggressions analytical framework is response to microaggressions, which they characterize as engaging in counterspaces, community building, finding ways to heal, and building empowerment. Building empowerment can refer to students organizing in response to microaggressions, like students

asking for a specialized dormitory, or other examples of reactive solidarity and politicalization in the face of racial oppression (Pitts 1975). This type of response questions the legitimacy of microaggressive norms and seeks change. But the focus of most research on microaggressions is less on how students of color combat the microaggressions themselves, and instead on the negative impact of those microaggressions of persons of color, and how they cope. While the latter is theoretically and practically interesting, it can reduce students of color to victims who are being acted on and who only resist the actions of their oppressors behind closed doors. I am much more interested in the former, in exploring the ways that students of color resist the ideologies that promote microaggressions and refuse to accept the prevalence of microaggressions as normal, acceptable, or immutable.

In this dissertation chapter I explore the way that students of color actively respond to microaggressions in online spaces. I suggest that the Internet structures a distinct type of racial discourse and gives students of color access to unique tools and opportunity structures for countering racial microaggressions.

Findings

Bonilla-Silva (2002) suggests that speech about race-related issues will be scarce in contexts characterized by the dominant color-blind racial ideology. This idea is consistent with the way students of color describe conversations about race on campus as being rare and largely avoided by White students. But students also make a distinction between face-to-face racial discussions on campus and online racial discussions, the latter occurring with more frequency. Because the Internet is a distinct social space with unique communication patterns and norms, including decreased accountability and moderation, online users may feel less constrained by color-blind or post-racial norms.

In the next sections I discuss characteristics of online communication that shape the way students of color experience online racial discourse and increase the agency students of color have in responding to racial microaggressions. Conversations about race online are more frequent, more likely to be initiated by students of color, and are both less bound by and more critical of color-blind norms. These discussions can include posts and comments made to social media sites, the sharing of articles or links to other informative sites, and are typically text-based, but can also be accompanied by attached or linked pictures and videos. Throughout the findings section, I use the term microaggression to refer to racial slights, racial jokes, or other comments about race that students of color perceive to be offensive, even if students of color do not use the term microaggression to refer to these experiences (Sue et al. 2009).

I find that students of color create and engage in the production of what I term *online counterspaces*, defined as online social spaces that structure critical racial discussions as students of color challenge the reproduction of dominant paradigms for understanding race, highlight and critically react to vicarious or direct experiences with microaggressions, and provide support for other students of color in the midst of what are perceived to be hostile racialized interactions. Online counterspaces are distinct from traditional counterspaces as they require less institutional support to function, are often racially integrated, structure a unique presentation of racial discussion, and can be permanent online spaces, but often are temporary spaces created in real-time around specific racialized incidents or interactions.

Finding Space to Talk About Race: Online Counterspaces

Tiffany, a Black female student, talks about the clear distinctions between online and in-person racial discourse:

> Compared to more face to face interaction, I think they talk about it more online, because I think obviously, you know, sort of being behind a computer is much more easier to sort

> of articulate your thoughts… you can sort of form an opinion, and sort of lay down your argument much more easily than if you're like in the heat of debate or anything like that.

Some basic characteristics of online communication- such as the ability to interact with others without being in their physical presence, and on your own time, not theirs- may increase the comfort level many students have talking about race. And students in the "heat of debate," as Tiffany puts it, are less likely to back down out of discomfort when they are more comfortable, hence the increased prevalence of racial discourse online.

More people talking about race means that students are exposed to a broader set of ideas. For instance, Tiffany continues to share how many of the online racial discussions start:

> The friends I associate with they're very like, "activisty" you know? So they're always sharing articles, like, "what do you guys think?" And also, here there's a lot of academic debates if there's anything going on in the world, they really want to talk about it and see other people's point of view.

Students interested in generating discussions about race on campus are frustrated by the lack of outlets. One reason counterspaces exist, in fact, is because issues of racial identity and justice are not perceived to be welcome in mainstream campus spaces. On the Internet, however, "activisty" students, or students who are racially conscious or engaged, have more agency in shaping and advertising racial discussions. They need not wait until the monthly Black Student Union meeting to talk about the latest Ta'Nehisi Coates piece. Instead, by simply sharing a link they can start this discussion immediately. And they may be interacting with a larger group online than they typically would in-person.

Bringing these discussions online has important consequences for how race is experienced. Rebecca, an Afro Latina student in her first year attends both Black and Latino student groups and spends a lot of time engaging with race issues. She laments the fact that on

campus she only talks about race once a week, or less. Online, however, she notes that race is "wildly discussed." She has this to say about talking about these online discussions:

> It also gives us more room to process. It gives you more room to keep thinking and to find space, because people are so much more willing to talk and also answer questions when asked like appropriately.

Like Tiffany, Rebecca appreciates the way she can take the time to reflect on racial issues before discussing them online. Most noteworthy here, however, is what she means when she says that she can "find space" online in a way that she cannot in person. On campus, there are few spaces where race can be discussed. For example, Rachel, a Black female student notes:

> If you would take the same conversations or the same ideas that you discuss online and try to put them in the school cafeteria or the library, it definitely... it definitely wouldn't be as welcoming of an environment. People seem unwilling to listen, and people usually, umm, in person like to deny that there is a race issue from what I've experienced.

Not talking about race reinforces White color-blind norms and maintains campus social spaces as being dominated by White culture and norms. In contrast, when Rebecca says she can "find space" online, she is referring to the spaces created by "activisty" students who, in sharing race-related material, are creating online counterspaces. Finding these spaces is important for all of the reasons that in person counterspaces are important- they affirm racial/ethnic identities and facilitate critical thinking about dominant racial structures. But unlike on campus counterspaces, which are typically populated by students of color, online counterspaces are racially integrated. The ability to craft mainstream spaces of resistance, visible to both students of color and White students, gives students of color increased agency in molding the racial climate of their institution.

Rebecca continues to discuss other characteristics unique to online spaces that facilitate the construction of online counterspaces:

> They have access to more resources to like back themselves up quickly. So you can just pull up a link. Umm, like direct someone towards information … being able to say, "this is what I'm talking about. You can't deny this. This is proof of it." So, I think there's that confidence in that you're online. Also, when you're online, you're not face-to-face with someone, you're not dealing with issues of like aggression, in like a physical sense, and being in a space where you have to absolutely leave. There are spaces, like spaces online where you, um, can just sort of step away from it.

Productive discussions about race can be difficult in contexts where both sides not only experience heightened emotions, but also use different paradigms for understanding race, and therefore talk past one another. For example, the dominant mode of thinking about race in ahistorical and individual terms limits the extent to which some Whites can understand the complexities of racial interactions, let alone racial injustice (Moffatt 1989). Having immediate access to sources and data, in this example, gives students of color the confidence and tools to poke holes in dominant paradigms for understanding race. Rachel shares how increased access to empirical resources and time to craft careful statements impacts the norms around online racial discourse:

> I didn't really care about grammar, but if you're on Facebook and you're talking to a [Mid U.] person, you should make sure that you have like a nice thesis, an intro, some citations... it encourages you to sit and kind of meditate on what other people say before you respond and type out a very thoughtful response, and make sure you have evidence to back it up.

Part of the importance of having the time to gather one's thoughts and carefully construct one's contribution comes from the expectation that your comments will be read by more people, who are more likely to critically engage with you than they would be in person. Another consideration is that it takes this increased effort, soundness of argument, and relevant evidence to counter commonly held folk beliefs about race. The normalization of formal language, evidence and peer critique, then, helps establish online counterspaces as uniquely capable of facilitating resistance to dominant norms around racial discussions, including silence and color-

blindness. Individual-level and ahistorical explanations for racial inequality, for example, may be less convincing in contexts where respondents can quickly share information about the structural or historical antecedents to various forms of inequality.

On campus, counterspaces are meant to be safe spaces for students of color, places where they can experience a respite from microaggressions. In contrast, online counterspaces are not safe spaces. Hank, a Black Male student, talks about how online norms structure racial messaging online:

> There's a certain degree of like liberation where you can say what you feel right and like people can scrutinize you but there're not scrutinizing you to your face. So, it's not as like harmful… it's not as like conflicting like if you were to say something like potentially controversial and people like call you out on it, like in class or something and then you are forced to defend yourself, but like in person… so I feel like online people are probably more likely to say like certain things… to give more like controversial opinions because they have like time to defend it and like look up statistics and like they are not actually face to face with the person.

The same characteristics of online communication that make racial dialogues easier to hold, then, also make it easier to share fringe or offensive ideas. Ahmed, a Black male student, talks about what he sees as the negative and positive of social media-based racial discourse. While the positive includes increased discussion, attention, and activism around issues of racial justice, he characterizes the negative as being the way many people, "hide behind the veil of social media to pretty much say whatever they want, specifically regarding race." David, a Black and Latino student, has had similar experiences:

> I see more stereotypes, more racism on the Internet than I do in real life. It doesn't mean it doesn't exist in real life. It means that it is tucked away in places and it doesn't mean who I surround myself with, you know, even though they may not be talking about race and even though our conversations are decent, superficial or whatever. They could be harboring or thinking a whole bunch of other things they are more willing to express like anonymously. And so for me, the fact that you can see that reflected on the Internet reflects, ahh, to a very large degree what society is actually thinking about and doing.

For David, the prevalence of racist attitudes online is indicative of how Whites really think about race, and this impacts the way he thinks about his superficial interactions with some Whites on campus. Research suggests that experiences with ambiguous racist events, where Blacks feel race could have influenced the way they were treated, but are not certain, can have a more negative impact on cognitive resources than situations where they encounter overt racism (Salvatore and Shelton 2007). This may be because at least with overt racism, people of color can externalize their negative treatment. There is greater uncertainty, however, around ambiguous experiences with discrimination, such as microaggressions. In online spaces, the increased comfort with which Whites can express their racial ideologies means there is less uncertainty about the salience of race in a given discussion, and some students use this as evidence to counter post-racial and color-blind ideologies.

Angela, a Black female student, also believes that people are more blunt and honest on social media, even when they are not anonymous. She has this to say about reading these online posts that might be considered racially offensive:

> It's a very interesting way to see how people actually feel about racial issues... In many ways it's actually kind of refreshing, because people can have like really honest debates that for some reason they feel like they can't have in person… it also doesn't mean that everything that people say is intelligent. It actually means that people have no filter… whereas you know you might be a little more careful, right, or a little bit more nuanced… in a front of person.

Not talking about race can be protective for Whites, as they avoid being labeled a racist for saying the wrong thing, and for people of color, who encounter old-fashioned, explicit racist ideas less often. Here Angela suggests that when Whites are preoccupied with not saying anything offensive, however, their interactions, though less offensive, can come across as being disingenuous. Even when online racial discourse becomes offensive, she at least feels that she is not being lied to.

Rachel feels even more strongly about the less-careful style of racial discourse she experiences online, suggesting that negative online racial discourse can fuel productive dialogue:

> The negative is much more harmful and if not checked, can be more problematic. But... if I don't know what you're thinking, we're not really going to get anywhere.

The problem, for Rachel, is not as much the explicit expression of racist ideologies, but the idea that these expressions might go unhindered. Unchecked, these comments can become normalized and, like silence, reinforce the dominant racial ideology. Rather than worry about the negative effects of being exposed to these microaggressions online, Rachel's focus is how, given the increased honesty about race that is seen online, these comments can spark racial discourse, potentially leading to individual or structural changes on campus. In online counterspaces, students of color are more at risk of being exposed to overtly racist ideologies, but also have access to a unique set of tools that let them identify and counter these ways of thinking about race.

Furthermore, students of color have more support in online counterspaces. In-person, microaggressions are only heard by people in the immediate vicinity, limiting the pool of people who can potentially respond, and putting pressure on students of color to be a race representative. Not all students are equally equipped or inclined to respond. Along these lines Amanda, a Black female student, says:

> I know how White people are on this campus and I know that they say things that are just blatantly racist and I wonder what happens when these like "Uncle Tom" people are around and they are just like, "I'm cool with that."

Amanda speaks critically of students of color who do not counter microaggressions, but the decision to respond to a microaggression is more complex than she indicates. In fact, at a different point in our interview, Amanda shared an example of a time that she heard a student use

the n-word, but chose not to respond because she wanted to "pick her battles" and not seem like an angry Black woman.

Still, her sentiment is indicative of the how students of color think about responding to racial slights on a majority White campus. As the only or one of a few students of color in a classroom, students have to decide if and when to speak up against racial microaggressions made by students or faculty. Many students shared that when a race came up in class, as the only member of that race/ethnicity, the entire class would look at them as if it were their responsibility to respond. Students of color are saddled with pressure of choosing between defending one's racial group, and offending one's peers by being too militant. Not all students are willing to risk the social consequences that they believe could result from their gaining a reputation as someone who takes racial jokes or comments too seriously.

In online spaces, however, this pressure is reduced. Cristina, an Indian American female student, explains:

> In the context of the University community, when people make racial jokes, I think they are uninformed. And if you talk to them, if I talk to them, and people speak up, you know? It's great. Because like our University is filled with people who will comment on a joke you make… Online. And say like, "hey, that's not okay and this is why," which leads to a conversation… there are people who put forth academic arguments that are flawed and it's very hard to argue against those kinds of people. But then again, there's like an entire legion of people who exist to argue against these people.

Because online racial discussions do not require participants to occupy the same physical space, nor be engaged at the same time, there is a larger pool of potential respondents to microaggressions online than in-person. While it is common for students of color to be the only student of color in their classrooms, they are never the only person of color on the Internet. Therefore students of color are less pressured to respond to microaggressions or to be the voice for their race/ethnicity in online counterspaces.

To further illustrate this point, Jelani spoke about a White student who made online comments disparaging the community surrounding the University and voicing how he felt unsafe with Black community members walking around or begging for money close to campus. The online response to these types of situations, according to Jelani, is consistent:

> There's never been a situation where no one has responded back to a comment like that. Someone always will step up and it's not just like a Black person to a White person, it's like any race will comment and start saying what you're expressing is, it's stupid. And like it's offensive. And like you really need to check yourself.

While the Internet may increase risk of students of color being exposed to microaggressions, it also increases immediate access to allies and support. Online, there exists a critical mass in perpetuity. And being a member of a group that is a numerical minority matters less in online spaces, where small groups can have a large voice. The decreased power differential between Whites and students of color in online counterspaces leads to Whites facing increased peer-accountability for making racial slights. Rachel speaks about the potential consequences of making offensive posts online:

> If someone says something really racist, you get a message like, "did you see what she said? She's in my such and such class." And then, they get “side-eyed” until you actually bring it up to them… That's a very, very easy way to be ostracized… you're not going to be able to still be accepted if you post something like racist or homophobic.

This outcome, Whites being made to feel uncomfortable on campus, or being less accepted because of their views or comments on race, is different from what we have come to expect on college campuses. Students of color in online counterspaces have access to informal sanctioning mechanisms that not only punish perpetrators of racial slights, but may also discourage further racial slights. I use the term *online racial checking* to refer to critical responses to microaggressions or the expression of racist ideologies.

Online Racial Checking

Several students told me about an online incident where a White student took a picture of a Black male dining hall employee sitting down and reading the school newspaper, and posted it on a campus Facebook page captioned with, "haha." Miguel, a Black male student who reported that he wrote 15-20 comments on the post, believed that the comment was laughing at a Black working class man reading- as if this were an oxymoron. But some online users did not accept this analysis:

> People were like, "oh no no no, you just, you just don't get it. It's cause someone is actually reading [the school newspaper] guys, like you know cause no one reads [the school newspaper]"… one guy was like… "oh you know I definitely think that this dining hall employee can read… maybe the fact that [you] took such offense to this only shows that you have insecurities about him not being able to read"… and I was like, "or maybe this is just racist."

One can imagine how this joke would be more defensible in-person. If the offending party was criticized for making a joke based on the stereotype that Black men can't read, they could easily respond by saying, "no, the joke was about the newspaper- I didn't even notice the guy reading it being Black." A person of color, whether or not they believed the explanation, might concede that it was a misunderstanding. To suggest otherwise could be interpreted as defamation of character- calling the person who made the comment a liar, or worse, a racist. And, as indicated in the above quote, the only racist thing about the joke, for some Whites, is the misguided suggestion that race was implied in the first place.

Online, these types of color-blind arguments are less effective. Persons of color feel less alone and outnumbered in online counterspaces, so they are less likely to be intimidated into accepting that the incident was a misunderstanding. Given this increased support around their understanding of the joke being about race, they experience less uncertainty about its racial implications, and, using the tools unique to the online counterspace, are better able to articulate their arguments that support their interpretation.

In this example, after about 100 comments, the poster said he had made a mistake and deleted his original post. While deleting the post does not necessarily signify a change of heart, it is indicative in a shift in power. For students of color, this event is not remembered as just another time that a White student got away with a hurtful microaggression or racist joke. Instead, students of color engaged in online racial checking by combatting the microaggression, denying the legitimacy of a color-blind interpretation of the joke, and demonstrating that it was ultimately not welcome in the online counterspace.

Angela, a Black female student, recounted the same incident and describes her thinking about why the poster could not understand the racial implications of his post:

> How did he learn that this would be an okay thing to do? That's a very serious question I have. It makes me think that he's not the only one… he might've said it was a mistake, but it reflects, in some ways, how he's been taught to think. … there are some people walking around thinking like that, and they're not being challenged to not think like that. …Is it partly [North-U]? I think partly [North-U] but also whatever kind of social circles that he's found. Either at home, you know, if he's in a fraternity or whatever; or if he's in other organizations... His other circles, right, have influenced that thinking.

Elsewhere in her interview, Angela spoke about how seriously she takes posts on social media, and how she believes they are indicative of how people think when their guard is down. In this example she suggests that the perceived appropriateness of the comment, on the part of the original poster, was learned in other campus spaces. In the online counterspace, however, claiming innocence does not absolve you of racial sins. Because the expression of racial stereotypes and microaggressions can go unchallenged in many on campus spaces, this online racial checking incident may represent the first time the poster's racial ideology had been critiqued.

Rachel talks about another example of racial checking that took place on the same campus website:

> This one girl posted, like, "overthought while walking behind a Black guy, what if I robbed him to just to be ironic?" And someone was like, "what?... how is that ironic? Like, so you're admitting that you expect a Black guy would rob you?"

Like the post of the dining hall worker, this post garnered a large number of comments. In this instance, however, the post was deleted by the student moderator of the campus page for being offensive- something that happens less often for racial slights, but is more likely to happen when a post is overtly offensive. Rachel noted that the consequences of the post extended to campus and said, "for the next couple of weeks when everybody saw that girl walking around on the quad, they're like, 'it's her!'"

As previously discussed, implying the criminality of persons of color is a textbook microaggression. And while colleges and Universities are known for making statements against overtly racist incidents that cause headlines (Mcintire 2015), racial slights like this, on the other hand, are more difficult to police, especially online. Even though we know online spaces are less moderated in general, this example suggests that online racial checking can function as a form of peer-based accountability that can carry over from online counterspaces to campus spaces.

In this example, as the poster was being ostracized by many on campus, an activist of color approached her in person to talk about the incident. The poster acknowledged how she was wrong, and showed interest in increasing her racial consciousness. Later that academic year she came with the activist to a Black student party, where her interactions with students of color indicated to Rachel that she had changed the way she thought about race. Online racial checking not only increases the extent to which White students are made accountable for microaggressing, but also may potentially be a part of an effective strategy for combatting racist ideologies.

Students who experience racial microaggressions in-person, but are dissatisfied with their ability to react, can also turn to online racial checking as a means of responding to that racial

event. Jeremiah relayed a story that began when he used the word "doe," slang for "though," in conversation on campus. A White student responded to him, saying,

> "I didn't know we were talking about deer, here," you know, and then I was just like, "well, I wasn't talking about deer. I was very clearly using a form of slang and that's how language works."

When Jeremiah attempted to engage this student in conversation about the incident, the student simply walked away and was unwilling to participate. At this point in the interview, Jeremiah took out his laptop and read me the online post he made about the incident, which had garnered over 100 comments in one week's time. After hearing the post, I told him that it read like an essay, and he responded:

> I like to write in a very provocative manner, so like, I write it – I sit down, I have like, a topic or I have like, an article, you know, and I'll put my opinions about it and then I get to writing about it in a way I know people are going to come talk to me about it for. Certain people that either agree with me are going to say, "I agree, but this is what I don't agree with," or certain people are going to say, like, "I don't agree with you at all," and that's where the conversation happens. These specific posts usually are written in a very long prose manner… the ones that garner the most attention are very – are written in like, an intricate manner.

Jeremiah was powerless to respond in person, as the person who made the comment was unwilling to talk about why Jeremiah thought it was problematic. In making a detailed, articulate, and critical online posting about the incident, however, Jeremiah started a discussion not only about this specific microaggression, but also to the way students think about race and speech. Using social media, Jeremiah was able to engage in online racial checking and critique the microaggression, even through he did not have access to the microaggressor. And although the responses to his post were mixed, with some support and some critique of his interpretation, the act of engaging in online racial checking prevented the microaggression from being further engrained in campus life as normal and acceptable. Had he simply shared the incident in a traditional counterspace he would have had access to moral support from other students of color.

But by engaging in online racial checking, Jeremiah created an online counterspace where he not only had immediate access to personal support, but also increased his personal agency by using his experience to engage Whites and students of color in a discussion that critiqued the prevalence of racial microaggressions on campus.

In another example, Stephanie talks about how a student posted an article about Harriet Tubman being put on the twenty-dollar bill. A White male student responded to this post, indicating that he was going to miss Andrew Jackson. A flurry of comments ensued with many students responding by pointing out how, among other morally questionable actions, Andrew Jackson had been involved in a genocide, and therefore was not a historical figure that should be honored by his face on our currency. As the student continued to defend Andrew Jackson, Stephanie says this of her own response:

> I commented something like, oh my god, I can't even remember what this comment was, but it was – it was gold, it was really good… a whole bunch of people liked it and I felt validated by the fact that a whole bunch of people liked my like, shaming of this guy.

The idea that a White male student can be shamed because he defends a White male American historical figure, and that this shaming garners much support (in the form of Facebook likes), is a shift in how we have traditionally thought about racial dynamics on college campuses. By engaging in online racial checking, Stephanie participated in the creation of an online counterspace where dominant historical narratives were questioned. She does not remember the words she used in her post, but she remembers the social impact it had, the support she received, and how in that moment the campus racial power dynamics were turned upside down.

Discussion

As colleges and Universities around the country decide how to navigate the thin line between free speech and harassment, the results of this paper suggest that students of color may

not rely on official policies to determine the way that they respond to racial microaggressions. In this chapter I explore the ways the Internet shapes how college students of color experience and engage in racial discussions, with particular attention paid to their unique online toolkits. I introduce the term online counterspaces to refer to the distinctive settings created by students of color online to talk about race and counter microaggressions.

Online counterspaces differ from in-person counterspaces in several important ways. First, online counterspaces are structured by norms of discussion that privilege evidence, logic, and clarity of argument- characteristics that are often missing from in-person racial discourse. Second, the creation, maintenance, and content of online counterspaces is student driven and can take place in the absence of institutional support. Third, they are integrated spaces, not clubs, groups or spaces accessible only to students of color. Along these lines, fourth, as online counterspaces are not limited by physical distance between parties, they include a larger audience than on campus counterspaces, giving students of color immediate access to increased support and amplifying their messages.

Fifth, online counterspaces can be either temporary or permanent. While there is evidence of students of color creating specific online counterspaces dedicated to racial issues, like a permanent blog dedicated to Black beauty, for example, this paper focuses on more transient online counterspaces formed in mainstream online social settings as students of color start racial discussions or respond to racial microaggressions. The potential for online counterspaces to take place outside of dedicated campus social locations takes racial discussions and critiques from the margins into the mainstream.

Lastly, online counterspaces are characterized by online racial checking, which I use to describe the action of calling out and critiquing racial microaggressions or racist ideologies in

online spaces. Given the distinct context of the online counterspace, students of color are more comfortable engaging in online racial checking than they are responding to racial microaggressions on campus. Outside of online counterspaces, or without experiencing online racial checking, White students who commit racial microaggressions in-person, intentionally or unintentionally, are less likely to be have these actions critiqued.

Online counterspaces and online racial checking increase the agency students of color have on college campuses in dictating the way race is understood and experienced. These findings add more complexity to the discussion of racial microaggressions on college campuses. Students of color are not indefensible agents who are merely acted on by Whites. Instead, with the tools available in online spaces, students of color are shifting the meaning of race, and are themselves deciding what types of racial jokes and comments are acceptable or unacceptable. In the absence of an institutional push against microaggressions, or a structured plan for racial learning for all students, students of color are leading the way in implementing informal sanctions against microaggressors, and creating online counterspaces where dominant racial ideologies are questioned.

CHAPTER SIX:

Digital racial organizing:

The development of racial and activist identities in online spaces

In the previous chapter I highlighted two forms of student-driven resistance against racism at North-U: online counterspaces[6], and online racial checking[7]. Here I contend that these online-based resistance strategies are central to the development of a new form of activism, which I term *digital racial organizing*. Digital racial organizing refers to online behaviors that are intended to stimulate growth in racial consciousness and the ability to recognize and critique racist structures, attitudes, and behaviors. Digital racial organizers see individual-level racial attitudes and frameworks as sites of activism, and part of their work includes breaking down the racial ideologies that further racial inequality, racial bias, and White supremacy. Their goal is to train their peers to use a critical racial lens when interpreting dominant social norms, public and political events, and interactions on campus. In this way, digital race organizers follow the transformative model of community organizing, which emphasizes building critical consciousness so that community members can recognize and challenge the dominant ideological frameworks that support unjust systems (Smock 2004). Triumph, for the digital racial organizer, does not need to be tied to a formal policy change, and instead can derive from the way students demonstrate or articulate growth in their understanding of the social meaning of race.

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[6] Online social spaces that structure critical racial discussions as students of color challenge the reproduction of dominant paradigms for understanding race, highlight and critically react to vicarious or direct experiences with microaggressions, and provide support for other students of color in the midst of what are perceived to be hostile racialized interactions.

[7] Online critical responses to microaggressions or the expression of racist ideologies.

While this concept has emerged inductively from the data, the language of digital racial organizing is not used by students in my sample. Instead, students consistently use the term activism to refer to a variety of online-based forms of resistance. I have chosen to use new language to describe these the resistance strategies because they do not fit neatly into existing models of activism, organizing, or participatory politics. In this chapter, therefore, when students use label activism to refer to new online resistance strategies, I code these behaviors as digital racial organizing.

Given that digital racial organizing is a style of resistance that emerges from collaborative activities, the level of consistency between community and individual-level understandings of these activities is notable. By this I mean that digital racial organizing is both internally and externally defined; by the organizers themselves, as well as by students of color present in the online community. As students of color demonstrate leadership through their consistent engagement in the creation of online counterspaces and take part in online racial checking, their peers take notice- especially when these activities seem to happen more often, or perhaps more effectively, than is normal for other students, Certain students, then, because of their online activities, develop reputations as digital racial organizers on campus, regardless of whether their online behaviors correspond with social action in the real world. This is an example of how the digital racial organizer label can be applied externally.

In other cases it is an internally applied label. Students of color can develop self-identities as digital racial organizers in relation to their engagement in online resistance activities. Some students may internalize this label in response to peer-evaluations of their online activities. Others have digital racial organizer identities that precede or supersede their online engagement in Internet-based resistance. Even then, their identities as digital racial organizers are reinforced

by their online behavior as they intentionally use online counterspaces and online racial checking as tools by which they can influence the student body and campus environment at North-U. These digital racial organizers seek to use digital platforms to provide informal training for their peers, including both students of color and White students, in order to raise racial consciousness and combat White supremacy on campus.

Whether or not students of color identify as digital racial organizers, their exposure to critical racial content in online spaces can impact their racial consciousness development. Students can be exposed to critical race ideas from various online sources, including those produced or circulated in online counterspaces at North-U, as well as sources found independently in the larger online community. Exposure to digital racial organizing content, then, can function as a form of racial socialization for students of color who become more critical in their understandings of racial inequality.

The digital racial organizing framework is heavily influenced by the organizing, participatory politics, and critical race theory frameworks. In the next section I briefly review relevant literature around organizing and online political activities and seek to extend these theories with a discussion of digital racial organizing. Next, I use data from in-depth interviews with students of color to examine the institutional context at North-U and the perceived futility of on campus organizing. I then explore digital racial organizing as a form of resistance that extends contemporary models of activism, organizing, and online political action. Finally, I investigate the influence digital racial organizing has on the racial socialization of students of color at North-U.

Background

Payne's (2007) *I've got the light of freedom: The organizing tradition and Mississippi freedom struggle,* discusses the differences between the two major styles of resistance seen during the Civil Rights Movement. Whereas the term *mobilizing* refers to Dr. King-style short-term events designed to maximize impact and media attention, *organizing* refers to a long-term commitment to developing leadership, and is exemplified by the work of leaders like Ella Baker. One of Payne's core arguments is that while the Civil Rights Movement is typically conceived of as taking place between the years 1954-1968, a historical perspective on organizing efforts finds that the freedom struggle began long before the 1950s. The highly publicized mobilizing efforts of the Civil Rights Movement, like the Montgomery Bus Boycott or the March from Selma, were possible because they had been preceded by decades of organizing work that developed the requisite leadership and organizational infrastructures that could support such large scale mobilizing efforts.

Smock (2004) identifies six models of community organizing, each with distinct visions of social change, methods of activism, and undergirding philosophies. The power-based model, or the Alinksy model, uses aggressive tactics to demand a seat at the political table. The community-building model focuses on strengthening communities by building the capacity of residents to shape themselves. The civic model focuses on strengthening formal and informal social controls as a way of preventing the problems associated with social disorganization. The women-centered model prioritizes the caretaking of families and children in the community. And the transformative model emphasizes structural-level problems that can only be solved with large-scale social change. These activists focus on training people to question dominant frameworks and providing an alternate vision for society geared around justice.

I suggest that digital racial organizing follows a number of core features of organizing work including building individual capacity, diagnosing and framing community problems, and organizing for change by developing a collective vision for society (Smock 2004). But the preponderance of Internet-based activism and political activity has faced much criticism, as detractors suggest they can represent a particularly weak form of civic engagement with less potential for real world change (Gladwell 2010). The production and circulation of political content online has been called slacktivism, characterized by displays of support for a given political issue, without the corresponding action needed to drive change (Kristofferson, White, and Peloza 2014).

Over the past decade, however, a growing body of work tells a different story about the ways young people engage in online political activities. One prominent form of Internet-based political engagement is participatory politics, defined as peer-based and interactive online political activity (Cohen et al. 2012). Participatory politics can include investigation, as young people learn about political issues through online sources; circulation, which refers to how information is shared in online networks; production of original content including but not limited to politically themed blog posts, pictures, or videos; dialogue around political issues; or mobilization, where online activities are linked with real world political action (Rundle et al. 2017).

Research coming out of the Youth and Participatory Research Network provides evidence of the real world impact of participatory politics. For example, Bond et al. (2012) conducted a randomized controlled trial with 61 million Facebook users in order to determine the impact of political social messaging. Facebook users who were shown a message at the top of their Facebook pages about voting were significantly more likely to vote when the message was

accompanied by the faces of several Facebook friends who had already reported voting. While online political messages are influential, they become even more so when they come from actual associates than when they come from advertisements or other generic sources. It may be that the effectiveness of participatory politics is related to its social dimension.

Cohen (2016) suggests that participatory politics can be a pathway to traditional politics. This negates the need to compare these online activities with traditional political activities, as if the two were mutually exclusive. While educators and researchers are optimistic about the impacts participatory politics can have on youth civic involvement, they do not suggest that participatory politics should replace voting.

Online social networks have been called a vehicle of democracy, as they give citizens more control of information and facilitate knowledge generation and political participation outside of elite interests (Meraz 2009). Participatory politics is a peer-driven activity that can operate without institutional support, which allows ideas and agendas to be shaped outside of mainstream institutions. For marginalized populations online spaces can provide an important opportunity for the production and circulation of counter-narratives and alternative resistance strategies (Brock 2007, 2012).

One example of this is seen in the diminishing power of media gatekeepers to control the stories that capture the national imagination. Groshek and Tandoc (2017) analyzed 4.2 million tweets about the 2014 protests and organizing efforts in Ferguson, MO following the murder of unarmed teen Michael Brown by a police officer. They used network analysis to identify important actors who shared information about the events in Ferguson in order to understand how social media changed the way news was being transmitted. Findings suggested that legacy[8]

[8] Journalists working for traditional or mainstream news organizations.

journalists and sources played less of a gatekeeping role than some actors who took part in, organized, or used social media to communicate around protest activities. The authors identify Deray, a prominent activist with a large social media following, as the single biggest gatekeeper of information around Ferguson. While the focus of the article is on shifts in the influence of traditional journalism practices, its findings have important implications for the way we understand how social media helps bring attention to issues of racial justice and opens up new pathways for political and organizing efforts.

Organizers like Deray are in a position to amplify the goals and activities of the Movement for Black Lives. We have seen other examples of social media being used to assist protestors, such as those resisting the Dakota Pipeline (Sottile 2016). I suggest that, in addition to amplifying movement activities, Deray and others engage in digital racial organizing, as their critical online discussions of racial justice can impact how their followers think about race and racism on individual, organizational, and policy levels. Indeed, Allen and Cohen suggest that participatory politics have the potential to reform "our implicit biases and instinctive aesthetic preferences (Allen and Cohen 2015)." Generating dialogues, from this perspective, can have an impact on the attitudes and political imaginations of the next generation.

While this type of activity is not explicitly connected to political goals, it is central to Miller's (2016) idea of transformative mobilization, which refers to the recognition that changing people attitudes is sometimes a requisite for engaging them in political action. Miller, an activist with years of organizing experience, tells stories of encountering racism when working to form racially integrated unions among working class individuals. Transformative mobilizing describes the way organizers had to work to shift, or transform, the way Whites thought about racial differences before they would agree to engage in interracial mobilizing efforts.

This example of explicit, intentional attention to racial attitudes in the context of organizing for economic equality demonstrates how digital racial organizers can play an important role in the development of undergraduates at North-U. Having access to a critical race framework for understanding their racialized experiences may play a role in the way students of color interpret, react to, and resist racism on campus. Shor (2012) discusses the role of critical pedagogy in developing critical consciousness in students, including the ability to question dominant meanings, ideologies, and institutions. In a sense, digital racial organizers seem to offer informal training in Critical Race Theory, which centers racism as normal and pervasive in mainstream institutions, norms, and attitudes (Delgado and Stefancic 2000). Digital racial organizing activities, including but not limited to online counterspacess and online racial checking, can function as digital sites of peer-based critical race pedagogy.

There are several differences between digital racial organizing, participatory politics, and organizing. While the participatory politics framework is concerned primarily with political activities online and their impact on real world political engagement, digital racial organizing adds to this with a more explicit focus on racial discourse, critical consciousness, and racial identity development.

In addition, some key differences between organizing in a traditional sense and digital racial organizing are best understood through the lens of participatory politics. Organizing is location-based, sustained and involves training ordinary people to become leaders, which can take place over months or years. Digital racial organizing, however, may offer less depth but more breadth in reach. For example, digital racial organizing may be less able to offer long-term mentoring opportunities or neighborhood or community-based social action. But because the Internet allows for organizing activities to take place across geographic lines, there may be fewer

spatial and temporal limitations in the communities and individuals that can be impacted by digital racial organizing, thereby widening its potential impact.

This chapter and dissertation focuses on race, but digital racial organizing in no small part relates to developing peers who are sensitive to multiple levels of oppression. The students who talk about combatting racism through online activities also talk about combating sexism, homophobia, and class-based inequality. While additional research is needed to fully explore the marriage of antiracist, feminist, and queer frames of resistance, I discuss the implications of this type of multifaceted recognition of marginalized identities to the extent that it is possible with my data.

Findings

There are three parts to the findings section, each with a unique and explicit goal. The first is to describe the organizational context at North-U, with a focus on how students of color experience institutional responses to racist incidents and the perceived limitations of traditional forms of resistance to racism on campus. Students of color perceive low institutional support for issues of interpersonal racial hostility or racial justice, and experience a high personal cost of engaging in face-to-face acts of resistance. This may incentivize the development of new strategies of resistance that use technology to overcome structural barriers on campus. My second goal is to empirically demonstrate the behaviors and motivations behind digital racial organizing, as students of color engage in online behaviors that intentionally seek to build the critical capacity of their peers to engage with issues of race. And third, I explore the perceived impact digital racial organizing has on racial consciousness building and racial socialization processes among students of color at North-U.

Part 1: Institutional neglect and the racial justice vacuum

The collective experiences of students of color with racial microaggressions, overtly racist events, and negative experiences with what are perceived to be half-hearted University responses to these incidents, contribute to the commonly held notion among students in this sample that North-U is not an institution that cares deeply about issues of diversity and inclusion. In this section I start by exploring the way that students have personally and vicariously experienced institutional responses to incidents of racial bias. Next, I explore the personal costs of traditional, in-person forms of resisting racial hostility and organizing for racial justice on campus.

Rachel, a Black female student, told me about a White student who made racially insensitive comments about Black women when playing a word-based board game. When Rachel called him out for these comments, things went a step further:

> And he says, "well you know, just wait 'til another word comes up, because I'm just gonna say like, nigger, nigger, nigger." And he just said the 'N word' like five times, and I was just...I was really upset, so I just got up and left and went to my room. But, I think the worst part of that incident was, because I mean, people are going to be stupid regardless, but I went to report it, and I like to my [hall director][9] and they basically just encouraged me to like talk it out with him. And I was just like I don't know.

As a result of this confrontation, and the lack of response it received, Rachel moved out of her dorm. This was not an isolated incident. Rachel told me about another Black female student who was called the n-word directly to her face, and also told her respective hall director about the incident. Of this second hall director's response, she says:

> They definitely did not keep it confidential. So, everyone who she lived with kind of found out about it, and kind of were ostracizing her about it for making a big deal out of it. So she wound up moving.

Explicit racist slurs, like the n-word, are something typically associated with old-fashioned racism- not the color-blind style racism or microaggressions that typify many majority

[9] A post-bachelors, part time University official that supervises RAs and is responsible for putting on events, and responding to emergencies, and incidents of sexual assault or bias.

White college campuses. Even when University officials seem more interested in protecting free speech than in protecting students of color from hurtful language, explicitly abusive language, like racial slurs, is generally not tolerated in mainstream spaces. In these examples, however, we see that University officials failed to protect Black students, and in both cases the students made the decision to leave their dorms rather than remain in a hostile racial environment with low perceived support from administrators.

These incidents indicate to students of color that North-U as an institution does not take their safety very seriously. After hearing this story, I stopped the interview for a minute in order to offer to connect Rachel with a contact in the North-U diversity office, who I was confident had the motivation and capacity to call both the offending student and the unresponsive hall director to task. Rachel seemed open to the idea of meeting with this contact, but the meeting never happened. For students of color, not only can finding administrative support seem improbable, but approaching unknown allies can also be difficult on an interpersonal level.

Reese is a Latina student who has been involved in organizing in response to a number of racist events on campus, serves in leadership of cultural organizations, and is part of several student-administrator groups geared towards improving the campus racial climate. She is the only student in the sample who identifies strongly as an activist but eschews online organizing activity, choosing instead to focus solely on in-person forms of resistance. While her perspective is not prevalent in the data, it provides some insight into the frustration associated with activist engagement on campus, which can explain why online activism has become a more desirable style of engagement with racial justice issues. For example, a number of students in the sample spoke about an incident when a campus fraternity planned a racist-themed party and posted about it on Facebook. Reese was one of the students who organized in response to this event. She was

part of a team that wrote letters to the administration, met with a group of administrators, and, after soliciting an official apology from the fraternity, was on a panel with a fraternity leader to discuss the incident.[10] Reese notes her disappointment with her experience on the public panel:

> There was a lot of Greek life people present in support of their people, which is really funny… and we had like 3 people on the panel who were Latino… like a lot of people who were there in support of Greek life, umm, ended up asking a lot of questions that were attacking the Latino community and the people of color on campus. Pointing out 'reverse-racism'… There was one guy… he asked a question at the end demanding to know like what we had all learned. Like, "we heard what the frat people learned… but what have YOU learned from this experience?" Which I think is an interesting moment in retrospect, because, uh, it signaled how I would like continue to have to answer to White men, and like, have to like make my experience valid.

That the fraternity apologized and changed the racist party theme may have signified some recognition of wrongdoing at an institutional or organizational level. Reese, and other Latino students, therefore assumed the purpose of the panel and event was for healing, so that both groups could move forward together as peers. Instead, the presence of large numbers of White students in support of fraternity life overwhelmed the panel members with questions that deflected from the stated purpose of the meeting. In addition, when a White student questioned whether the Latino students present had learned from the event, Reese was reminded of her marginal social position on campus, despite her organizing efforts. The event, rather than provide healing, served to reinforce racial and gender norms and power dynamics on campus. The fraternity had its hand slapped, but demonstrated that this was not enough to curb their behavior or change the way they thought about issues of diversity.

Furthermore, Reese talks about the personal cost of engaging in these organizing efforts:

> And it was really close to the end of the year, so that affected my finals, that affected how I did on my finals, and I know a lot of people in the room, like people like administrators warned me about that. Like, "you don't want to get back-taxed on your homework, and like suffer this whole situation working on finals." But like practically and in reality, I

[10] Organizers did use social media to plan their meetings and strategies, but the actual resistance took place in-person with traditional methods like drafting letters, meeting with the administration, holding a forum.

> had to be at meetings, and I had to do this, and I had to do that. And I look back on that time and I'm kind of frustrated with myself because I should have just... like if I had known how the rest of my time at North-U would go, I would've taken more time to just hit the books, but I didn't because I thought it was more important for me to work on issues that would affect my community as a student and as a Latina. Because ultimately, if I wasn't going to do anything, then no one was.

At the same time as administrators gave less than an optimal amount of attention to these issues, they encouraged Reese to do the same in order to focus on her academic development. Unlike the administrators, however, for Reese her resistance work was an important part of her racial and student identity. For her, working against racist acts and structures on campus was non-negotiable, especially as not many students make the same decision to prioritize issues of justice over their personal and academic needs.

In a previous chapter, I discussed how the responsibility to respond to microaggressions or other forms of racism is lessened in online counterspaces, because students have increased and immediate access to more support and allies. For Reese, the low perceived support and persistent disappointment associated with working on these issues on campus took an academic and emotional toll on her wellbeing.

In another example, following the PINC[11] and the racist frat party, North-U started a program geared towards creating racial dialogues, which included inviting a number of speakers on campus. Reese, who was on this committee, described the meetings as being mostly about picking the right posters to display on campus, and indicated that she believed bringing speakers on campus was like throwing students a "false life jacket," something that in theory was designed to help them, but had no practical application. Tiffany, a Black female student, shares her perspective on these events promoted by North-U as ways to engage in racial discourse on campus following racist events:

[11] An anonymous, campus based website filled with racist content, explored in chapter four.

> And I really understand that just exposure will really help, and these forums really try to do that; but the people who attend those forums are mostly minorities… it doesn't really help if the people that you're trying to target don't attend these things, or they don't feel like there is something they need to change, because if they think, you know, I'm not racist… Then they don't feel like there's anything to change … maybe they don't recognize that things that they say are these micro-aggressions, or something they say is maybe offensive to people. And if they don't have that sort of initial recognition, then there's nothing...there's no steps that they're going to take to try and address them. You know?

These forums then, designed in part to expose the student body to more inclusive ways of thinking about racial differences, instead function as counterspaces[12], populated by students of color. From an institutional standpoint, the logic of the event is clear; North-U can point to the events as administrative efforts to offer spaces for racial dialogue. But in practice, because White students rarely attend these events- except for critically engaged White students[13]- students of color are left wondering about their effectiveness in solving racial problems.

Students of color at North-U have experienced what is perceived to be a lack of commitment to issues of diversity and inclusion, as incidents of explicit racism are not handled in a satisfying way by the administration or other University officials. Furthermore, students who campaign against racism on campus are disappointed by the lack of response the administration makes, and students feel that the efforts of the University to promote a positive racial climate- like inviting speakers to talk on race, or hosting public forums- are largely ineffective. I suggest that given the perceived low institutional commitment to racial inclusivity, the high personal cost of engaging in on campus activist efforts, and the low perceived effectiveness of these efforts, students have developed methods of resistance not connected to the institutional apparatus at

[12] As defined in chapter five, social spaces where students of color seek to not only avoid hostile racial interactions, but also actively participate in celebrating and affirming their racial/ethnic identities (Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso 2000).

[13] An exception is the panel co-opted by fraternity members. Members of this organization joined the panel in order to reflect on an incident they are involved with.

North-U, and organizing around issues of racial justice is increasingly being pushed to online spaces.

The new activism: Digital racial organizing

In this section I start by exploring the types of behaviors students attribute to digital racial organizing in order to understand how this dimension of resistance is externally defined. Next, I examine internal definitions of digital racial organizing by exploring the perspectives of student organizers themselves.

Kim, a Black female student, talks about her interactions with racial content online, and the way she ascribes digital racial organizer status to her peers. With regard to her Facebook activity, she says:

> I haven't posted a status in like two years… I just like see other peoples comments and like articles, like a lot of people for some reason like to post articles and like they'll be these long threads of discussions… And it's just like interesting to see the comments.... Like things around politics and like a lot of racial things.... there are like some activists on campus that just have a lot to say on Facebook.

For Kim, navigating social media is a more passive enterprise. She is a consumer but not a producer of politically or racially conscious content online. She ascribes digital racial organizer status to students who have a different approach, consistently utilizing Facebook as a way of engaging in critical discussions about race. Kim goes on to reference more specific behaviors:

> There is this one person I follow who really is like an activist. This is an everyday thing… it's kind of annoying because he's crazy. But, um he's just always posting like really radical things. Like, his big thing is White supremacy. So he posts a lot of articles. Um, I'm trying to think of the most recent thing. I don't know. Like the other day he was just ranting and saying … like respect his opinion, and he was like, "I know what I'm talking about."

From a critical race theory perspective, dismantling White supremacy would mean changes in attitudes, laws, organizations, schools, and cultural frames. For the digital racial organizer in question, exposing the many ways Whiteness and White supremacy are reproduced

is a strategy for resistance. He is eager to be recognized as an expert, which could increase the likelihood that his actions will raise the critical consciousness of his peers as they learn to follow his lead and recognize and resist White supremacy in American institutions.

Again, the digital racial organizer identity is not only ascribed by peers who are exposed to digital racial organizing activities, but is also adopted by students who engage in these activities in consistent and calculated ways. Cristina, an Indian-American student, identifies as being an activist student, and says this about her social media landscape:

> My Newsfeed is very skewed. Like, there's like the 90% in the middle and there's the 5% on this side and there's the 5% on the other end. Like, I'm in that 5%.

Cristina sees herself as being two standard deviations from the mean in terms of her involvement in resistance activities- both in terms of the people she interacts with online, but also in terms of the style with which she engages. She describes the way she circulates content around race and her comfort with a particular style of online racial checking that is meant to preclude defensive responses. She tells of how these discussions seem to follow her in person as she develops a reputation for being a digital racial organizer:

> People like make fun of me about all the time. They're just like, "Cristina gets like 5 billion likes on like anything that she posts." You know? "Cristina's like the most popular, like blah blah blah." Like, "everyone listens to everything she says." So like, I'm one of those people who like, annoyingly, like all the time is talking about these kinds of things. And there are more people like that. You know? As I do it more, other people do it more. As people like me do it, other people do it more. And so just like, there's just been like a very sea change in the dialogue that we are having amongst each other as students about issues like race… And if this momentum keeps, then like, from like 10 years from now we're just going to be a much more sensitive campus than we are right now.

For Cristina, engaging in digital racial organizing activities not only has short-term impacts on her community by combating microaggressions and creating online counterspaces for dialogue, but also has long-term effects as more students become comfortable engaging in these

types of activities independently. As a digital racial organizer, therefore, Cristina is building the capacity of her peers to resist dominant norms around racial discourse, and those peers are putting their critical skills into practice- something which Cristina perceives is changing the racial climate at North-U, and has the potential to continue to have a positive impact on racial discourse. Her identity as a digital racial organizer is also reinforced by positive feedback, as the responses she receives can resemble popularity.

Jeremiah, a Black and Latino student, gets more specific about his particular style of online organizing:

> My activism – and that means, like, that's how I get active in these movements and talking about oppression- is about humanizing the oppression that I'm talking about. So whether we're talking about, you know, racism, whether we're talking about, you know, patriarchy, it's really just about understanding that these are like – even though they seem like abstract concepts of identity, there are real people behind these topics and there are real lived experiences of these types of things.

For Jeremiah, humanizing oppression is a strategic action that helps to make racist structures visible for students who may doubt the significance of race. For example, he continues to talk about how he believes some view the types of racial conversations he engages in as digital racial organizing:

> They think that people talk about race to talk about race. They think that it's a bunch of victim stuff. They think that it's a bunch of us, you know, us being activists – people of color and other people who care about these types of issues making it an issue, rather than it actually being a very real issue and so, like, all my work is about showing people how it is an issue, whether it's my personal experience with it, you know, studies, you know, conversations, articles, whatever it is – just constantly having this conversation to get people the resources to talk

Jeremiah is involved with online and in-person social action, and in the months following our interview helped organize a campus wide week long event focused around helping people understand how their social positions impact their lived experiences. His identity as a digital racial organizer, therefore, goes beyond his online presence. But while in-person organizing

events are less frequent, he takes his daily online conversations very seriously as sites of resistance. By giving people the intellectual tools to critique racist structures, ideologies, and actions, he enacts social change- because he views increases in racial consciousness as being a key outcome variable. The positive feedback he receives about these actions not only reinforces his identity as an digital racial organizer, but also gives him incentive to continue these types of discussions. He notes:

> I'll get a couple of different like, Facebook posts on my wall that are like, man, like, you always have these discussions. It's really good to read these. Also, I get a lot of private messages and that's what I really enjoy and that's why I keep doing it. I've gotten dozens of private messages that say, continue to do what you're doing, because like, they're reading these posts, seeing your responses and seeing other people's responses – it helped me kind of change my opinion about this all – like, I had this opinion and now that I see the type of dialogues that are happening, I see what you're saying in a way different light than where I'm normally predisposed to believe.

The research coming out of the participatory politics framework thinks about outcomes in terms of political action. To what extent does the sharing of information make young people more engaged? In contrast, digital racial organizers do not measure their success by the extent to which their organizing efforts result in political action like voting or protesting. Instead, individual-level consciousness is itself conceived of as an outcome as worthy of attention as policy change. For digital racial organizers like Jeremiah, the goal is to produce young people who think critically about race. If they adopt a critical framework for understanding race, this framework is expected to influence how they independently think about issues of racial justice down the line.

Digital racial organizing can take different forms. Rachel, a Black female student, engages in online racial checking and participatory politics, but also has created a permanent online counterspace that she uses as a site for developing racial consciousness:

> I started a group called *The Sister Circle*, and we usually discuss, like, race issues, and particularly race issues, um, related to women of color, or gender issues related to women of color.

Presumably, all of the participants in The Sister Circle take part on a voluntary basis, and are looking for a place to talk, grow, and/or practice their critical engagement with issues of race in a way that may not be as welcome in other online or offline spaces. They also may prefer a context where women of color- voices forgotten by many conversations about racial inequality, and gender inequality- are the only voices. As a digital racial organizer, Rachel facilitates the conversations in order to provide a much needed space for women of color to grow and process their experiences.

Digital racial organizing can also incorporate online racial checking, which students sometimes frame as an "intervention." Amanda told me about a time she confronted a friend, a person of color, who posted an image that she deemed to be offensive to a different racial group. She has this to say about what happened when she initially messaged her friend:

> Hey what's going on. Why are you doing this?... It like escalated really quickly, just cause I was like, "I'm trying to be your friend and tell you that you should remove this picture"... and he was like well I have Asian friends who said it wasn't racist and I was like I'm sorry... I didn't know that they spoke for the entire Asian population… he told me I was a racist, he told me that I was like a Black Panther. Which I was like ok with.

In this example, Amanda started by approaching someone she was friendly with in a helping manner- she wanted him to know that what he had posted was problematic and expected that his response would be to recognize his mistake and remove the offending material. Instead, he responded in a combative manner. Despite Amanda's efforts, the student was not ready or able to see how his post was offensive or to adopt a more critical understanding of racial dynamics that may have helped him be more sensitive to the people he may have hurt with his post. In his response to her, he made the suggestion that her overthinking his post was itself

racist and militant. Amanda's strategies for digital racial organizing are influenced by her strong racial identity, therefore she was not bothered by this labeling as much as she was disturbed by her friend's response to her good intentions.

Perhaps if this instance of online racial checking had taken place in public- or in the comment section of a Facebook post instead of in a private message- others would have been able to join in Amanda's critique, and her friend may have had a different response. Given the collaborative nature of online racial checking, as discussed in the previous chapter, we can expect it to be less effective in a more private and less collaborative context. Amanda chose to alter the online racial checking style, however, because of her commitment to making sure her friend remained comfortable, and because her digital racial organizing goal in this example was neither to publicly condemn the action nor creating a public teaching moment, but instead to help someone she perceived to be an ally modify his behavior without it becoming a public event.

Digital racial organizers have to decide what strategy for building consciousness makes the most sense given the technological and social context. Rebecca talks about how difficult this process can be:

> You never have to educate. It's never your responsibility to do that. But, if you take it upon yourself, if it's something that you want to do, you have to think about how you can do it… There is sort of this concern about being politically correct, and this concern about not offending everyone, and not making people feel like that 'White guilt', or like cis-guilt, or like male guilt…… But how do you make it so that people are OK with being uncomfortable? So it's...because that's what you need to...you have to be uncomfortable. It has to happen. You're not going to progress unless you are made to feel uncomfortable. I believe that.

Rebecca makes several points here. First, she notes that no person of color should feel the responsibility to educate others about race or respond to microaggressions- a responsibility students in this sample express regarding on campus racial discussions, but are less prone to

experience in online spaces where they perceive more peer support[14]. Digital racial organizers, however, are not burdened by the desire to educate, and instead see this as part of their responsibility as change agents. For Rebecca, this involves troubleshooting ways to engage individuals in uncomfortable conversations- which she sees as being a necessary requisite for growth- but doing so in a way that does not cause them to become defensive, which would prevent them from experiencing growth.

Division I student athletes generate millions of dollars for their home institutions but are not paid for their time beyond basic scholarship plans. Some have argued that there should be some profit sharing among college athletes in order to take less advantage of these young people who put their bodies on the line (Peebles 2015). In a similar fashion, in the absence of effective programming or educational opportunities around issues of race at North-U, some students of color give their time and energy to educating people about race, resisting dominant and oppressive notions about what race means, and engaging in critical and intentional informal education efforts online. This digital racial organizing has tangible impacts on the racial socialization of students of color at North-U, which I explore in the next section.

Digital racial organizing and racial socialization processes

For digital racial organizers, the acts of creating online counterspaces and engaging in online racial checking are intentional tools for educating students about race. Digital racial organizers also provide online spaces, information, and frameworks that not only shape how their peers understand the oppressive racial system in America and beyond, but also their own racial identities. For both Amanda and Rebecca, two digital racial organizers from the previous section, their own personal racial socialization took place in online, off-campus spaces. These

[14] For more on student perceptions of responsibility to respond to uncomfortable discussions about race in face-to-face versus online environments, see chapters three and five, respectively.

online experiences impacted their racial identity development, as well as their commitment to thinking about how to use their experiences to educate other students about racial justice and identity issues.

Amanda talks about how her own racial identity development was shaped in online spaces:

> I think one of the first things I like, social justicy blogs that I followed was like Latina Negros and, and that was really cool for opening my eyes and then like from there I don't know what happened. But all of a sudden I was following these people who were like racism is like not just like someone calling you nigga it's like... Black men being in prison- like disproportionately- and I was just like, "what?" And umm, it was just like this eye-opening thing for me. 'Cause I came in very like Stacy Dash… and now I've left and now I'm just very like fight the power.

Amanda had an affluent upbringing, had never personally experienced racism before coming to college, and talked about at times feeling more in common with her White friends because of class differences between her and her peers of color. For example, she mentioned that her White friends were more able to afford to eat at the type of restaurants that she enjoyed frequenting. There are not many opportunities for racial learning for students from her background at North-U, but she described Tumblr, a social media blog site that she explored independently, as an online counterspace where race was examined through a critical lens. Through engaging with these sites, Amanda describes the change she noticed in herself, moving from being conservative or not very race conscious (hence the reference to Stacy Dash, an actress of color and former Fox News correspondent) to feeling militant.

Part of the lure of these online resources is the way they function as primary sources that allow students of color to understand how race is experienced in different social contexts. For example, Rebecca, an Afro Latina student, talks about her experience with race-related blogs online:

> Honestly, a lot of my understanding about issues, largely issues of sexuality, and also issues of race, and issues of feminism, and issues of all these things, have come from Tumblr... it's a form of blogging. So it's like people's thoughts, people's processing. It's not like it's the be-all, end-all... it's not like a very official thing… people are giving real world accounts. So it's not like they're making things up.

In the absence of formal racial learning opportunities on campus, Rebecca describes informal online spaces that have shaped her critical understanding of issues of race, gender, and sexuality. As a college student, she recognizes that the blogs she follows are not "official"- they are not peer reviewed or validated by inclusion on a North-U syllabus. They are valuable, however, because they provide counter narratives and examples of how race impacts everyday in the form of stories and experiences of the blog writers. Some Tumblr posters may use blogs as a way of processessing their own experiences with race, with any impact on other users being purely incidental. But for both Amanda and Rebecca, the degree to which these blogs helped them develop a critical racial lens for understanding racialized interactions and racial inequality suggests that many Tumblr users may be using their blogs as spaces for digital racial organizing where stories are shared strategically in order to foster growth.

Cristina, who identifies strongly as a digital racial organizer, talks about how she uses social media, or Facebook in particular, and how it impacts her continued development:

> I use it to keep in touch of news, because friends post, umm, like news articles and articles and stuff. And, my Newsfeed is like hella liberal, hella queer, feminist, like, socially aware, you know? My Newsfeed is covered in those kinds of people. So they are constantly providing me new things to think about, which I'm very grateful for. Sometimes it honestly gets tiring, because everybody is talking about like problems, you know? Umm, but I've been educated, I've been linked to so much informative and thought-provoking content on the web because my friends have linked me to it because they post it on their Facebook. They're just like, "hey, look at this cool article about this," you know? Like, this about race, or that about gender, or this about this current issue, you know? Yeah, I found out about things first through Facebook, you know?

Through social media Cristina is linked to an online community of like-minded activists, which encourages her to continue to grow, and gives her the confidence to contribute to these

spaces as a digital racial organizer- whether through producing new content, or circulating critical content.

Another example of the developmental impact of these online organizing practices comes from Reba, a Latina student, who talks about an experience where an online blog post shaped her perception of race in pop culture:

> There was an article on Miley Cyrus' new song, well it's not new anymore, but "*We Can't Stop"* and the video, and I remember watching the video and being kind of disgusted. I was like, "what is this? This is so stupid and weird." And then I remember there being an article about it in *Jezebel*, I think online, and then a friend posted like, or took some quotes out of it and said, "this article is, you know, pretty accurate. Like, Miley Cyrus is using Black culture as an accessory." And I was like you know what, that's basically what my reaction was, but you put it into words for me.

The *We Can't Stop* video was heavily criticized for its portrayal of Black women dancing, a critique compounded by the way Miley Cyrus appropriated and profited off of becoming known for twerking[15]. Reba was unable to articulate her discomfort with these images until, through the sharing of an online critique, she gained access to a style of interpretive framing that allowed her to view this media through a critical racial lens. In another example, Sara, a Black female student talks about how similar experiences with online content gave her the language to understand some of her own personal experiences with race:

> I watched this YouTube video about um, I can't remember the woman's name... she was like a, she was a speaker and she was talking about like stereotypes that people have about Black women. Um, and the last one she brought up was like, the stereotype of the strong Black women. And I hadn't really, like recognized that that was a thing. But then I remembered you know, something my roommate had said to me earlier and it was about like how I was so strong... and I was like I'm not... and she said you know like I've never seen you cry and you're such a strong person. And I was like.. I don't really think so but... what have I really done to merit that, except for the color of my skin.

In this example, Sara reveals a microaggression she experienced- but may not have coded as a racial microaggression when it occurred. She thought it was strange that she was told

[15] A dance originating in Black and hip hop culture that involves squatting and shaking the hips.

she was strong enough to warrant discussion, but did not connect that experience to racial difference or ignorance. And because the microaggression occurred in private, and Sara may not have shared it with others, she did not have access to people who would help her understand the racial dimensions of such a statement. While the incident did not take place in an online counterspace, and so the microaggression was not checked, through digital racial organizing Sara was exposed to a framework that helped her reinterpret her past experiences, and she was able to understand their racial implications in hindsight.

Another example of how digital racial organizing can impact racial socialization comes from Angela, a Black female student, who sees her role as being someone who addresses analytical blindspots or weaknesses that she notices in the way her peers discuss race online. She says this about what she learns from seeing racial ignorance in online spaces:

> And the one thing you realize is that there's still a lot of work to be done, in terms of how people think about race, uh, and think about other racial groups. Umm, a lot of people aren't, you know, privy to the whole like racial construction thing. I just assumed that everyone knew that race was a social construction.

It is not clear from this statement whether Angela is referring to White students or students of color. Just as online counterspaces are integrated, as opposed to the typical in-person counterspace populated only by students of color, these online organizing efforts take place in integrated contexts, and can be directed at having positive impacts on the racial consciousness development of White students, and students of color. This can also be contrasted with the North-U sponsored spaces for racial dialogues, which are typically populated by students of color. While my analysis of the socializing impacts of digital racial organizing centers the experiences of students of color, it is important to note that digital racial organizers are interested in developing critical racial consciousness across demographic lines.

For Angela, one way of developing the capacity of her peers to understand and critique race, is by introducing them to the idea that race is a social construction. Angela goes on to give an example of a time she attempted to this lesson to a student who had made a comment on an article about worldwide beauty, suggesting that African women were not beautiful:

> You know, and I was trying to kind of educate him...of course I used the beauty is a social construction argument, and he was like, "what are you talking about?!" And then I used words like, you know, privilege, and you know, Western notions of beauty, or whatever. And he was like, "Privilege, racism...how am I being racist? What are you talking about?... I'm just stating my opinion,"

In this example of online racial checking, Angela did more than simply let the poster know his comment was offensive. Her attempt to explain how one's beauty preferences could be influenced by societal standards rooted in racism and inequality is indicative of an interest in having a changing influence on the poster's thinking about race and beauty. Angela noted that "there was no convincing this guy," and was hurt by his inability to recognize how his personal preferences were both offensive and connected to racism. She ultimately decided, however, that his lack of his response was less important than how other people experienced the discussion. Of the original poster's response, Angela says, "it didn't matter because they already agreed with me." They, in this quote, refers to other people who commented on the back and forth between Angela and the poster. She continued to talk about how other students responded to her comments:

> Actually the comment that I made ended up...most, you know, or a lot of people agreed with it. They liked the comment or whatever. a lot of people, um, really think that African people are just inherently not good looking. Because that kind of belief, I mean...there are a lot of African-Americans who don't think they're beautiful as a result of that, and would rather… aspire to 'Whiteness' in various ways… it promotes self-hatred.

So despite the lack of response from the target of her consciousness raising efforts, other actors witnessed and were influenced by the interaction. The positive feedback Angela received

let her know that her digital racial organizing was successful, and worked to counter the type of self-hatred that might result from students of color internalizing the poster's sentiment that Blackness was not beautiful.

Digital racial organizing can have a socializing impact on students when critical racial content is circulated through online social networks, or when they find online counterspaces, like blogs, where new content is being produced. In this example, however, Amanda uses online racial checking as a way to not just counter a microaggression, but also provide a learning opportunity for the microaggressor, and the students who witnessed the discussion.

Discussion

On many social media websites, users can use hashtags (words proceeded with the "#" symbol) as ways to organize information. By clicking on the hashtag, social media users are able to see other users' posts using the same hashtag, whether or not they were in each other's social networks outside of the hashtag. Hashtags can be used to file comments, and place posts in a trending hashtag-based conversation, or performatively, as the hashtag can serve as a symbol of the subject of the post (Bonilla and Rosa 2015).

There are several hashtags that have characterized organizing efforts in the movement for Black lives in the past few years, including #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and #staywoke. The #staywoke hashtage refers to a state of racial, political, and social awareness. Being *woke* is both a state and process, as it refers to a critical framework for viewing the world, but staying woke, and maintaining that state, necessitates continuous growth and critique of dynamic structures, ideologies, and events. In fact, #staywoke has been used as a title of a documentary on the Movement for Black Lives, and is also the name of the group that published the resistance manual- an online, open-sourced collection of resources around a number of social justice and

policy related issues, including police violence, education reform, and health care policy ("Resistance Manual" 2017).

In this chapter I examine the process of becoming woke among undergraduate students of color at North-U. How does one become woke? What actors and social forces are involved in this process? In the previous chapter, I discussed innovative strategies for counting microaggressions in online spaces, including the formation of online counterspaces, defined as online social spaces that structure critical racial discussions as students of color challenge the reproduction of dominant paradigms for understanding race, highlight and critically react to vicarious or direct experiences with microaggressions, and provide support for other students of color in the midst of what are perceived to be hostile racialized interactions; and online racial checking, which refers to critical responses to microaggressions or the expression of racist ideologies.

In this chapter I suggest that these resistance strategies are crucial for both racial and activist identity development. Through digital racial organizing, students gain a critical understanding of how race operates in different contexts, and are better able to understand macro-level racial inequality, including institutions and ideologies, but also are able to use these frames to better understand their own experiences with race. For digital racial organizers, online racial checking is a tool, online counterspaces are the sites of resistance, participatory politics is the method, and organizing is the ultimate goal as students of color invest in the consciousness development of their peers at North-U.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Conclusion

For a time, many Whites chose to stop telling us they were racist. Surveys on racial attitudes have shown consistent declines in prejudice over the past fifty years (Krysan and Moberg 2016), and overt racism is taboo in many contexts (Bonilla-Silva 2002). But over the past few years we have seen a resurgence of White nationalism – under the guise of the "Alt-Right" – which does not fit with the way scholars have understood racism to operate in the post-Civil Rights Movement America. We have been thinking about how to combat hidden, subversive, systemic racism for so many years that we forgot what it was like to have someone yell in our children's faces, "go back to Africa!" Or, these days, "stay behind that wall in Mexico!"

Perhaps that is why the Left could not figure out what to do with Trump except to call him crazy, or a bigot. For many on the Left, the idea that Americans would support Trump given his *openly* racist rhetoric was unthinkable. Nevertheless, Trump has assumed the office of the President, and many White supremacists groups have united in their support of his administration (Hunter 2017). This is troubling; do they know, better than we, what Trump means when he promises to "Make America Great Again" or put "America First?"

The first months of Trump's administration have shown us that he means to follow through on many of his far-Right promises. As environmental, educational, and health programs and policies are defunded, the fears that our nation would regress under his leadership seem to be have been realized, at least in part. But at the same time, as our nation's leadership seems to take a step backward, resistance movements are making strong pushes forward.

For example, in April of 2017 Pepsi published a commercial that showed images of protests, but ended with a White woman handing a police officer a drink – as if this act was going to solve the racial justice problems glibly alluded to in the video (Victor 2017). Within hours, the ad had been pulled, as digital racial organizers on social media engaged in online racial checking and critiqued the way a corporation was misusing images of Black resistance to sell soft drinks.

So while our country's leadership is at the very least associated with overtly discriminatory positions and policies, we are also witnessing the amplification of critical ideas about racial justice and resistance activities, often via social media. How do we make sense of this contradiction? I suggest that the current moment – with strong winds blowing from both the Left and the Right – can best be interpreted using a framework that centralizes technology as a mediator of ideas, human connections, and both public and private discourse. This dissertation uses data from one college campus, but the findings can be used to more broadly elucidate the pathways by which the ways Americans talk about race have changed in online spaces.

In this concluding chapter I reflect on the lessons learned at North-U and use them to highlight how the Internet has facilitated a fundamental shift in the way we experience and talk about race. First, I underscore some of the antecedents to this shift in context, including how the norms that guide racial discourse can be perceived as limiting for both Whites and people of color. Second, I explore the mechanisms of online communication that enable changes in the style and substance of racial discourse. Finally, I look at the repercussions of these changes in discursive styles and strategies on the current social and political moment, including the increased visibility of both White supremacy and movements for racial justice.

Antecedents

Bonilla-Silva (2002) suggests that overtly racist language is frowned upon in contexts characterized by the color-blind ideology. The virulence of color-blind racism lies in its ability to appear innocuous through an avoidance of taboo language, while simultaneously supporting systems of racial inequality. Color-blind racists minimize racism and credit racial inequality to individual or cultural differences, which legitimates racist systems and institutions.

But the self-proclaimed anti-"political correctness" (PC) crowd, including but not limited to the Alt-Right, has taught us that we may have overestimated the dominance of the color-blind ideology. As evidenced by the popular support of Trump's refusal to talk nice about minoritized populations, many Americans are annoyed at the idea that they have to pretend to not see race. This is one point of agreement between the antiracist crowd and the anti-PC crowd – both are tired of people pretending like race does not exist or matter. There are of course different motivations behind wanting to eschew color-blindness, with the Alt-Right wanting to make racial differences more distinct, while antiracists want to highlight and ameliorate racial inequities.

I suggest that color-blind racists and anti-PC racists are opposite sides of the same coin. For students and people of color, interactions with either side can be jarring and painful. Color-blind racism may not be as explicit as open discrimination or racial insults, but subtle racial slights still hurt.

On campus at North-U, the color-blind ideology and norms of political correctness work together to keep racial discourse to a minimum. This is something I explore in chapter three, as I follow the ways Whites are able to carefully select the contexts in which they engage in racial discourse. Students of color perceive that Whites are most comfortable talking about race in

classrooms where the high value placed on freedom of inquiry takes precedence over concerns with being PC, or avoiding language or ideas that can be offensive or hurtful.

The point I want to stress is that the norms that structure both of these frames for thinking about racial differences – color-blindness and political correctness – are turned upside down by the Internet. In many online spaces, neither political correctness nor color-blindness is able to function as in face-to-face interactions. This shift in context, and the corresponding changes in norms and patterns of behavior, creates pathways for changes in racial discourse in online spaces.

Mechanisms

Throughout this dissertation I have discussed a number of the characteristics of computer-mediated communication that can shape how people talk about race online, including increased potential for anonymity, a perceived departure from social norms, and the ability to amplify marginal viewpoints. Technology has changed not only how racism is expressed and experienced, but also the ways people respond to racism and racial discussions.

In chapter four, I use the PINC as an example of how online spaces can be crafted in order to bypass the norms that have traditionally restricted offensive speech in public spaces. The website used an anonymous posting system to alleviate student fears that communicating their *true* feelings on race could damage their reputations on campus. What resulted was an online social setting where racist ideologies were expressed in a more explicit manner than students of color had grown accustomed to on a campus typified by PC interactions.

The ways students responded to the PINC site offer some insight into our current social and political moment. First, while much of the campus at North-U was outraged by the website, there was clearly a segment of the student body that felt relieved by its existence. PINC users

who discussed *why* they were attracted to the site told a story of feeling stifled on campus, as if their ideas and perspectives were unwelcome. The PINC empowered the anti-PC contingent on campus, and some participating students may have felt that their taboo racial views were legitimized by the propagation of like-minded posts on the site.

I argue that White supremacists can feel similarly empowered by race talk in online spaces, even when they have not been as meticulously constructed to provide anonymity as the PINC. An example of this comes from an exercise I have graduate students complete in a class I teach on race. I created a class twitter account and followed a number of popular Alt-Right personalities. The assignment asks students to respond to problematic statements about race and use our course concepts to critique the assumptions and biases inherent in these statements. Occasionally, as students critique the viewpoints offered by famous alt-right accounts, they will get into back and forth discussions with twitter users who agree with the Alt-Right viewpoint. These people may be emboldened by the fact that the taboo ideas they are positing are also endorsed by public personalities with thousands of followers. In fact, my students are often in the ideological minority when responding to these discussion threads.

As people perceive that they are more free to talk about race in insensitive ways online, this type of content increases in quantity. This in turn increases the potential for people of color to be exposed to these types of ideas. Through my interviews with students of color at PINC, I found that exposure to more explicit expressions of racism can have a variety of impacts on student psyche and behaviors, with variance being explained by racial identity development, student background, and racial consciousness.

For students who had not had personal experiences with racism, or who did not perceive racial problems on campus, PINC was an unwelcome wake up call. They believed common

intellectual pursuits were more important than differences in identity and were disturbed at the idea that *any* of their classmates could have been responsible for the racist posts on the PINC. For students with more racial consciousness or experiences with racism, however, explicit expressions of racist ideologies can serve as confirming evidence that race is indeed still relevant. Exposure to explicit racism online can put young people on guard as they realize that racism looks different in the digital age than it did during the Jim Crow-era, but may be no less potent.

There is also evidence that through online communication people of color may feel more comfortable combatting even the less explicit expressions of racism. In chapter five I explore how the Internet structures a distinct style of responding to microaggressions for students of color at North-U. The way students of color resist subtle racial slights in online spaces is also influenced by characteristics of online communication.

Whereas race can be an uncomfortable topic of discussion in face-to-face interactions, online, it is less so. For instance, students of color in my sample are less concerned about being perceived as combative when they engage in online racial checking than they would be responding critically to microaggressions on campus. The perceived physical and social distance between subjects in these conversations decreases the social anxiety around how discussions about race can impact their interracial interactions or relationships on campus.

Students of color perceive a shift in power in online counterspaces, where dominant modes of thinking about race are more susceptible to online racial checking and critical critique. These interactions are also perceived to garner more peer support in online spaces. Resistance becomes a participatory activity that reduces the emotional toll responding to microaggressions can have on any one student.

In the midst of classroom-based racial discussions, students of color sometimes report needing time to process content that is both emotional and intellectual. Online, they have not only this time, but also the added incentive of knowing that they are contributing to a peer-driven dialogue and resistance against dominant meanings and attitudes about race. The content of online counterspaces tends to be especially critical and thoughtful in nature, therefore, because students know that their responses will be read by their peers and craft their comments accordingly.

Repercussions

The most obvious consequence of the normalizing of explicitly racist content in online spaces is what has been called the resurgence of White nationalism (Ganim, Welch, and Meyersohn 2017). While Donald Trump's actual connection to White nationalism remains unclear, he has been known to follow and retweet White supremacists on social media (Kharakh and Primack 2016), the White House Chief Strategist ran an Alt-Right news site (Singer 2017), and his success on the campaign trail led David Duke, former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, to say, "the fact that Donald Trump is doing so well, it proves that I'm winning (Berenson 2016)."

When Trump was elected many Democrats and Left-leaning independents responded as if it was more than a political loss. In my own bleeding-heart progressive circles, it seemed as if my friends and family were in a stupor – like they had experienced a collective tragedy. Barack Obama, in the days leading up to the election, said that a victory for Trump would be a direct affront to his legacy (Jones 2016). While any conservative win would be experienced as a progressive loss, it is doubtful that he would have used this language to refer to other candidates. It was Trump's brazenly coarse rhetoric around race, and his past behaviors demonstrating a lack

of concern and even contempt for racial and gender justice issues that set him apart from other conservative candidates.

I do not think it is over the top to suggest that this moment could be a turning point for the nation. I argue that White supremacy has won the battle – their candidate is in office, and at this point it is impossible to overestimate the potential damage this administration could do to education, the environment, international relations, and vulnerable populations both in and out of the country. But I also contend that in winning this battle, White supremacy has also ensured that it will lose the war by employing methods that have disabled its most powerful weapon – invisibility.

Racism is most difficult to combat when it cannot be seen and is couched in institutions and attitudes that on a surface level are consistent with American egalitarian values. As the Alt-Right, anti-PC crowd increases its visibility, however, it becomes more vulnerable to attack, and resistance efforts have a clearer picture of what they are up against.

This is evidenced by what seems to be a sustained, anti-Trump movement throughout the country, and the way people and institutions have been responding to Trump's administration. For example, Trump's travel ban from seven Muslim countries was shut down by the court system twice. And while the administration attempted to describe the ban in non-discriminatory terms at the time of the signing of the executive order, a judge used as evidence Trump's own discriminatory language in a press release as evidence that the policy was, in fact, driven by anti-Muslim sentiment (Burns 2017). There exist many policies that are implicitly racist, but usually politicians at least feel the need to lie about their racial motivations. Not Trump.

Along the same lines, Jeff Sessions' decision to pull back the police investigations and reform efforts initiated by the Obama Administration was ignored by a federal judge who

decided to move forward with police reforms in Baltimore (Levy 2017). I imagine that this not-so-veiled attempt at pushing back against racial justice efforts was in part stymied by the months of social media and news campaigns, including a letter from Coretta Scott King decrying Sessions as a man who fought against Civil Rights efforts. The way we interpret Sessions' political actions is influenced by the values we know he stands for. A more moderate figure in pursuit of the same political agenda might not face the same level of opposition.

Another consequence of the influence social media has had on racial discourse is the strengthening of antiracist resistance efforts. In chapter six, I introduced the idea of digital racial organizing to describe a new form of online based activism, where young students of color at North-U use Internet-based resistance strategies to influence the way that their peers think about race. Digital racial organizing uses participatory methods, is driven by critical theory, and has a developmental organizing strategy with a focus on developing people who can understand and resist racism in multiple contexts.

We have examples of similar digital racial organizing strategies in other online communities. The day after Trump was elected, a popular hashtag was #TrumpDayOne, where people told stories of harassment and discrimination taking place across the country – often with perpetrators saying explicitly that this is the type of behavior minoritized groups should expect in Trump's America. Sharing these stories, for many, represented a call to action. If racism looks different, so must the resistance.

A double-edged sword?

We know that the Internet has facilitated increases in explicit presentations of racist ideologies. We also know, that the Internet amplifies antiracist resistance efforts, including contemporary social movements. Are these two sides of a double-edged sword? As they pull in

opposite ideological directions- one left, one right- do they cancel each other out? If both the oppressors and the resistance are equally empowered by computer-mediated communication, then perhaps what we are seeing is simply the same battle, fought with different weapons.

I contend that this is not the case. Both sides experience amplification from online tools, but its effects are moderated by ideology. Racists and antiracists do not benefit equally from this increased amplification.

In a society that explicitly values racial equality, and where it is illegal to formally discriminate based on race, racism is most effective when it hides in the shadow of institutions and structures that provide oft hidden advantages, purportedly color-blind laws and policies, and surface-level egalitarian attitudes. When racism is invisible, it is difficult for researchers, educators, activists and citizens to identify its causes and effects, and it is even more difficult to demonstrate these causes and effects to Whites in a way that is both convincing and also not likely to put them on the defensive.

The amplification of explicit expressions of racism in online spaces, then, takes away this advantage of invisibility, and subjects racist ideas to the types of critiques that have not been necessary for most of the last half-century. While the Internet provides White supremacists with a space to organize, it also exposes the ugliness of racism. For example, in April of 2017 a video of a White supremacist leader punching a young woman on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley was shared widely on social media (Branson-Potts 2017). One can imagine an aging Ku Klux Klan member shaking his head at the video footage of that attack and saying, "In my day, we wore masks before we engaged in acts of terror." Social media, in some sense, has de-masked White supremacy. Trump, who for many people represents the embodiment of

these views, is experiencing the consequences of being perceived to represent a clear threat to our country's values as people from diverse viewpoints congregate to resist his influence.

On the contrary, contemporary social movements have much more to gain from social media. During the Civil Rights Movement, mobilizers strategized ways to capture the media's attention because they believed the American people would take their side if they saw the way Negroes were being treated. Journalists, however, were the gatekeepers who sometimes shone the spotlight on Civil Rights efforts, and sometimes did not. Contemporary movements, however, are able to bypass these media gatekeepers through social media.

An obvious example comes from the Movement for Black Lives and the nation-wide campaign against police violence. For communities of color, police violence has been a consistent fact of life for decades. But not as many Americans knew the depth of the problem outside of communities actually affected by police abuse. This is in part due to biased reporting that sensationalizes violence in Black and Latinx communities (Márquez 2012). In the past few years, however, the sharing of cell phone videos of police violence on social media has forced this justice issue into the national spotlight. In a dramatic shifting of roles, organizers now are the gatekeepers of information, and have more control over what information is shared about protest activities on social media than do traditional and mainstream news sources (Groshek and Tandoc 2017).

So as social media reveals the ugliness of racism to the world, it also amplifies the logic of resistance. Far from an equal push and pull, I suggest that the magnification of this conflict between racism and anti-racism will tip the scales in favor of efforts to resist racism. Overt racism contradicts widely held American values. Color-blind racists are able to believe they are not racist because of their vehement disavowal of overtly racist ideas and policies, in favor of

more subtle racist attitudes. For Americans who can stomach the subtle racism that is the underfunding of Black schools, but not the murder of Black children by police, social media has the potential to change the way they think about issues of racial justice.

Conclusion

The findings from this dissertation speak directly to how students of color experience race at North-U, how online communication has shifted racial discourse on campus, and the way students of color use digital tools to resist racism. As discussed in this conclusion, however, my findings have implications beyond the college campus, and the theory that has emerged from this study helps us understand trends in racial discussions and race-related social issues in the United States.

First, it challenges how contemporary theorists understand racism in the 21st century. For social workers interested in combating racism at institutional, group, and individual levels, it is important to map the current racial landscape, including both online and offline settings.

Second, the changing expression of racist ideologies will have an inevitable impact on the way young people of color experience race and discrimination. Social workers concerned with youth development must make an effort to continue to further their understanding of the Internet as a social context that shapes how young people of color learn and socialize. Successful navigation of social media can increase the effectiveness of face-to-face social interventions for young people of color (Patton et al. 2016).

And finally, this study points forward to the future of contemporary social movements that use social media to organize, share information, and spend their movement goals with a broad audience. For social workers interested in community organizing, this study can impact the

discipline's thinking about how technology can be utilized to empower community members and further the goals of our profession.

APPENDIX A:

The Race and Internet Study Interview Guide

1) How long have you been at North-U, and what are you studying?
2) Are you involved with any student organizations or campus activities? Which ones? Why/ why not?
    a. What do these organizations do? [Are they cultural, academic, social, or special interest?]
3) What is your racial/ ethnic background?
4) How North-U similar or different than the environment you grew up in?
    a. Socially? Economically? Culturally? Academically?
5) Do you feel a sense of belonging here at North-U? Why or why not?
6) How would you describe the racial climate at North-U? Why?
    a. Faculty? Student body? Administration? Student organizations? Sports?
7) How do people talk about race here?
    a. In the classroom, social spaces, housing system
8) Using three words, describe the interracial interaction on North-U's campus.
    a. Why did you use these words? Unpack their meanings.
9) Have you witnessed or experienced discrimination while on campus?
    a. Please describe what happened. How did you respond?
    b. If the answer is no, do you know anyone who experienced or witnessed discrimination while on campus?
    c. How did these events affect your feelings towards North-U?
10) Do you use any online social media websites, such as Facebook or twitter?
    a. If so, which ones, and how often do you use them?
    b. What is your primary purpose for using social media?
11) How do people talk about race online?
    a. Is this different on different sites?
    b. Does the way race is discussed online impact the way you think about race and racism in the real world?
    c. Is there any difference between how race is discussed on the Internet in general, versus with other people from North-U?
12) Have you ever experienced or witnessed racial discrimination online? This could take the form of the expression of prejudiced attitudes, explicit racist language, or racist cartoons, pictures, or videos.
13) Have you read or heard about "Politically Incorrect North-U Confessions?"
    a. If yes, what did you think about it?
    b. Did this surprise you? Why do you think it happened?
14) Do you know of any other anonymous forums used by the North-U community?
    a. If so, how often do you visit?
    b. If you encounter racism online, do you continue to visit the site, or use that form of social media?
    c. What value do these sites hold for the North-U community?

15) Can you think of any other times when race or race related issues were discussed online?
16) How does the way race is discussed online make you feel about student racial attitudes or race relations on campus?

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