

# Racism Online: Racialized Aggressions and Sense of Belonging Among Asian American College Students

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Boston College  
Lynch School of Education

Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education  
Program in Higher Education

RACISM ONLINE: RACIALIZED AGGRESSIONS AND  
SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG ASIAN AMERICAN  
COLLEGE STUDENTS

Dissertation

by

KEVIN JASON GIN

submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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**Racism Online: Racialized Aggressions and Sense of Belonging Among Asian  
American College Students**

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**ABSTRACT**

College students today are the most connected and social media savvy generation in the history of higher education (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008) and maintain constant connections to online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Clem & Junco, 2015). Social media are now understood as a central component of campus and student life across colleges and universities (Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009).

Coinciding with the proliferation of social media use has been a rise in racialized hostilities on online settings. These offenses often target racially minoritized students, and scholars have become increasingly interested in understanding the ways this antagonism on social media impacts college student experiences (Tynes, Rose, & Markoe, 2013), including Asian Americans (Museus & Truong, 2013).

This dissertation uses a critical race theory framework to examine the racialized environment on social media, how Asian American college students experience racialized aggressions, and how their sense of belonging is impacted by racially hostile online encounters. This dissertation addresses the following question: *How do encounters with racialized aggressions on social media impact Asian American students' sense of*

*belonging at a PWI?* 29 participants from a predominantly white institution, East Oak University, engaged in individual interviews, participant observations, artifact collection, and focus groups as part of this study.

The findings of this study suggest that the encounter of racialized aggressions on social media, especially those on the anonymous platform Yik Yak, are detrimental in facilitating positive sense of belonging among Asian Americans at East Oak. These online racialized encounters are asserted to be rooted in the endemic nature of racism at East Oak, and the claiming of social media as a property that enabled Whites to define and dictate campus culture by engaging in racist discourse. The nature of these online communications speaks to the ways that social media is suggested to influence both sense of belonging and institutional racial climates on today's college campuses.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

### **Statement of Problem**

Social media use has been documented as a pervasive trend among college student populations (Clem & Junco, 2015), but this virtual environment has initially been shown to harbor racialized aggressions towards students of color (SOC) including Asian Americans (Gin, Martínez-Alemán, Rowan-Kenyon, & Hottel, 2017; Museus & Troung, 2013; Tynes, Umaña -Taylor, Rose, Lin, & Anderson, 2012). While racialized hostility is persistent on social media, there is limited understanding regarding how encounters with racialized aggressions in online contexts may impact Asian Americans' student experiences within higher education (Museus & Troung, 2013).

The precursor to positive college student experiences has been theorized to be shaped by a student's sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), which has been examined in physical settings, but remains to be studied in the virtual environment of social media with Asian American students comprising the empirical base of interest. Although Hurtado and Carter (1997) suggest that racial hostility within physical campus settings facilitates feelings of alienation and decreased sense of belonging among Latino/a college students, it is unknown how encounters with racialized aggressions on social media may affect the ways Asian American students feel welcomed, connected, and valued by their campus community.

A pilot study for this dissertation conducted by Gin and associates (2017) further substantiates the need to investigate the relationship between Asian Americans' exposure to racialized aggressions on social media and sense of belonging. The findings of this pilot study indicated that overt racism was the predominant racialized offense on social

media at a PWI, and these racialized behaviors were most commonly reproduced on the anonymous social media forum Yik Yak. Additionally, encounters with online racialized hostility by SOC, including Asian Americans, were likely to result in detrimental psychosocial outcomes such as racial battle fatigue (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007) and cultural paranoia (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Whaley, 2001), which have been shown to exacerbate dissonance between a student and his/her institution (Fenigstein & Vanable, 1992; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006).

The authors of this pilot study contended that continued inquiry regarding the proliferation of racialized aggressions and their impact across disaggregated demographics such as racialized identity was necessary to understand how the hostile racialized environment of social media may affect sense of belonging (Gin et al., 2017). While traditionally examined within physical campus contexts, the presence of an unwelcoming racial climate on online settings is not thoroughly understood, especially as it relates to the impact on Asian American college students' sense of belonging. A problem statement may be identified for investigation and study from this grounding that includes an examination of social media, Asian American college students, and sense of belonging.

### **Social Media and Online Racism**

The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project has documented that up to 90% of college students use social media (Smith, Rainie, & Zickuhr, 2011). Research has also shown that students may spend an average of an hour and forty minutes per day on Facebook, the most popular social networking platform (Junco, 2012). Social media are no longer a novel entity within the environment of higher

education. Students are constantly connected through longstanding sites such as Facebook and Twitter (Clem & Junco, 2015), and have popularized emerging social media platforms that promote anonymity, such as Yik Yak (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). These trends are indications that engagement with social media has become an everyday part of the college experience (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007).

The pervasiveness of connections to an online environment within higher education is evidence of the ubiquitous nature of social media within the lives of college students. Communications among peers, and social engagement are no longer confined exclusively to the physical college campus (Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009). Rather, students live out these daily interactions in the virtual forum of social media (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008). These interactions have been shown to contribute to the development of students' friendship groups (Gray, Vitak, Easton, & Ellison, 2013), facilitation of involvement within campus activities (Junco, 2012), and the dissemination/acquisition of social capital within higher education (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lamp, 2007). Social media have therefore become significant forums to advance student life on college campuses, but the immersion in and embracing of campus life within the virtual world has not come without consequence (Daniels, 2012).

Online environments in higher education have been plagued with incidents of racial bias that often target Asian American students on college campuses (Museus & Truong, 2013). High profile examples of racist online content documented in the press are incidents such as the prevalence of anonymous racist posts on Yik Yak at Colgate University (Mahler, 2015), a viral YouTube video featuring an anti-Asian tirade on YouTube by UCLA student Alexandra Wallace (Lovett, 2011), and Facebook posts



documenting the ‘Asia Prime’ racially themed party at Duke University (Kingsdale, 2013) that contribute to a hostile racial climate for Asian Americans. These incidents are concerning to educators because racial prejudice has been shown to negatively shape students of color’s (SOC) perceptions of campus (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998).

While most studies have not focused exclusively on Asian American populations, a hostile racial climate also has been shown to impact academic achievement (Harwood, Choi, Orozco, Hunt, & Mendenhall, 2015), campus engagement (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2015), self-efficacy (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson, Soldner, Leonard, Alvarez, Inkelas, Rowan-Kenyon, & Longerbeam, 2007) for broad SOC populations in the physical campus setting. Despite evidence of racism on social media, and previous affirmations of racism’s harmful effects on the student experience within the physical environment, research has yet to advance further understanding regarding the ways SOC, and specifically Asian Americans are impacted by encounters with racial prejudice on online settings.

### **Asian American College Students**

The limitations in research of Asian American college students may be partly attributed to a socially constructed image to reflect the belief that this racial group has overcome racism in educational structures through meritocracy, and academic achievement. This image is often referred to as the “model minority,” suggesting Asian Americans can be equivocated to Whites, no longer face discrimination, and should not be perceived as a minoritized group experiencing oppression (Lee, 1996; Lei, 2006;

Suyemoto, Kim, Tanabe, Tawa, & Day, 2009; Wu, 2002). However, evidence exists (Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Maramba & Museus, 2012; Museus, 2008) that suggests Asian American college students are regularly the target of racialized incidents of hate in physical campus settings, which result in discriminatory experiences that put these students at risk for damaging psychological outcomes. Asian American students often perceive a negative racial climate within higher education, resulting in increased levels of stress, depression, and feelings of isolation (Cress & Ikeda, 2003). These experiences dispel the model minority image, and are rooted in pressures from the dominant culture directed at Asian American students to conform to a cultural stereotype, along with verbal and physical harassment from White peers or educators (Kiang, 1998; Museus, 2008).

The misinformed belief that Asian American college students are universally enjoying untroubled racialized experiences has become prevalent within the structure of research and inquiry (Museus, 2009). When examining peer reviewed and published literature regarding Asian Americans, Museus (2009) reported that less one percent of the most popular higher education journals (e.g. *The Journal of College Student Development*, *The Journal of Higher Education*, *Research in Higher Education*, and *The Review of Higher Education*) contain research regarding Asian American students. He asserted this result is due to the assumption that Asian Americans continue to be perceived through the model minority lens, and therefore are not a critical population for study. The model minority lens positions the Asian American student community as a population that does not face racialized adversity or struggle within the academy and therefore does not require imminent attention. This is despite the fact that researchers

have refuted the model minority claim with evidence that Asian American students are often the targets of overt and covert discrimination on physical campus settings (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009). Asian American college students have additionally reported low levels of satisfaction with their college experiences (Hune & Chan, 1997) further demystifying the image of an untroubled model minority. As a result of these findings, calls have been made by researchers to further understand how the intersection of campus culture and racial climates may shape Asian American students' negative perceptions of student life (Maramba & Museus, 2012; Museus, 2008).

While experiences of discrimination and racial bias by Asian American students are largely ignored within physical campus settings, racialized experiences by this population within the online environment has been almost nonexistent. In the studies that have examined racism faced by Asian Americans in higher education, the majority of research has disregarded online settings and opted to examine physical environments (Nadal, Wong, Sriken, Griffin, & Fujii-Doe, 2014; Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, & Sue, 2013; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, & Torino, 2009) even though students co-exist on social media in modern higher education (Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009).

Only a single study conducted by Museus and Truong (2013) specifically examined the racialized hate Asian Americans college students face in online settings. This study found the virtual environment frequently harbored overt racism toward Asian Americans, which put students at risk for the reinforcement of a negative self-image and internalization of racism. These outcomes are concerning because such consequences have been shown to facilitate decreased mental and emotional health within Asian

American college student populations (Lee, Wong, & Alvarez, 2009; Wing, 2007). The lack of research regarding online experiences with racism, combined with the initial evidence that negative outcomes occur from such prejudiced encounters compels additional inquiry concerning the racialized experiences of Asian American college students.

### **Microaggressions and Racialized Aggressions**

Previous studies have identified the dominant form of modern racism toward Asian Americans as racial microaggressions, and have advocated for further study of this phenomenon within higher education settings (Nadal et al., 2014; Ong et al., 2013; Sue et al., 2009). Scholars have documented racial microaggressions, defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273) as one of the most common forms of racialized prejudice affecting the college student experience.

While Sue and associates (2007) documented racial microaggressions as manifesting through brief and unconscious encounters, one major study found the subtle delivery of these racial slights in physical settings are transformed into overt expressions of hate in online contexts toward Black college students (Tynes, Rose, & Markoe, 2013). Additionally, this study found that the expression of microaggressions on online spaces possesses the ability to repeatedly victimize the targets of bias due to the potential for the offense to permanently reside on the Internet. Whereas microaggressions generally refer to small, covert racialized acts and communications, the finding by Tynes and associates (2013) that the majority of racist content on online spaces were blatant and explicit makes

microaggressions a misleading term to use in studies of racism on the Internet.

Online environments pose a dilemma because these virtual settings introduce a complex environment beyond what the microaggressions terminology has typically defined for use in physical settings. This problematic gap suggests an alternative term should be employed to more aptly reflect the severe and overt nature of the racial bias existing on social media. It is due to these differences that Minikel-Lacocque (2012) suggested using the term “racialized aggressions” be used to describe the explicit hate racially minoritized students encountered in her study of racism in online and physical spaces (p. 455). Minikel-Lacocque (2012) used the terminology of racialized aggressions to capture the blatantly spiteful forms of racial discrimination and the deep wounding, enduring scars of racial bias. Additionally, a pilot study to this dissertation (Gin et al., 2017) corroborated the findings by Tynes and associates (2012) by asserting the dominant presence of overt racism on social media, while further validating Minikel-Lacocque’s (2012) assertion that framework of racialized aggressions is more appropriate to utilize for studying racial bias on virtual settings than Sue and associates (2007) microaggressions taxonomy.

While there is substantive literature in higher education regarding the impact of racialized aggressions on SOC’s experiences within physical campus settings (Harwood et al., 2015; Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009), only a single study has attempted to document how these racialized encounters affect Asian Americans in online spaces (Museus & Truong, 2013). This gap in the literature presents a crucial issue for researchers and practitioners because much of a student’s contemporary interactions, communications, and relationships exist on social

media (Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009), and the racially hostile phenomena occurring on these spaces remain understudied for Asian American college students. Understanding how racism on virtual settings impacts the Asian American college student experience is crucial, because intervening in the perpetuation of a hostile racial climate is vital for the promotion of positive student experiences (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Within higher education, the foundation to such positive experiences has been theorized to be aided by a student's sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007; Maramba & Museus, 2012).

### **Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging refers to the ways a student perceives how he or she is included within a campus community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Sense of belonging has been defined in multiple ways throughout higher education, but the outcome has largely been understood to encompass emotional, and psychosocial outcomes that include feelings of connectedness, inclusion, being valued, and reciprocity of respect throughout the campus community (Goodenow, 1993; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Strayhorn, 2012). These outcomes are important to educators because a positive sense of belonging has been associated with increased student persistence (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007), and academic engagement for SOC (Freeman, Anderson, & Jensen, 2007), which reflect positive measures of the student experience that are of interest to educators.

The presence of a hostile racial climate has been shown to decrease sense of belonging, which negatively impacts outcomes such as degree attainment (Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008), academic engagement (Palmer, Maramba, & Holmes, 2011) and adjustment to campus life (Santos, Ortiz, Morales, & Rosales, 2007). Additionally,

Asian American college students have not constituted a significant population of study within the body of literature concerning sense of belonging despite evidence that Asian American students experience low sense of belonging on college campuses (Maramba & Museus, 2012).

Although the impact of an institution's racial climate on students' perceptions of feeling welcomed has been examined within physical campus settings (Freeman, Anderson, & Jensen, 2007; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007, Hurtado & Carter, 1997) there exists limited literature that examines how the nature of racism on social media may influence outcomes for Asian Americans. It is due to the importance of promoting positive sense of belonging, the lack of literature bridging sense of belonging to racial climates on social media, the need to advance scholarship regarding the Asian American college experience, and the emergence of racialized aggressions on online settings that an imminent research problem may be stated for inquiry.

### **Research Question**

The interaction between the experiences of Asian Americans and those college students' encounters with racialized aggressions on social media is the focus of this study. This dissertation is based on identified gaps in the literature and the rationale for continued investigation by Gin and associates' (2017) pilot study that initially confirmed the harmful manifestation of racialized aggressions on social media at a PWI. Of interest to this dissertation is an inquiry examining how Asian American college students' sense of belonging at a PWI are affected by encounters with racialized aggressions on social media platforms. Understanding online racialized encounters and their impact on sense of belonging will allow educators to effectively identify barriers that may exist on social

media that inhibit positive student experiences. The research question that will guide this dissertation is explanatory in nature and asks: *How do encounters with racialized aggressions on social media impact sense of belonging among Asian American college students at a PWI?*

### **Importance/Implications of Study**

College leaders, and student affairs professionals in particular, strive to promote both academic and co-curricular environments that inclusively encompass the diverse student populations that are entering higher education. The advancement of racial inclusion has traditionally been championed as a universally accepted value within the field of student affairs, but currently, few best practices exist that guide student services administrators in their understanding of online racism, in their assessment of these virtual environments, and in guiding the development of interventions that effectively counteract the offensive racialized assaults that exist on social media.

This dissertation study addresses the previously mentioned gaps within the field of student affairs, and help elevate college administrators' understanding of how the racial climate on social media contributes or hinders the development of positive student experiences on college campuses. The findings and analysis within this study are designed to raise administrative awareness of the fast evolving climate of social media, and to comprehend the experiences that racially minoritized students encounter online in an effort to inspire programs, interventions, and policy that aligns with the objective of promoting racial justice on college campuses.



## **CHAPTER TWO: Review of Literature**

### **Social Media on College Campuses**

Social media have become embedded within the academic and social operation of higher education. Students are perpetually connected to online settings through mobile devices, tablets, laptops, and traditional computers, which are contemporary forums for student engagement and communication on college campuses (Clem & Junco, 2015; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Current college students have been described as the most online connected generation in history, with 97% of college students owning a computer, 94% owning cell phones, and 90% with high speed Internet within their residences (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008).

In a large-scale Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life study of social media, Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lehnart, and Madden (2015) reported college aged populations are perpetually connected to social media such as YouTube (video sharing), Facebook (social networking forum), Snapchat (ephemeral messaging), Instagram (photo sharing), Pinterest (photo aggregating), and LinkedIn (professional networking), with the majority of students regularly using multiple social media platforms. The connection to this virtual world has enabled additional means for the engagement of civic participation (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009), involvement within student life (DeAndrea, Ellison, LaRose, Steinfield, & Fiore, 2012; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009), and connections among peers on college campuses (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007)

### **Social Media and Mobile Technologies**

Social media are broadly defined as the applications and websites that facilitate multi-directional information sharing among users in what scholars have coined "Web

2.0” content (Haenlein & Kaplan, 2010). Social media are understood to encompass the spectrum of information sharing applications and websites that include social networking sites such as Facebook, video sharing sites or applications such as YouTube, and microblogging sites such as Tumblr and Twitter (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Martínez-Alemán, 2014). These sites are characterized by their ability to be both information dispensers, and forums of acquisition representing a multidirectional flow of information between user and online platform (Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009). Various forms of communication are enabled by social media, including private messaging, public wall posts/newsfeeds, and tagging of individuals in videos/photos (Junco & Cole-Avent, 2008). This flow of information is freely exchanged through peers, family, or strangers who are referred to as a user’s friends (e.g. Facebook), followers (e.g. Twitter), or connections on various platforms. A fundamental characteristic of social media is the ability to interact among users within each platform where individuals contribute to the overall ecology and climate of these online environments (Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009). This interactive online interaction is especially customary on college campuses (Junco, 2014a).

The perpetual connection to social media has been enabled by mobile technologies that have permitted students to interact through smartphones and tablet devices. College students are no longer restricted to engaging on social media solely through desktop technologies. Rather, the efficiency of connecting to online environments from phones and tablets has provided consistent access to social media on college campuses regardless of an individual’s location (Dahlstrom, de Boor, Grunwald, & Vockley, 2011). Mobile devices and tablets have allowed students to instantaneously

document and share experiences or thoughts from any setting (e.g. classroom, social events, off-campus, etc.) in anonymous, or identifiable forums (Mastrodicasa & Metellus, 2013). This documentation has allowed social media to capture student and campus culture through photos, videos, texts, and individual perspectives (Cabellon & Junco, 2015).

### **Communications and Content on Social Media**

Social Media users exhibit varying degrees of control on online forums due to personal preference and individual forum settings. On longstanding social media such as Facebook and Twitter, individuals possess the ability to control the content that is visible to the user through a curating process. This process permits individuals to select what persons/connections are allowed into a personal feed of information that appears on an individual user's profile page (Martínez-Alemán, 2014).

New and evolving platforms also are becoming popularized such as Yik Yak and ErodR that localize the sourcing of user dispensed information to identify what is currently being talked about in a particular campus setting (Kingkade, 2015). Social media platforms like Yik Yak rely on a geo-located feature that aggregates posts in a specific location and subjects all users to the same feed of information unlike forums that permit the curating of information and filtering of users on individual feeds (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015).

Content on social media is also rarely censored, and forums exist in a mostly un-moderated space. For example, incidents of hate and racism that have appeared on college campuses are permitted to exist in these online settings and co-exist alongside posts that are inoffensive and mundane (Daniels, 2012). There are limits to the offensive

nature of speech tolerated on campus, though. In a recent trend, individual social media posts that were perceived as threats of violence toward the campus community have been flagged and perpetrators were charged with threats that were deemed to be a danger to public safety (Blankinship, 2015; Krull, 2015). This organic proliferation and circulation of user-originated information (whether offensive or ordinary) and connection to peers is viewed as an idiosyncratic quality of social media on college campuses (Martínez-Alemán, 2014; Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009) and has caused student affairs administrators to question how the challenges of a virtual environment impact student life on college campuses (Cabellon & Junco, 2015).

Social media have contributed a new virtual forum of communication on college campuses where students may simultaneously exist in conjunction with physical environment. Students rarely differentiate between encounters that occur in online spaces and face-to-face interactions. Rather, students see online interactions as an extension of everyday communications that are necessary and ordinary to student experiences (Junco, 2005). Social media have become integrated within multiple aspects of university life and is no longer a novel entity on college campuses, but is now understood to be as a central component of student culture (Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009).

**Critique of Extant Social Media Literature.** While higher education and social media are intricately connected, there continues to be limited research extensively documenting student experiences within these online settings in ways that face-to-face interactions on the physical campus have been documented. College students co-exist exist within online social media settings, which has caused researchers to further

investigate how multiple phenomena of campus life that have traditionally been examined in the brick and mortar setting now intersect within the virtual campus environment (Gray et al., 2013; Madge et al., 2009; Tynes et al., 2013). While existing literature has considered the ways social media is broadly used among student populations to disseminate/acquire social capital (Ellison et al., 2007), engage in academic activities (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011), and maintain connections with peers (Gray et al., 2013), these studies and others have not extensively considered how engagement on social media apply across disaggregated demographics, such as race or ethnicity (Cooper & Weaver, 2003; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, & Shafer, 2004).

The empirical base of study for most social media research has also predominantly centered on Facebook and Twitter, the two most popular social media forums (Clem & Junco, 2015). While college student usage of Facebook and Twitter are extensive, these previous studies have largely neglected the rise of anonymous social media forums such as Yik Yak, Whisper, Erodr, and 4Chan that college students are popularizing (Gin et al., 2017; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015).

Additionally, the experiences of encountering racialized prejudice on online forums and social media have only recently been examined by a limited number of researchers, and these studies have largely excluded Asian American college students as a population of interest (Museus & Truong, 2013; Tynes et al., 2013). This is despite the fact that encounters with online hostility have proven to be pervasive on college campuses (Daniels, 2012), such encounters result in negative outcomes for college students (Tynes et al., 2013), and Asian Americans have been identified as a population requiring additional attention within the literature (Museus, 2009; Teranishi, 2010).

## **Asian American College Students**

Asian Americans are the second fastest growing racial group in the country behind Latinos/as, and are projected to comprise ten percent of U.S. citizenship by 2050 (U.S. Census, 2004). According to the U.S. Census (2011), the term Asian American is a broad racialized category that encompasses a number of populations that include those from Southeast Asia, who may identify as Desi. While the U.S. Census does not include Pacific Islanders within the designation of Asian American, there are strong cultural ties between Asian Americans and those of ancestry from Pacific Islands such as Hawaii, Guam, and Samoa which are also occasionally encompassed by the Asian American designation (Fong & Mokuau, 1994). Although the term Asian American is predominantly used to encompass the distinct cultures and identities of the unique populations within this racialized population, the designation of “Asian American” can be both liberating for some, but problematic for others due to the restrictive means by which this label may confound cultural identity (Srinivasan & Guillermo, 2000). Given this recognition, Asian American is the term that is used within this study for those who identify within the Asian American, Pacific Islander, and Desi communities, while simultaneously recognizing the problematic presence that racial categorization may pose for some individuals.

The Asian American population has grown by over 40% within the previous decade and encompasses a wide range of cultural groups, which includes more than 45 distinct ethnicities such as: Southeast Asian Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Nepalese, Pakistani, Tibetan, and Vietnamese, among others (U.S. Census, 2011). 18 million Asian Americans within the United States are also disproportionately located and enrolled in

higher education within two states, California encompassing a total population of 5.8 million Asian American residents and New York with 1.7 million residents (U.S. Census, 2011).

### **Asian American Demographic Context**

Asian Americans are projected to experience a thirty percent increase in enrollments within higher education from a ten-year period of 2009-2019 (National Center on Education Statistics, 2011). Contrary to dominant belief, the majority of Asian Americans do not enroll within elite, four-year colleges, but experience higher education through community colleges (Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2005). Teranishi (2010) reported that over half of the Asian American population attends two-year institutions within the United States. This reality is often overshadowed by narratives that prefer to highlight the successes of the Asian American population rather than focus on the barriers that inhibit further access to higher education for this racialized community (Museus, 2009; Suyemoto et al., 2009).

The domineering belief that Asian Americans are concentrated and excel within elite higher education institutions is often reinforced by the U.S. Census (2011). The Census found that 50% of Asian Americans 25 and older have obtained a bachelor's degree, which is compared with 28.5% of the general population 25 and older that have a bachelor's degree. Additionally, 20.7% of the Asian American population 25 and older was documented as obtaining an advanced degree in comparison with 10.6% of the general population.

These statistics, while revealing, do not fully encapsulate the in-group differences, and barriers to access faced by a number of ethnic sub-communities that exist under the

umbrella of the Asian American racial group. Aggregated statistics that generalize Asian Americans as a monolithic entity such as the Census do not capture educational differences that may emerge from examination of the cultural and geographic diversity of this racialized group (Museus & Truong, 2009; Nadal, Pituc, Johnson, & Esparrago, 2010; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009).

There have been calls to further understand and recognize the within race diversity of identities that are encompassed under the categorization of the Asian American umbrella as a result of the generalized narrative that Census data have presented (Museus & Truong, 2009). Asian American college students are often perceived as a monolithic entity, and this view neglects the numerous ethnic subgroups that constitute the racial group. The term Asian American has often been used as a proxy to encompass a variety of distinctly different ethnic communities including Native/Indigenous Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders even though these and other ethnic subgroups have experienced different social, economic, cultural, and political histories (Srinivasan & Guillermo, 2000; Takaki, 1989). These cultural differences are vast and cannot be captured through a monolithic lens. The Pew Research Center (2012) has documented demographic differences within the Asian American community that include vast differences in experiences with, and identification of religion, settlement and immigration patterns, socioeconomic class, language, degree attainment and cultural values that are hidden by the generalizations that emerge from categorization as an aggregated racial group.

Scholars have documented the need to underscore the varied subgroup experiences and differences that Asian American college students face within higher



education to better understand the diversity of educational experiences of this racialized group (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Park & Liu, 2014; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2008). There are over 45 Asian American ethnic subgroups within the United States, but six ethnicities (Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese) comprise 85% of the 17 million Asian Americans within the United States (Pew Research Center, 2012). Aggregation of the Asian American umbrella is problematic because the dominant presence of these six ethnicities act to conceal the voices, experiences, and visibility of smaller ethnic subgroups whose educational experiences are less understood such as those of Indonesian, Bangladeshi, Thai, Malaysian, and Sri Lankan descent (Museus & Kiang, 2009).

Oversimplification of Asian Americans through generalized racial categorization has become problematic because it masks the lack of degree attainment, economic poverty, and barriers to higher education access faced by a number of ethnic subgroups under the Asian American racialized identity (Chang & Kiang, 2002; Hune, 2002; Kiang, 2004; Museus, 2009). When data are disaggregated, a number of ethnic populations within the Asian American race are shown as exhibiting lower levels of academic success, and displaying decreased levels of degree attainment compared to the national average of the United States population (Museus, 2009).

For instance, Southeast Asian Americans and a number of Pacific Islander populations consistently exhibit lower levels of college degree attainment than the U.S. national average (Hune, 2002; Museus, 2009; Museus, 2013). According to Museus (2013), some Asian American ethnicities have alarmingly low rates of college graduation, including Native Hawaiian (17%), Hmong (14%), Cambodian (13%),

Guamanian (13%), Laotian (12%), Fijian (11%), Tongan (11%), Samoan (10%), and Micronesian (4%). Many other Asian American subgroups also face significant challenges in regards to access to higher education. These specific groups include Cambodian, Lao, Hmong, and Native Hawaiian, who often face difficulty in their academic readiness when entering college, their inability to pay for college, and their long-term persistence in higher education (Lee & Kumashiro, 2005; Wing, 2007).

### **The Model Minority Image in Higher Education**

One of the most prevalent issues Asian American college students face in higher education is the constructed identity to reflect a model minority image. This model minority image suggests the Asian American community has broken through the barriers of racism that other minoritized groups have failed to overcome within educational structures (Lee, 1996; Wu, 2002). The effects of the model minority essentially de-minoritize Asian Americans as an oppressed racialized group within higher education, and invalidates the barriers this community regularly encounters because Asian Americans are more closely equivocated to Whites than a minoritized community through this constructed identity (Lee, 2008).

The model minority is a stereotype that has been shaped by the evolution of Asian Americans as outsiders to normative western culture, to the modern perception that this racialized group is characterized by both academic and social success (Min, 1995). This idealized image generalizes the Asian American population as a uniformly high achieving community that has transcended racial barriers (Lei, 2006; Suyemoto, et al., 2009). Asian Americans are suggested to be more successful than other minority groups, leading to assumptions that this racialized group has “made it” by breaking through the

impediments that other minority groups have failed to overcome within American society (Lee, 1996; Wu, 2002).

### **Challenges Created by the Model Minority Image**

Museus (2008; 2009) stated the model minority myth has resulted in Asian American college students being neglected within the discourse of research and literature. The disregard of Asian Americans has resulted in what Lo (2003) coined as the “forgotten minority.” Table 1 summarizes the ways that Asian Americans have been overlooked and disregarded within empirical and published research within higher education literature.

*Table 1. Asian Americans in educational research*

Statistic	Explanation	Source
0 out of 35	In the decade prior to 2007, of the 35 published articles examining race on college campuses, no studies specifically focused on Asian Americans.	(Harper & Hurtado, 2007)
Less than 1%	As of 2009, less than 1% of the most prestigious higher education journals include any focus on Asian Americans.	(Museus, 2009)
0 out of 5	In a 2013 follow up to Museus (2009), 0 of the 5 most visible higher education journals had published articles in regards to experiences by Asian American graduate students.	(Museus, Mueller, & Aquino, 2013)
250 out of 400,000	Only 250 out of 400,000 articles in the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), the largest education database, focused on Asian American college students	(Teranishi, 2010)

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A lack of urgency to center the Asian American population as an empirical base of study exists due to the dominant perception that Asian American college students are

often equivocated or even seen as more successful than Whites within higher education, and thus are perceived as not a critical population deserving of study (Hirschman & Wong, 1986; Kim & Chun, 1994; Lee, 1996; Museus & Vue, 2013). When research has focused on student experiences and racism on college campuses, the framework is often presented within the racial context of Black and White students, which overlooks the existence of Asian American student experiences within scholarship (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Loo & Rolison, 1986).

Osajima (1995) has also written that when Asian Americans are integrated within relevant literature, they are often compared to either Blacks or Whites, which minimizes this racialized group's experiences within higher education. This has rendered Asian American students invisible within the college experience, and further concealed the multitude of racialized issues these students encounter on college campuses (Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2002).

The model minority image is also problematic due to evidence that demystifies the perception that Asian American college students are devoid of struggle (Museus, 2009). When examining social experiences within higher education, Asian American students often report increased levels of isolation, self-segregation, and perceive a less than supportive learning environment than reported by those within other racial groups (Chen, Edwards, Young, & Greenberger, 2001; Lorenzo, Frost, & Reinherz, 2000; Lorenzo, Pakiz, Reinherz, & Frost, 1995; McCormack, 1998; Ying, 2001).

### **Dispelling the Model Minority Image**

The model minority stereotype has been proven to be a myth because it emphasizes an oversimplified reality of Asian Americans and ignores the subgroup

difficulties that many ethnicities face within higher education (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Suyemoto et al., 2009; Tran & Birman, 2010). Contrary to the model minority image, evidence exists that suggests Asian Americans are subject to negative experiences (Garcia, Johnson, Garibay, Herrera, & Giraldo, 2011; Museus & Truong, 2009; Sue et al., 2009; Teranishi et al., 2008) that are similar to those faced by Black and Latino/a students at PWIs (Allen, 1992; Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Museus, 2008). These experiences on campus facilitate psychological angst and decreased well-being within Asian Americans (Ong et al., 2013). These distresses include anger, frustration, invalidation, and alienation (Sue et al., 2009).

The limited research that has been conducted on the Asian American college student experience suggests a number of overlooked realities that are often masked by the dominant perception of a model minority image. Asian American students often perceive a negative racial climate within higher education, resulting in increased levels of stress, depression, and feelings of isolation (Cress & Ikeda, 2003). These experiences can be attributed to a number of parameters that include, but are not limited to, pressures to conform to a specific stereotype, verbal and physical harassment from peers or educators, and cultural conflicts that complicate the selection of academic major and social activities (Hurh & Kim, 1989; Kiang, 1998; Kiang & Kaplan, 1994; Lee, 1994)

Asian American college students also report increased levels of isolation, self-segregation, and perceive a less than supportive learning environment, and researchers have hypothesized that these outcomes may be in part explained by pervasiveness of the model minority image on college campuses (McCormack, 1998; Chen, Edwards, Young,

& Greenberger, 2001; Ying, 2001). The reality of existing in academic and social environments that endorse this falsely constructed stereotype may threaten the ability of Asian American students to have positive campus experiences within higher education due to internalization of the model minority identity (Inman & Yeh, 2007; Lee, Wong, & Alvarez, 2009).

Additional evidence also reveals Asian Americans are often the targets of racism within higher education both in physical (Teranishi, 2012), and online spaces (Museus & Truong, 2013). Asian Americans report lowered levels of satisfaction regarding their college experience due to the negative campus climate and racial prejudice that students face at PWIs (Kotori & Malaney, 2003; Lewis, Chesler, & Forman, 2000; Rankin & Reason, 2005). It is due to these critiques and consequences of the model minority image that researchers argue increased attention must be paid toward the impact that racialized experiences have upon Asian American students within higher education.

### **Racial Microaggressions**

Researchers have documented racialized stresses against Asian American students commonly manifest in the form of racial microaggressions within physical campus settings (Nadal et al., 2014; Ong et al., 2013; Sue et al., 2009). Racial microaggressions have proliferated in higher education settings, especially at PWIs (Smith et al., 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso 2000). Microaggressions are coined by Sue and associates (2007), as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (p. 273).

Sue and associates (2007) wrote that microaggressions can be classified into three categories according to their effects and characteristics. These three forms include microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. Microassaults most similarly align with what many view as traditional racist acts, including name calling, avoidant behavior, and intentional discrimination (Sue et al., 2007). Sue and associates (2007) described microinsults as reflective of subtle insults delivered through unconscious behaviors that communicate insensitivity or demean an individual's racial heritage or identity. Sue and associates (2007) further characterized microinvalidations as having the effect of negating the realities of a person of color and giving the impression that the racialized encounters felt by people of color are inconsequential by nullifying or denying those lived experiences. While Sue and associate's (2007) taxonomy is widely held as the seminal framework that has guided the majority of research modern racial discrimination since its publication, it has recently also been critiqued (Wong, Derthick, David, Saw, & Okazaki, 2014).

### **Critiques of the Microaggressions Taxonomy**

Although commonly accepted, there have been calls to re-examine the terminology used to describe the unconscious and fleeting characteristics of racial microaggressions to more accurately reflect the continuum of racialized encounters that are likely to manifest in everyday life, and to correctly capture the impact of these racially charged encounters on targeted populations such as Asian American students in online spaces.

Although Sue and associate's (2007) microaggressions taxonomy has proven to be a valuable framework for the study of contemporary racism, these racialized offenses

span a continuum of blatant aggressions to subtle slights in both physical and online communities (Tynes et al., 2013). The distinctions that differentiate deliberate racialized acts of prejudice from covert manifestations of bias have drawn critique from those who argue the fundamental differences among these racialized hostilities deserve consideration for the inclusion of a term that more intentionally partitions conscious, intentional racialized hate from unconscious, inadvertent bias (Wong et al., 2014). It is argued that a conceptual conflict emerges through continued inclusion of overt racism within the umbrella of Sue and associates' (2007) terminology, because deliberate racism is inherently in conflict with the understanding and application of the microaggressions framework as unconscious and subtle phenomena (Minikel-Lacocque, 2012). This critique is crucial when contextualized within the study of online racism because racialized hate on social media has been shown to predominantly manifest as conscious and explicit hostility (Daniels, 2012; Gin et al., 2017; Tynes et al., 2013).

Due to these critiques, researchers have challenged and questioned the inclusion of a term such as microassaults within the larger microaggression taxonomy as a way to capture expressions of overt hate (Gin et al., 2017; Minikel-Lacocque, 2012; Tynes et al., 2013). Individuals who engage in what Sue and associates (2007) have termed microassaults possess a conscious, engrained belief of racial inferiority for minoritized groups, and their actions should not be considered or labeled micro due to the overt intentions of the perpetrator to cause harm (Minikel-Lacocque, 2012). Because Sue and associates (2007) have defined microassaults as being delivered with the intention to harm, this behavior has been aligned most analogously with constructs similar to blatant bullying rather than the covert nature that Sue and associates (2007) have emphasized



microaggressions as exhibiting (Offermann, 2013). As a result of the conflict that exists with including explicit racialized hate under a framework that is understood to be unconscious and covert, calls have emerged to reconsider the inclusion of microassaults within the general taxonomy of microaggressions because of the unique commonality microassaults has with overt racist acts (Wong et al., 2014).

Further, Garcia, Johnston, Garibay, Herrera, and Giraldo (2011) state that in order to prevent microaggressions from becoming an overused, incorrectly invoked buzzword within higher education, it is critical to maintain a clear understanding of the micro events that constitute a microaggression versus explicit incidents of hate that should be more appropriately be classified as an overt racist act. It is through this rationale that scholars have continued to advocate for further refinement and critique of the original microaggressions taxonomy.

### **A Racialized Aggressions Framework**

Minikel-Lacocque (2012) further contributed to the assessment of the microaggressions terminology by considering how microassaults can be redefined with a term that more accurately captures the intent and impact of deliberate racism. Minikel-Lacocque's (2012) critique argued that even though Sue and associate's (2007) term of microassaults was meant to capture blatant, deep wounding racialized hate of overt racism, the "micro" preface possessed damaging semantic consequences because the prefix conveyed a minimization of the impact that results from the dispensing of overt racial prejudice.

Minikel-Lacocque (2012) aptly suggested the term "racialized aggression" be employed as a means to convey the anger and hurt by the targets of these incidents, and

capture the “overt and intentional” nature of perpetrators who enact these actions in both physical and online environments (p. 455). Minikel-Lacocque (2012) argued that the term racialized aggressions brings greater clarity to the destructive nature of blatantly racist acts that racially minoritized students have been documented as facing within both academic and social settings on college campuses (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006). It is through this framework that racialized online hostility has been recommended to be analyzed and interpreted (Gin et al., 2017).

### **The Racialized Climate of Social Media**

In a widely cited study, Tynes and associates (2013) asserted that online settings are more likely to harbor overt racialized hate toward SOC instead of the subtle bias Sue and associates (2007) described in their definition of microaggressions. This finding was asserted because racialized offenses on online forums retain the ability to exist permanently after they are posted, which may repeatedly victimize targets of these aggressions (Tynes et al., 2013) rather than disappearing as short-lived in person encounters as defined by microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007). Additionally, Gin and associates (2017) confirmed the findings by Tynes and associates (2013), and affirmed the usage of the racialized aggressions terminology was appropriate to apply when analyzing racialized hostility on social media. Both of these studies referenced the distinctions that situated virtual racism as explicitly offensive encounters, and experiences that were deep wondering/long lasting as rationales to utilize the framework of racialized aggressions to describe the hostile racialized environment of the Internet and social media.

Racialized aggressions (Minikel-Lacocque, 2012) are likely to occur and be expressed under conditions of safety for the perpetrator, such as anonymity. Thus, online environments and the safety of anonymity facilitate spaces that enable aggressive and bullying behaviors on apps such as Yik Yak (Gin et al., 2017; Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). These anonymous forums can be viewed as home territories, defined as havens where perpetrators of White superiority can flourish under conditions where there is a broad sense of control over the environment, and where racialized aggressions may be common occurrences (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1998).

Glasser and Kahn (2005) described the hostile racial environment on online settings as a retreat to pre-Civil War era race relations, with perpetrators who routinely referenced offensive text, image, and video that referred to violent acts against minoritized populations, or equivocated racialized minorities to animals and other degrading figures. Recent examples of racialized hate on social media on college campuses have included: Physical threats made to Black students at the University of Missouri through the anonymous app Erodr (Kravarik, 2015), the pervasive usage of racial slurs documented on Yik Yak at Colgate University and Boston College (Koenig, 2014), and the documentation of blackface/racially themed parties at the University of California Los Angeles (Rocha, 2015) and Duke University on Instagram and Facebook (Kingkade, 2013)

While encounters with racialized aggressions have been examined and shown to result in damaging consequences, such as emotional distress, high blood pressure, and substance abuse in physical campus settings (Bennett, Wolin, Robinson, Fowler, & Edwards, 2005; Smart Richman, Pek, Pascoe, & Bauer, 2010), the potential effects of

encountering racialized aggressions have not been extensively examined on social media despite the pervasiveness of these offenses on online forums. Additionally, the limited studies that do exist regarding racial hostility on social media have not leveraged Asian American college students as an empirical base of study even though this racialized group is growing in population numbers and experiencing racially hostile conditions on college campuses (Nadal et al., 2014; Ong et al., 2013; Sue et al., 2009).

### **Online Racialized Aggressions Toward Asian American Students**

Understanding how Asian American students experience and perceive racialized aggressions on social media is important to consider in the context of higher education because encounters with online racism have been shown to lead to a number of concerning outcomes such as internalization of stereotypes, stress, and disengagement with campus communities (Clark, Spanierman, Reed, Soble, & Cabana, 2011; Museus & Truong, 2013; Tynes et al., 2012). While research regarding online racism is a burgeoning area of scholarship, previous studies have typically examined Black, Latino/a, or broad SOC samples and rarely situated Asian Americans as a demographic of interest. The pilot study to this dissertation encouraged further attention to the emergence of racism on social media as it relates to disaggregated racial groups and specific outcomes of the student experience because encountering online racialized experiences contributed to racial battle fatigue and cultural paranoia for SOC (Gin et al., 2017). Among the participants within this pilot study included a sample of four Asian American undergraduates who exhibited characteristics of racial battle fatigue from encountering racialized aggressions on social media.

A study that is widely cited in the literature found that SOC (primarily Black and Latino/a students) were also likely to experience increased levels of school-related stress as a result of encountering online racialized aggressions leading to decreased academic engagement, but this study did not include a sample of Asian American students (Tynes et al., 2013). In the only study explicitly studying Asian American college students, Museus and Truong (2013) found that online racism was likely to result in the internalization of racialized stereotypes, resulting in decreased self-worth, and rejection of cultural identity, but this study examined racialized content on virtual message boards and did not focus on the content of popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Yik Yak.

Given the emergence of regularly occurring racially themed offenses on social media within higher education (Daniels, 2012; Tynes & Markoe, 2010), and the lack of research addressing Asian American college students within these virtual forums, furthering the understanding of how this specific racialized group encounters racialized aggressions on this online setting is especially timely.

### **Anonymity on Social Media**

The emergence of racialized aggressions on social media has caught the attention of researchers who have started to draw attention to the importance of how anonymity impacts the dispensing of offensive communication on social media (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). The popularization of anonymous social media has increased the quantity of racialized hate on college campuses, and contributed to concerning outcomes including racial and gender bullying (Black, Mezzina, & Thompson, 2016), cultural

mistrust, and the threatening of democratic principles within higher education (Gin et al., 2016).

The rise of racialized aggressions and other forms of hostility on social media are attributed to the online disinhibition effect (Joinson, 2007; Suler, 2004), which stated that individuals are more likely to engage in antagonistic behaviors due to the presence of the “safe” social barriers that lower behavioral inhibitions online. Previous studies (Joinson, 1998; 2001) have shown that flaming behaviors, threats of violence, and verbal offenses are all behaviors that occur in virtual spaces, but are typically not exhibited in “real world” spaces, due to online disinhibition. Scholars have noted that the conditions of online anonymity (McKenna & Seidman 2005; Tanis & Postmes, 2007), virtual invisibility (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2003; Suler 2004), and lack of eye contact (Lapidot-Leffler & Barak, 2011) are additional characteristics that enabled online disinhibition to manifest, and this phenomenon liberated users from the burden of accountability for engaging in negative actions.

Building on these previous studies, Wang and associates (2014) noted that the lack of accountability for posting inflammatory material on social media further enabled the reproduction of explicitly offensive posts to exist on anonymous social media. Anecdotally, Issac (2014) further confirmed the assertion by Wang and associates (2014) by stating that perpetrators of online hostility (e.g. on the anonymous social media app, Secret) are incentivized to anonymously dispensed aggressions on social media because there was little to no fear of being retaliated against for posting offensive statements online when a user could not be personally identified or held accountable for posting such statements.

The issue of online anonymity is not novel for colleges and universities. Higher education has, and continues to be faced with the problematic issues that anonymous social media and online disinhibition present to facilitating positive experiences on college campuses. Institutions have formerly had to address the challenging presence of anonymous message boards (e.g. Juicy Campus, College Wall of Shame, etc.), which were known as forums that smeared, harassed, and promoted vulgar perspectives about students, faculty, and staff before those sites were ultimately shut down (Black et al., 2016). Today, similar iterations of those message board sites continue to emerge and evolve on college campuses in the form of anonymous, mobile social media apps, such as Yik Yak, which has shown to harbor overtly racist and offensive communications that demean racialized minorities on college campuses (Gin et al., 2017).

Despite the concerning outcomes that anonymous social media have been documented to convey on college campuses, limited research continues to be advanced regarding how the encounter of racialized aggressions on anonymous forums contribute or hinder positive student experiences in higher education. Given the lack of literature within this area of scholarship, identifying social media's (both anonymous and identifiable forums) relationship with an outcome such as sense of belonging is timely to explore, especially as it relates to the Asian American student experience.

### **Students' Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging may be conceptualized through Schlossberg's (1989) constructs of marginality and mattering. Individuals who feel like they do not belong to a certain environment often report a feeling of marginality, defined as not perceiving oneself as central to a community, space, or setting. According to Schlossberg (1989),

this marginality was common during transitions into college where students perceived incongruences between the norms of their previously familiar environment and the foreign culture of a new institution (e.g. a student who regularly spoke a foreign language to communicate at home but moves to a predominantly White, residential college where no one speaks his or her language).

Schlossberg's (1989) concept of mattering is also relevant to understanding if a student feels he or she belongs to a college environment. According to Schlossberg (1989), mattering referred to the belief that individuals felt like they matter to someone else, and there existed direct reciprocity of that significance through the formation of mutually beneficial relationships. The feelings of "mattering" are operationalized in the following ways: A) feeling that one is important enough to command the attention of another person, B) to feel that another person is concerned with our personal fate, C) others will be proud of our accomplishments or saddened by our failures, defined as ego-extension, D) the extent personal behavior is influenced by dependence upon other people, and E) the extent one feels appreciated by others. According to Schlossberg (1989), marginality and mattering were critical in understanding college student experiences because these feelings have a significant impact in determining psychosocial behaviors and are closely aligned with sense of belonging.

Understanding sense of belonging has been an interest for higher education scholars and practitioners who have studied this phenomenon in relation to a number of outcomes relevant to the college student experience. Sense of belonging is defined as one of Maslow's (1962) basic human needs and a motivating factor for student engagement that has played a critical role in affecting outcomes such as persistence, and positive



social interactions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Students who satisfy the need to belong will exhibit positive behaviors and optimistic perceptions of the campus environment in contrast to those who feel alienated from belonging to the campus environment (Strayhorn, 2012). This actualization of belonging is important due to the fact if a college student's desire to satisfy sense of belonging is not met, higher-order needs that are important to higher education educators such as knowledge and self-authorship cannot be achieved (Strayhorn, 2005).

Sense of belonging has been identified as a critical factor in facilitating positive psychological wellbeing (Hagerty, Lynch-Bauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992), leading to happiness, elation, and joy (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The consequences of a negative sense of belonging for college studies are undesirable and include: decreased academic achievement, lowered motivation, and diminished ability to persist in an educational environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Goodenow, 1993).

Scholars who have examined sense of belonging in higher education have primarily focused on the experience of those possessing minoritized identities (e.g. SOC, women, etc.) because those students most often report feeling unsupported and invisible within campus environments that are perceived as unfamiliar to these marginalized identities (Anderman & Freeman, 2004). Thus, understanding the conditions that facilitate or inhibit sense of belonging for SOC has become crucial for contextualizing a learning environment that most effectively advances positive experiences and retention of students possessing marginalized identities within campus communities through student integration.

## **Student Integration**

The environment of higher education is composed of distinct social and academic systems, and a student's integration within these multiple systems is critical in determining his or her persistence or withdrawal from an institution (Tinto, 1975; 1987) and involvement in campus activities (Astin, 1984). Integration within these systems is reliant upon how a student fits within the environment, perceives a sense of affiliation, and how strongly he or she identifies within the community, collectively referred to as a student's sense of belonging (Hoffman, Richmond, Morrow, & Salomone, 2003). The emphasis by educators to understand the conditions that facilitate or inhibit integration, persistence, and involvement are thus tied to sense of belonging/identification with a campus community.

College campuses often complicate this integration, though, because the higher education environment has been described as foreign, unfamiliar, and often racially unwelcoming especially for SOC who perceive themselves to exist within the margins to mainstream college life (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) such as Asian Americans at PWIs (Maramba & Museus, 2012; Park, 2009). Additionally, traditional understandings of integration have relied on assimilation of the student who must disconnect and separate from his or her cultural identities in order fit into the campus environment, and such approaches have been critiqued by scholars who assert institutions should bear the responsibility of facilitating student membership within the campus community instead of vice versa (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992; 1999).

Understanding the campus conditions that may inhibit integration and persistence for SOC such as Asian American have become priorities for educators who are interested

in preventing withdrawal through promoting sense of belonging in academic and social spaces (Maramba & Museus, 2012). While identifying the barriers that inhibit campus integration for racially minoritized students has been advanced in physical campus settings, research remains to be conducted regarding the impediments to sense of belonging emanating from racially hostile social media.

### **Sense of Belonging: Multiple Definitions**

While sense of belonging is widely accepted as a critical outcome in the student experience (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007), scholars are in disagreement concerning a singular definition of this phenomenon. There exist multiple definitions of sense of belonging that have been used in the literature.

Psychologists have defined sense of belonging as a relational dynamic that exists between an individual and a particular environment. McLaren (2009) captured this psychological definition by defining the phenomenon as the experience of feeling personal integration within a system to the extent that the individual felt he or she played a contributory role within that particular environment, and to the extent the environment had a meaningful existence to the individual. Psychologists understand sense of belonging impacts multiple dimensions of human cognition and behavior such as an individual's mental health and the development of interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Within the education literature, sense of belonging has been defined in a number of ways. Spady (1970) encompassed sense of belonging within a definition of perceived social integration that examined the ways a student fits in to an environment through his

or her perceived warmth of the social setting, and the extent he or she did not feel pressured to adapt to the normative differences within an institution. McMillan & Chavis (1986) defined sense of belonging as a feeling that students believe a group is important to them, and that students are reciprocally important to the group. Some authors accept sense of belonging as a feeling that individual members of group matter to one another, thus leading to shared faith that individual and community needs will be met through common commitment (Ostermann, 2000). Others have used this term to convey a sense of identification or positioning in relation to a group in order to yield an affective response (Tovar & Simon, 2010). Further definitions have restricted sense of belonging within academic settings, referring to a feeling of being “accepted, valued, included, and encouraged by others in the academic classroom” (Goodenow, 1993, p.25).

The multiple characterizations of sense of belonging within the psychology and education literature poses a problem to studying this phenomenon because there has not existed a shared understanding that comprehensively encompassed the common characteristics of these previously accepted definitions. Due to the varied meanings that have been ascribed to sense of belonging, a common definition must be justified for use in further investigating this phenomenon. Strayhorn (2012) has most recently attempted to synthesize the multiple definitions from previous authors in the literature and proposed the following definition of sense of belonging for college students as the “...perceived social support on campus, a feeling of sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)” (p. 3).

Strayhorn's (2012) definition of sense of belonging was used in this study for multiple reasons. This understanding of sense of belonging was an inclusive framework that captured the multiple facets of the phenomenon of interest that previous authors have been unable to encapsulate within past definitions. Strayhorn's (2012) definition leveraged the cognitive effects defined in the psychology literature and integrated it with the multiple meanings defined in the education literature. This definition encompassed the numerous sensations a student may experience of feeling like he or she is included in the campus environment (Spady 1970), while engaging in valued interactions (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) through being appreciated by peers (Ostermann, 2000) both in and out of the classroom via sensations of feeling welcomed (Goodenow, 1993). Further, Strayhorn's (2012) description of sense of belonging filled in the gaps that helped bridge previous definitions between the psychology and education literature to each other, and provides a thorough recognition of how this phenomenon encompasses a broad range of emotional and cognitive outcomes.

### **Conditions for Sense of Belonging**

A number of indicators have been used to predict increased or decreased sense of belonging among college students. Social involvement (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; 2005), cross cultural communication (Maramba & Museus, 2012), and frequent positive interaction with peers, faculty, and administrators (Freeman et al., 2007) on a physical campus setting have been shown to positively facilitate a SOC's sense of belonging. Rendón (1994) also stated that educators can advance experiences where students felt accepted, welcomed, and valuable through validation, which is a developmental process

that enables, supports, and confirms academic and interpersonal development both in and out of the classroom.

There are also a number of factors that lead to the inhibition of sense of belonging that emanate from racial hostility, prejudice, and bias. Research that has shown that perceptions of unwelcoming racial climates are inhibitors to student transitions and persistence within the college environment (Johnson et al., 2007), and these barriers correlate to a negative sense of belonging for racially minoritized students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

To cope with this hostile environment, SOC often engaged in ethnic group cohesion, defined as the degree of connectedness students have toward their ethnic communities and cultures as a means to develop membership within college campuses (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Santos et al., 2007). Previous research has claimed that the presence of a racially hostile campus climate may be an impetus that causes students to seek out familiar racial or ethnic subgroups as a means to discover, comfort, and develop stronger ties with culturally accustomed communities (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). Engagement within these subcultures on campus has been shown to be effective in facilitating forums where SOC may find cultural familiarity within an unacquainted or threatening environment, be afforded a space to express cultural identities, and to have their cultural heritage validated (Maramba & Museus, 2012).

### **Sense of Belonging and Asian American Students**

While broad SOC populations have been examined, there exists a lack of depth regarding the influences that specifically impact Asian American college students' sense

of belonging (Maramba & Museus, 2012). These limitations in scholarship have restricted the ability to understand the specific conditions that are beneficial or detrimental to sense of belonging for Asian American college students. When research regarding sense of belonging is disaggregated by race, the majority of research on student sense of belonging has examined the Black and Latino/a student experience (Freeman et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Only two studies (Lee & Davis, 2000; Museus & Maramba, 2012) have been widely cited in the literature and have examined the relationship between sense of belonging and Asian American undergraduates. This limitation within the literature is despite calls by researchers to accentuate and better comprehend the Asian American student experience on college campuses (Museus & Truong, 2009; Teranishi, 2010). In one study, Lee and Davis (2000) found that the formation and salience of ethnic identity for Asian American college students was significantly linked to sense of belonging, while Museus and Maramba (2012) examined the Filipino student experience and found that ethnic group cohesion and resources such as cultural centers or ethnic student organizations provided a safe haven for racialized students to engage in and facilitate a sense of community and belonging on college campuses.

While these previous findings have emphasized the importance of ethnic identity and the presence of safe spaces for ethnic cohesion to take place, neither of these studies have used Strayhorn's (2012) framework to operationalize sense of belonging as the means Asian American students feel included, perceive engaging interactions, and feel appreciated within the comprehensive academic and social environment of college campus. Because of this, a more thorough examination of sense of belonging is required

to capture the ways Asian American students feel like they are part of a campus community and matter within college campuses.

Additionally, neither of these previous studies considered the impact of online racial climates or the current state of social media as a forum where communications, relationships, and campus culture currently exist (Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009). The limited studies that have been conducted on sense of belonging have focused exclusively on the experiences of Asian American students on the physical college campus (Lee & Davis, 2000; Museus & Maramba, 2012). Further research remains to be advanced regarding how encounters of racialized aggressions on social media may affect the degree to which Asian American college students feel connected to their campus environment.

### **Gaps that Emerge from the Literature for Future Examination**

Critiques of the literature have resulted in a number of unexplored topics that are in need of imminent and future study. Scholars have called upon higher education to further understand the presence and outcomes of social media on college campuses, but the majority of extant research has neglected to consider anonymous online forums where racialized aggressions are most likely to proliferate.

Researchers have also increasingly appealed to educators to pay increased attention to the Asian American college student experience, yet publications and studies continue to primarily identify Black and Latino/a students as the foundation for study (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Harwood et al., 2012; Ramirez, 2014; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011), or clump Asian American students within an aggregated SOC population that conceals the unique experiences of this racialized group (Museus &



Truong, 2009). As the Asian American population continues to grow, higher education must become increasingly aware of the needs and realities that this community is bringing to colleges and universities.

Additionally, sense of belonging has been identified as a critical component of the student experience and is prioritized among higher education educators, but little is known about how this outcome is affected, impeded, or advanced in the contemporary environment of social media. Those interested in promoting increased student satisfaction, engagement, and persistence within higher education would be well served to comprehend how interactions and experiences on social media affect this sense of feeling welcomed and included within a campus community.

A future area of study may be identified from these critiques. How will educators respond to the lack of research regarding the intersection of student experiences traditionally examined within physical college campus environments but are yet to be explored on social media? How can the continued deficit of research regarding Asian American college student experiences, and the lack of understanding regarding how sense of belonging is affected by encounters of racialized aggressions on social media be emphasized in practice? These questions can be answered through employment of Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework that contextualizes the unique racialized experiences of Asian Americans within U. S. society. The identified gaps in research and the need for educators to further explore these questions are grounded within the literature of this chapter. This rationale is an impetus to proceed with a methodological investigation that thoroughly examines both the student experience, and the online

environment in which racialized encounters by Asian American college students and communications occur.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originally evolved from a critique of legal studies as a means to identify the persistence and integration of racism in American society (Delgado, 1995). CRT is rooted in the foundational tenet that asserts the construction of race and the manifestation of racism are endemic, pertinent, and fully intersected within the societal structures of the U.S. (Bell, 1992). Additionally, CRT centralizes experiences by racially minoritized individuals as privileged knowledge that can be used to understand, analyze, and advance discourse regarding racial oppression in American society (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

### **Critical Race Theory and Higher Education**

CRT is a theoretical framework that is useful for interpreting racialized experiences of college students within higher education. CRT helps uncover the manifestation and existence of racism within educational settings to help explain the stratification of class and racial hierarchies (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CRT is an effective means to interpret rationalizations of colorblindness/meritocracy, understanding how systemic racism facilitates environments that subjugate racialized minorities to oppressive educational experiences, and identifying solutions to these problematic experiences that facilitate constructive change to address the social inequities within education (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Ultimately, CRT is a framework that can serve as a means to eliminate racism and the subordination of other marginalized identities by identifying, analyzing, and transforming the structures within higher education that have

maintained and perpetuate racial hegemony (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT is grounded within the understanding of foundational pillars that include: the centrality of racism, the emphasis of lived experiences, a critique of liberalism, and whiteness as property (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

**Centrality of Racism Within Education.** CRT situates identities of race and the manifestation of racism within the forefront of the methodological research process, and aspires to give voice to participants who are typically silenced and muted in dominant “objective” and neutral paradigms within research (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Analyzing student experiences using CRT is relevant for studies relating to campus racial climates due to CRT’s ability to uncover experiences that are normally masked by majoritarian paradigms, and because recognizing and critically analyzing the impact of a campus climate through minoritized perspectives is essential for educators interested in advancing scholarship regarding the persistence and matriculation of SOC within higher education (Allen & Solórzano, 2001).

The primary tenet of CRT is based on the understanding that racism is normalized within society and has become embedded and reproduced as the central factor within the operation and functioning of social orders (Russell, 1992). It is due to this assertion that Bell (1992) argued that racism is a permanent fixture and natural to everyday processes. Racism is central to the identity of the United States, but it also intersects with a number of other forms of subordination, including classism and sexism that reinforce the intercentricity and foundation of racist oppression (Barnes, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). CRT maintains that a commitment to social justice and action are a necessity in order to eliminate these forms of oppression within education (Solórzano, 1997).

**Lived Experiences and Counter Narratives.** A second pillar of CRT maintains that understanding the ways racism manifests in society and its impact can be uncovered through the elevation of racialized individuals' lived experiences by processes such as storytelling and counter storytelling (Barnes, 1990; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Narratives, chronicles, and testimonials from minoritized populations are seen as an effective means to understanding how majoritarian paradigms have historically minoritized specific communities (Delgado, 1995). CRT accomplishes these objectives by challenging claims of objectivity by privileging the voices of those who experience racism in their everyday experiences by allowing minoritized individuals to “name their own reality” when describing experiences of racial oppression (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13). Through this process, CRT unmask the minoritized knowers of knowledge who are often concealed by objective paradigms and allow for multiple subjective realities to be uncovered and be valued (Barnes, 1990; Delgado, 1995).

Within higher education, studies have been conducted that prioritized the voices and experiences of historically marginalized populations. These studies have been prominent in advancing understanding of how educators can support SOC through programs, interventions, and policy that advance positive student experiences for marginalized communities within academic and social settings (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), while empowering those who have been oppressed by educational structures (Matsuda, 1991). These studies have challenged the dominant ideology of colorblindness, meritocracy, and race neutrality that have been essential in defying majoritarian narratives for Asian American college students such as the model minority image (Park & Lui, 2014; Teranishi, 2002).

**A Critique of Liberalism.** Third, CRT critiques liberalism as a perspective that is ill equipped to serve as a catalyst for social change to racial oppression. Liberalism acts in a slow manner and doesn't possess mechanisms that enable liberation for racialized minorities (Crenshaw, 1988). Because racism is so entrenched within societal workings, large scale, sweeping transformations are required to create change that destabilizes racism's foundation within the context of liberalism (Crenshaw, 1988).

CRT asserts liberalism and the structures that it embodies are enablers of systemic racism because the system subjects racially minoritized communities to oppression through endorsement of principles such as colorblindness and meritocracy within educational settings such as colleges and universities (Crenshaw, 1988). Crenshaw (1988) states liberalism ultimately discounts the confounding realities of racism that CRT aims to expose and critique. Thus, situating educational structures within the historical and contemporary context of liberalism is essential for framing the experiences of racially minoritized students at PWIs.

**Whiteness as Property.** Fourth, CRT maintains that Whites have been the primary beneficiaries of legislation within the historical construction and continued political will existing in the United States that position access to, and consumption of education toward a privileged class (Ladson-Billings, 1998). These legislative advantages have safeguarded the material manifestation of whiteness as privileged and protected property (Harris, 1993). Beyond its categorization as a racial identity, Whiteness is perceived as possessing inherent value within society because it acts as a means of distinguishing individuals as separate from Blacks, who are held in a racially inferior and less desirable position within a racial hierarchy (Hacker, 1992).

Whiteness permits individuals to access a number of social, political, economic, and psychological privileges that would not normally be available to those without material whiteness. CRT affirms that these benefits are disseminated and reproduced through structures and legislation that protect White property rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The ability to claim structures, processes, and spaces as property and the ability to exclude non-Whites from these material possessions is foundational in the understanding and enactment of property rights in the U.S. (Harris, 1993). It is due to these advantages that whiteness is protected, valued, and meaningful within multiple societal contexts. In the settings of higher education and social media, online forums where racist attitudes have daunted SOC from being active on platforms such as Yik Yak (Gin et al., 2017) can be perceived as territorial spaces claimed by whiteness in the form of home territories (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996).

### **Critical Race Scholarship and Asian Americans in Higher Education**

Authors have leveraged the tenets of CRT to capture campus racial climates and critically analyze the impact on SOC within oppressive environments such as PWIs. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) asserted that the experiences and knowledge of racially minoritized individuals can be elevated by a counter story telling process that acts to refute dominant narratives and “objective” notions that have historically defined people of color. Firsthand knowledge by individuals who experienced racism is important within these studies because CRT posits individuals are experts on their own lives. Multiple studies have leveraged this notion and used CRT to expose racism within education, such as documenting the emergence of racial microaggressions within peer culture (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), critically examining the bias students face within academic

settings (Solórzano, 1998), and to give voice to students who have traditionally been overshadowed by majoritarian narratives (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006).

Although utilized to examine multiple racialized issues in higher education, CRT has not been popularized within studies examining Asian American college student experiences. This is despite the fact that Chang (1999) stated that Asian Americans are subjected to unique racialization due to their conflicting constructed image of both outsiders and exemplars of American society. As a result, Chang (1999) advocated for a CRT framework to understand the confounding racial issues that Asian Americans face, including the model minority myth that has been used to legitimize meritocracy and nativistic racism that has acted to situate the Asian American population as intruders to U.S. culture.

Additionally, Chang (1999) claimed that many individuals are unaware of the historical discrimination (e.g. immigration policies), contemporary bias (e.g. affirmative action), and violence (e.g. Vincent Chin) Asian Americans have faced within American society that comprised this group's racialization in the U.S. Other authors have resonated with this sentiment by stating CRT is effective in understanding how Asian American college student experiences have been primarily misunderstood through dominant paradigms and narratives (e.g. the model minority image), and future studies must challenge the misconceptions of access (Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Miss-Escalante, 2009), affirmative action (Park & Liu, 2014), and campus racial climate (Teranishi, 2002) that have led to Asian Americans as a forgotten minority (Lo, 2003). It is due to the possibilities of uncovering previously hidden knowledge of the Asian American

experience that scholars have further argued for further usage of CRT in studies examining this racialized population.

### **Rationale to Use Critical Race Theory**

CRT becomes a relevant framework to utilize in this study because of its ability to focus on how the construct of race shapes educational structures, behaviors, and discourses acts as a means to uncover counter stories, perspectives, and experiences (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009) of Asian Americans who are often rendered voiceless by normative paradigms that emphasize a singular truth such as the model minority myth (Lee, 1996; Suyemoto et al., 2009; Wu, 2002). CRT situates Asian American college students in the broader lens of social, institutional, and historical contexts, which values minoritized perspectives as privileged knowledge (Delgado, 1995). Uncovering this knowledge can inform social change and the advancement of policy aimed at better addressing the needs and experiences of Asian American college students by striving to eliminate racism within higher education (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). It is from this framework that Asian Americans college students' encounters of racialized aggressions on online spaces, and the impact of those experiences upon sense of belonging may be further explained with recommendations presented for future research and action within college and university settings.



### CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

The previous chapters have highlighted the literature that have informed the research question for this dissertation. The literature has asserted that studying the manifestation of racism requires an in-depth analysis that qualitative research is suited to advance. Qualitative research has been identified as an effective means of identifying, interpreting, and attempting to make sense out of phenomena in natural settings, such as encounters of racialized hostility in academic environments (Lau & Williams, 2010; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to inquiry where researchers engage in the natural settings of an environment and attempt to make sense of, or interpret phenomena through interactions with participants in a study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Such a definition is in alignment with the goals identified by the research question posed by this study: *How do encounters with racialized aggressions on social media impact sense of belonging among Asian American students at a PWI?*

To study the experience of online racialized aggressions as it relates to Asian Americans' sense of belonging at a PWI, a qualitative study of students at a highly selective, private institution in the northeast U.S. was carried out through interviews, observations, artifact analysis, and focus groups concerning the participants' social media use. Qualitative methods are useful for documenting and developing complex understandings of issues that can be advanced through direct communication in environments that empower participants in a study to tell stories, unencumbered by what the researcher expects to find (Creswell, 2013).

## **Rationale of Qualitative Research**

A qualitative approach was an effective means of engaging in this research question given online encounters of racialized aggressions have not been thoroughly examined within Asian American college student populations, sense of belonging is a complex variable that is not easily measured, voices of Asian Americans are not often uncovered at PWIs, and the phenomenon of interest is a current trend occurring in the environment of higher education.

Creswell (2013) defined a number of prerequisites as characteristics that must be met in order effectively engage in robust qualitative research. These recommendations included: A) rigorous and varied data collection that supplement individual interviews (e.g. photography, drawings, text messages, and other artifacts); B) studies must consider researcher positionality, openness to emergent and evolving designs, seek to capture a holistic view of context, and validate multiple participant realities; C) rigorous design must be thorough and assessed along the way; and D) the researcher analyzes data using multiple levels of abstraction and is consistently conscious of unexpected explanations to interpret findings. These recommendations are addressed within this chapter and are documented through the research design, theoretical framework, analytical approach, and researcher positionality.

This study engaged Asian American college students at a PWI in a number of qualitative protocols that are ethnographic and phenomenological in nature, including individual interviews (See appendix C for protocol), observations and artifact analysis (See appendix D for protocol), and focus groups (See appendix E for protocol) through a CRT framework. The integration and operationalization of CRT within the methodology

was designed to ground race and racism within protocols and analysis, challenge dominant theories and beliefs used to explain the experiences of racially minoritized Asian American students, and offer solutions that address the oppression of a subordinated group within an educational structure (Creswell, 2013).

### **Theoretical Orientation**

The data collection protocols and analysis of findings were informed by a CRT framework to document the depth and detail necessitated by qualitative research. CRT was an appropriate theoretical orientation to utilize within this study due to the framework's ability to centralize traditionally marginalized/oppressed voices, to emphasize the lived experiences of a diverse population of Asian American students at a PWI, and to ground these experiences within the context of endemic racism within an educational structure.

### **Operationalizing Critical Race Theory Within Protocols**

The interview protocol leveraged the tenets of CRT in multiple ways. To establish a saliency of the Asian American identity within this inquiry, participants were asked to reflect on how their experiences as students at the site of this study were racialized at the PWI, and what implications those racialized experiences had on their sense of belonging. Participants were encouraged to reflect upon their personal experiences, elaborate on individual narratives, and to provide a counter narrative to the dominant campus perception of Asian Americans.

Participant reflections upon their racialized identity and experiences spoke to the need to understand the varied experiences of a diverse Asian American population. Highlighting individual perspectives was important due to assertions by scholars that

Asian Americans must be understood through their unique voices and cultural backgrounds (Museus & Kiang, 2009; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Park & Liu, 2014; Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2008). These protocols counteracted the majoritarian perspectives of Asian Americans as an amalgamated model minority by emphasizing the CRT principle of multiple truths and encouraging participants to elaborate on individual experiences with racism, their perspectives on ethnic identity, and their assessment of sense of belonging.

CRT further grounded the interview protocol related to participants' assessment of the racial climate on social media. These questions were designed to underscore the lived experiences of the ways racism manifested and persisted online. The purpose of accentuating these experiences was to raise the consciousness of the participants as a means to prepare individuals for engagement as social change agents. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) defined this engagement and preparation for action as a compelling benefit for employing CRT in studies of minoritized and oppressed communities.

CRT offers an action oriented "liberatory or transformative method to racial, class, and gender oppression." (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000, p. 63). Due to this, participants were encouraged to provide recommendations for change and reflect upon how their personal experiences enabled themselves, their peers, and the campus community to mobilize as a means to advance equity within their particular environment. This activism is in alignment with previous acts by Asian Americans who have engaged in social resistance as a result of engaging in discourse and increasing awareness of existing within racially distressing environments (Nguyen & Gasman, 2015). CRT scholars also recognize that while direct activism and action are ideal, not all students

will engage in this social transformation. Rather, participants may have framed this call to action through increased personal reflection to initially commence their journey toward racial liberation (Harro, 2000).

CRT further guided the analytic process and acted as the lens to interpret the findings after data collection was complete. The researcher allowed codes to emerge and amalgamated themes by interpreting the findings through a CRT framework that described the endemic nature of racism, the power of narratives, a critique on liberalism, and the definition of whiteness as property. It was through this theoretical framework that the findings are discussed, and implications for theory, research and practice are presented.

### **Study Design**

A qualitative, naturalistic inquiry was employed for this study using multiple sources of evidence that were ethnographic and phenomenological in nature. In accordance to the recommendations by Creswell (2013) and Patton (2015), the overall study design remained flexible in nature and open to pursuing new paths of discovery as the understanding of a phenomenon was deepened, or conditions changed throughout the inquiry that required a revision of the protocols (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

### **Research Site Selection**

The site for this study was a highly selective, urban, private, religiously affiliated PWI with approximately 9,000 undergraduate students in the Northeast United States. The pseudonym for this institution is East Oak University. East Oak University is a highly residential campus comprised of 53% women and 43% men. The predominantly White population comprised approximately 70% of the undergraduate student population.

30% of undergraduates identified as a SOC, and 10% of the total undergraduate student population identified as Asian American. The demographic breakdown based on Asian American ethnicity was not available from the institution. The college housed five undergraduate program colleges and had a faculty to student ratio of 1:12. The yearly tuition for the institution was approximately \$46,000, and roughly two thirds of students received some form of financial aid.

East Oak was justified as a site for study because the qualities of this institution were reflective of the conditions that facilitated online racialized aggressions (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) as confirmed by the pilot study to this dissertation (Gin et al., 2017). Additionally, the context of being situated at a private, elite PWI increased the scrutiny and acute experiences of racialized hostility for participants because Asian American college students are not predominantly concentrated at institutions such as East Oak University (Lew, Chang, & Wang, 2005; Teranishi, 2010). Thus, being situated as an undergraduate Asian American at an elite PWI was likely to result in becoming the target of racial antagonism due to the visibility of such minoritized status.

There were approximately 900 undergraduate students who matched the Asian American participant demographic identified for study, which allowed the researcher a substantial population to achieve theoretical saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The institution was also characterized by a history of racial tension toward Asian Americans and other racialized communities both within the physical campus setting and on social media. A few of these notable incidents are further documented in the following context.

**Racial Tension at East Oak University.** The research site has been the location for a number of contentious racial discourses over the previous year and a half. Undergraduate and graduate students have continually attempted to raise the institutional consciousness of the racial injustices within society (e.g. Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland) through multiple displays of activism including die ins, campus protests, and an academic walkout where students walked out on classes and gathered in the institution's quad to symbolize unity with the racial injustices students face at the University of Missouri. While many East Oak students have supported this activism, a portion of the campus student population have criticized and spoken out against these disturbances and taken to social media to express their disapproval. The dynamic of these competing perspectives and the lack of senior administrative voice to rectify this rift contributed to a polarized climate between SOC and the campus community.

East Oak has also historically been the site of other contentious campus climate issues that have been highlighted in the institution's student newspaper. In 2014, the rise of the anonymous social media platform Yik Yak created outrage on campus with racially charged posts such as a satirical user who used the pseudonym titled "[East Oak] Asian" and community posts such as "Do all Asians apply to live in [the library] when they fill out their housing intent?" appearing on the platform (East Oak Newspaper Author 1, 2014, para 4). Students at East Oak documented the proliferation of racial slurs toward Asian Americans as "repulsive" and credited the anonymity of the platform as an enabler to the proliferation of this hate (East Oak Newspaper Author 2, 2014, para 2).

These racial tensions were also rooted within earlier electronic incidents at the institution, and have also targeted Asian American populations on campus. In 1998, a nationally covered story focused on an email that was sent to 13 racially minoritized students (including Asians and Blacks) stating “[East Oak] was for white men” and for the students to “go back where you came from” (Flaherty, 1998, para 4). At the time of these emails, students on campus stated 'I don't think [East Oak] as a whole was aware of how often these things happen... I know in two or three months it's going to be forgotten and things will be the same.' (Flaherty, 1998, para 7).

East Oak University also houses two high profile anti-racism student groups. One is an undergraduate council of students founded in 2002 and advised by a faculty member that has produced a number of educational videos shared through social media forums, conducts trainings to advance awareness and discourse regarding racism on campus, and has challenged East Oak University students to engage in activism for racial justice (East Oak Newspaper Author 3, 2014). The other group is a recent collective of graduate students, administrators, and alumni founded in 2015 who are unsponsored by the institution through any formal affiliation to offices, departments, or colleges. This group’s vision is to eradicate racism and dismantle White supremacy at East Oak through disruptive tactics such as disruptive demonstrations at graduations, at meetings of the Board of Trustees, and at campus programs (East Oak Newspaper Author 4, 2015; East Oak Newspaper Author 5, 2015).

These groups, and the historical racial tensions at East Oak informed and influenced the current racial climate on campus for Asian Americans. The historical marginalization of non-White racial groups, the predominant culture of East Oak being a



PWI, the emergence of sponsored and unofficial anti-racist coalitions, and the popularization of social media all contributed to the campus culture that situated SOC such as Asian Americans within the crosshairs of antagonistic discourses regarding racism within the campus community.

### **Research Participant Selection**

Participants were recruited for this study using purposive maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2015) until theoretical saturation was attained (Guest et al., 2006). Maximum variation sampling was justified for this study due to the need to capture the diverse perspectives and identities encapsulated within the Asian American racial umbrella (Teranishi et al., 2009).

While Patton (2015) states that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative research, Guest and associates (2006) found that theoretical saturation was approximated to occur within a range of the first twenty participants. Using Guest and associates (2006) as the guideline for sample size, this study identified 29 undergraduate students who identified as Asian American at East Oak University to attain theoretical saturation.

Maximum variation sampling aimed to capture and describe how central themes cut across a deal of variation. The diversity of the sample was aimed at accomplishing three objectives: A) capturing detailed narratives that were useful for documenting the diversity of participants; B) establishing how shared patterns cut across varied participants and derive their significance from having emerged out of a heterogeneous sample (Patton, 2015); and C) capturing a sample that was most representative of the Asian American population of study as recommended by previous research studying Asian American students (Teranishi et al., 2009). A sample was created by first

identifying the diverse characteristics within the Asian American undergraduate student population at East Oak University (e.g. gender, class standing, major, ethnicity, etc.), and then identifying participants who satisfied the maximum variation of the previously identified characteristics within the Asian American student population.

Participants were initially invited for involvement in this study through a participant pre-interest survey (See Appendix A). A link to the pre-interest survey was distributed to potential participants identified via multiple channels at East Oak. This included email invitations sent through the multicultural office list serve, individual emails addressed to the Asian American student organizations at East Oak, calls for participation posted on the Asian American student organization Facebook pages, and email announcements sent through the Asian American Studies program on campus.

The selection and invitation of participants to take part in the study occurred through analysis of the pre-interest surveys. The diversity of participants was examined and sorted based on factors that included: ethnic identity, gender, class year, major/school affiliation, religion, sexual orientation, hometown, and social media use. Once participants were identified for participation, they were formally invited to take part in the study.

To ensure ethical standards were met, and that participants were fully aware of the scope, nature, and risks involved in this study, students authorized their participation in this study through agreement via consent form (See Appendix B). This form further safeguarded confidentiality of participant and institutional identities by stating pseudonyms would be utilized throughout all phases of this study including the final

report. Students who completed all phases of this study were compensated with a \$30 gift card to the campus bookstore or local dining establishment for their participation.

The researcher worked toward establishing substantive significance (Patton, 2015) in the findings and conclusion of this study to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon of study, to provide insight to occurrences of similar context at campuses with a comparable institutional profile and student population, and to inform action-oriented steps to addressing racialized hostility and advancing sense of belonging on college campuses. Additionally, the findings of this study are designed to compel further research and inquiry within similar sites that may further document the experiences of racism and the impacts on sense of belonging for other Asian American college students.

### **Triangulation and Maintenance of Data**

Patton (2015) asserts that triangulation is an ideal and critical characteristic of qualitative research, and findings can be strengthened by employing a variety of methods and data collection within the study design.

This study addresses multiple calls for triangulation in ways that are documented under the study design. Employment of multiple forms of evidence were collected because different types of data are sensitive to capturing nuances in qualitative research that help reveal inconsistencies in findings, and enable researchers to delve deeper into the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015). Multiple sources of evidence also enable converging lines of inquiry to form that are favorable for triangulation of data and to increase validity (Yardley, 2009). Using these multiple sources of evidence is effective because these data have “non-overlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths” (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, p. 17). This dissertation utilized multiple forms of

evidence through interviews, observations, artifacts, and focus groups to satisfy the criteria for robust triangulation of findings.

Reliability of the findings were established through the employment of critical friends. Critical friends independently analyzed the data and coding as a means to compare findings with the researcher (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Two doctoral students with backgrounds in both qualitative research and critical race theory, read, analyzed and coded selected transcripts and digital artifact of participants in this study. These critical friends and compared their coding and analysis of the transcripts and artifacts with the findings of the researcher. They then provided critiques to the findings and helped contribute to the validity of the study by asking critical questions to unclear findings, and raising probing critiques that were not originally recognized or addressed by the researcher (Costa & Kallick, 1993).

Qualitative studies also require the maintenance of a comprehensive database that contains evidentiary documents, field notes, and all relevant data that were used to maintain a chain of evidence throughout the inquiry (Yin, 2014). This study upheld these recommendations of thorough documentation regarding how and when multiple pieces of evidence arose within the data, where cited evidence was located in the data, and the reasoning of how identified data/evidence contributed to the addressing of the research question.

## **Interviews**

Individual, semi-structured interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) leveraging tenets of CRT (e.g. recognizing endemic racism, elevating narratives of SOC, dedication to social change) were employed with the purpose to “enter into the other person’s

perspective” as a means to grasp feelings and thoughts of students that are difficult to directly observe due the internal ways that participants organize the world (Patton, 2015, p. 426). Sixty-minute long interviews were scheduled with participants who completed the pre-interview interest survey and qualified for the study. Interviews took place in a private campus location mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participant. The interviews were digitally recorded on an electronic device. The interviews were uploaded to a password-protected database and sent for transcription. Once the transcriptions of the interviews were completed, all original recordings of the interview were destroyed/deleted off all devices and databases. All identifying information of participants and institution that emerge within the transcriptions were protected by pseudonyms.

The protocol (See Appendix C) for these interviews was designed to elevate the voices of Asian American students at a PWI to inquire about each student’s social media use, document his or her encounters with racism on social media, and to capture visions for social change on campus. The topics that were included within the interview protocol included: Social/academic experiences on campus, racial identity, personal patterns of social media use, racial climate on social media, how sense of belonging is impacted by racial climate of social media, and a call to action/recommendations for advocacy.

The interview protocol had multiple objectives: A) to document Asian American students’ patterns of social media use, B) to gain student perspectives regarding their social and academic perspectives at a PWI, C) to classify the racial climate on social media platforms used by these participants, D) to identify racialized aggressions students may encounter in their use of social media and if/how they respond to these aggressions,

E) to uncover if/how these online racialized encounters affect sense of belonging, and F) to solicit participant feedback regarding how students can use these reflections to mobilize for change and promote positive student experiences for Asian Americans at a PWI.

Patton (2015) notes that high quality and rigorous interviews compel interviewees to share their stories, and that interviews simultaneously act as a two-way observation between the participant and researcher. The interview protocol followed Patton's (2015) advice and employed questions based off the conceptual foundations of racialized aggressions (Minikel-Lacocque, 2012) and sense of belonging/mattering (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Schlossberg, 1989; Strayhorn, 2012) to encourage participants to engage in the process of in depth chronicling of their online experiences, and to facilitate a connection to the researcher of this study.

### **Observations**

Observational analysis of students' social media use further documented the "depth and detail" of the context where racialized aggressions manifest, and shed insight on how participants reacted to aggressions in real time settings (Patton, 2015, p. 332). As described by Patton, the purpose of observational data is to document context, environment, and other characteristics that are typically not captured in retroactive call within interviews. Another purpose of observations was to detect environmental characteristics that may routinely escape the awareness of a study participant in his or her daily interactions.

An observational protocol spoke to Lau and Williams' (2010) call to move toward direct observations of racialized hostilities in "real-life settings" within higher education

(p. 319). The protocol for this portion of the study (See Appendix D) entailed a 1:1 meeting with students after their individual interview. The observation was scheduled for thirty to forty-five minutes and was conducted in the same space where the interview occurred. The researcher asked the participant to use his or her mobile, tablet, or laptop device to log on to the user's preferred social media platforms. The researcher observed the participant using these social media platforms and paid attention to the content within the media feeds, with whom the users connected with on social media, and documented a student's responses and reflections to any racialized content he or she may have encountered through field notes. In instances where the observation protocol did not reveal encounters of racialized aggressions or racialized hostility, the researcher engaged the participant in a conversation to understand how the user protected him or herself from these encounters on social media (i.e. curating of profiles, newsfeeds, avoidance of particular forums, etc.)

Participants were asked to take screen shots of any racialized offenses during and in the weeks following the observation. Participants were asked to email the documentation to the researcher as a means to capture these experiences through digital artifacts because visual data are increasingly becoming important in qualitative research (Azzam & Evergreen, 2013). Patton (2015) notes that while visual evidence does not exclusively constitute a robust form of credible evidence, such data can be extremely useful in explaining findings when used in conjunction with other data such as interviews, focus groups, and observations. The inventorying of artifacts served multiple purposes: to triangulate findings, to provide evidence of a prevalent phenomenon, and to ensure reliability of data by triangulating interview findings to evidence from social

media observations (Patton, 2015). Interesting findings that emerged from observations and artifact collection were also be presented to a focus group for participants to validate, invalidate, or further discuss the validity of the researcher's interpretation of the data.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups supplemented individual interviews and observational analysis by giving voice to a marginalized community (Asian Americans at a PWI) in a social setting (Morgan, 2008), while relying on group interactions to enhance data quality by validating or weeding out false findings initially identified by the researcher (Krueger & Casey, 2008). The focus group was intended to highlight diverse perspectives regarding the research question by sparking dialogue among participants (Krueger & Casey, 2008) and to reinforce major themes identified by the researcher (Patton, 2015).

Focus groups also recognize that participants in qualitative research are social beings, and the interaction within a social experience can increase validity and meaningfulness of findings because perspectives are formed and sustained in social groups (Patton, 2015). Engaging in a focus group also provided access to the thoughts and perceptions of research participants who would have been intimidated by individual one-on-one interviews. Focus groups allowed multiple lines of communication to develop within a group where data that could not be uncovered in an individual face-to-face interview (Madriz, 2000).

The semi-structured protocol for the focus groups (See Appendix E) was based off of the findings identified from individual interviews and observations. In accordance with Patton (2015), six to eight participants were invited to take part in each focus group. Four focus groups were conducted for this study. Students were invited to take part in



only one of the focus groups. Participants in these focus groups responded to themes identified by the researcher's initial coding and analysis of individual interviews and observations to triangulate findings across multiple phases of this study as a means to warrant trustworthiness (Krueger & Casey, 2008).

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected throughout this study were transcribed and coded for themes using HyperResearch software. The analytic strategy leveraged CRT to guide the interpretation of findings due to the unique lens that this theoretical framework brought to understanding the manifestation of racism and the experience of oppression. The wide range of participant characteristics and experiences within this study were documented, and patterns were identified that cut across the diversity of cases (Patton, 2015).

The data were analyzed through a constant comparative method that was designed to develop concepts by simultaneous coding and analyzing to create emerging categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Constant comparative analysis has been identified as an effective analytical strategy for researchers conducting studies in education settings (Kolb, 2012) and was justified for this study because of the method's relevance to the study design and theoretical orientation. The constant comparative method generates theory that is both closely related to the data and integrated among the multiple data sources within a study (Conrad, Neumann, Haworth, & Scott, 1993). The constant comparative method is also effective in leveraging the CRT principle that multiple realities and truths exist that challenge pre-existing paradigms (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Unlike deductive processes that utilize preexisting frameworks and paradigms to guide analyses, the inductive constant comparative method permits a substantive

explanation or theory to organically emerge through interactions with the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which align with the principles of CRT (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Additionally, these explanations or theories become reinforced by the contributions of marginalized voices within the study sample, which CRT aspires to elevate and underscore.

The raw data was initially guided by emergent, open coding, allowing the researcher to discern the most salient data arising from interviews, focus groups, analytic memos, digital artifacts, and observations (Saldana, 2009). This inductive process allowed for a codebook to be developed with root and stem codes that were used to interpret the data and develop themes. Multiple overviews of the data were necessitated so that patterns and categories so “jumped out” as the researcher became more familiar and engrossed within the data (Patton, 2015, p. 530). Based on Saldana’s (2009) recommendation, these codes were recorded in the codebook with corresponding definitions, examples, and explanations of how each code was operationalized as a means to maintain and document validity throughout the analysis process.

Categories were developed through the process of analyzing how data converged and fit together via recurring regularities (Guba, 1978). Categories from the raw data were created based on A) the extent a group of codes belonged and should have been grouped together in a meaningful way that represented consistency (i.e. internal homogeneity); and B) the extent these new categories were distinct and differentiated from one another and how these categories comprised a complete picture of the phenomenon (i.e. external heterogeneity) (Guba, 1978).

After patterns and categories were established, the researcher engaged in the process of building upon the categories and making connections among the various patterns that were established (i.e. extension and bridging the data). These categories were further grouped to explain patterns that acted as the foundation for the creation of themes (Bernard, 2013). An examination of deviant cases, or data that do not naturally fit into the most salient patterns, also occurred to explain how and why these data complicated or created nuance in the findings (Patton, 2015). Through this process, themes were interpreted and grouped to address the research question posed by this study (Saldana, 2009).

### **Trustworthiness and Reliability**

Multiple strategies were employed to ensure trustworthiness and reliability. These means included: employing multiple sources of evidence to ensure construct validity (Yin, 2014), and iterative thematic construction to warrant internal validity (George & Bennett, 2004). Trustworthiness was further ensured through member checking of the coding process by “critical friends” (Yin, 2014, p. 150). Triangulation of findings was conducted through feedback from participants in the study via focus groups (Patton, 2015). The maintenance/comparison of field notes during multiple points of data collection and analysis were employed to ensure consistency with the original purpose of the study’s inquiry (Patton, 2015). Additionally, reliability was ensured by thorough documentation of all procedures through a comprehensive, password protected database containing all protocols, interview notes, transcriptions, artifacts, and findings through every phase of the study.

## **Pilot Study**

A pilot study (Gin et al, 2017) was conducted to this dissertation as a means to initially assess the online encounters of racialized aggressions by students at East Oak University. This pilot included a subset of data from a sample of fifteen (seven men, eight women) first-generation, traditionally aged (under the age of 22), mostly students of color undergraduates who have been followed for the previous three years as part of a larger longitudinal research project examining the connection between technology and educational outcomes for first generation college students. This study engaged students in a semi-structured interview protocol and was analyzed using constant comparative analysis and member checking throughout the coding process by multiple individuals within a research team to ensure trustworthiness. The study was heuristic in nature, as students were encouraged to make meaning of their encounters with racialized aggressions on social media platforms.

The findings from this pilot study suggested that East Oak University was a prime location for racialized aggressions to manifest on social media, especially in the anonymous forum Yik Yak. Students of color were often daunted by hostile online spaces and exhibited behaviors that were characteristic of racial battle fatigue and cultural paranoia. Students also called for the disruption of racialized aggressions in online spaces through the enactment of anti-racist education, though distanced themselves from personally being the educators responsible for such interventions.

Although Asian Americans were not the focus of this study, the participant sample included four students who identified with this racialized group. When examining the subset of data from these four students, Asian Americans conveyed both a hostile

climate on social media, and an unwillingness to engage on the racialized forum of Yik Yak. Rather, these students engaged in behaviors that both minimized the proliferation of racialized hate, and avoided hostile social media apps altogether. Because only four out of the fifteen students of this pilot study identified as Asian American, further research was recommended to expand the sample of students and examine the experiences on social media of various disaggregated racialized groups.

Multiple recommendations emerged from this pilot study that will be implemented within this dissertation. First, the online racialized experiences by students of color should be further partitioned by race, which this dissertation has taken into account by examining Asian American students. Additionally, the terminology of racialized aggressions was affirmed as an appropriate definition to frame the manifestation of online racism within the protocols used for this dissertation. Consideration of the context of East Oak's racial climate within the analysis and protocols is also important, as factors external to the individual students (e.g. student activism on campus and national dialogues surrounding racism) have a localized influence on the experiences of participants within a study. These contemporary and historical forces have been documented within the site selection section of this chapter and will be taken into account during the analysis and interpretation portion of this dissertation.

While the pilot did not explicitly focus on sense of belonging, the question "Do you feel like you are part of the [East Oak] community?" was asked of all participants who were part of this study. The brief responses by the participants suggested further probing is necessary in order to operationalize and clearly define sense of belonging for

students in this dissertation. This suggests the researcher must contextualize the concepts of community, mattering, and belonging within the protocols and be prepared with probes that can uncover the participant perceptions of sense of belonging.

Finally, students often stated they took precautions against encountering racialized aggressions through curating profiles or avoidance of social media that often harbored such hostilities. This suggests observing students using their social media may not bring the researcher into online spaces where participants will encounter a large quantity of racialized aggressions. In this instance, the researcher has built in questions to the protocols to further understand how the curating process creates a comfortable social media experience for the user, and how this curated space also contributes to sense of belonging on campus. The act of curating is an important response to the presence of racialized aggressions and still can provide insight that connects the manifestation of online racism and sense of belonging to East Oak University.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Patton (2015) asserts positionality is important to note within the research process because qualitative analysis is highly personal and judgmental. Patton (2015) suggests researchers must be conscious of the reflective process of inquiry where personal biases, fears, and blinders can influence study findings and become prevalent within the voice of research if personal perspectives are not recognized throughout the research process.

Patton (2015) poses a number of questions to consider within the reflexive process of conducting research. These questions include: What does the researcher know? How do experiences and preexisting knowledge shape the researcher's perspective? How

do a researcher's perceptions, identity, and background shape the analysis and presentation of data? How does the researcher perceive the participants he or she studies? And with what voice does the researcher use to share his or her perspective? These questions are answered within the following paragraphs to address the impact of positionality and reflexivity within this study.

I am a third generation, Chinese American who comes from an upper middle class family from Oakland, CA. My racialized identity has always been a salient aspect of my life, as I grew up in a community that was not predominantly White, but one where my identity was reinforced by immigrant grandparents on both sides of my family. As someone who was born and raised in a racially diverse community and has resided in locations where racial justice has been a prominent aspect of the culture (Berkeley, CA) and in predominantly White locations where I felt hyper visible as part of a minoritized population (Fort Collins, CO), I believe in the endemic nature of racism and the power of higher education to be a forum to advance the discourse regarding the stratification of race, the inequities experienced by marginalized populations, and the advancement of social justice through mobilization of activist communities. These facets of my identity have been influential in framing both the research question, and the purpose of this study. It is due to my first-hand experiences with racism as a racialized minority and my identity as an Asian American that I am invested and am interested in advancing knowledge through this study by examining Asian American undergraduates at a PWI.

My father is a retired higher education professional who continues to influence my personal and professional identity. My personal connection to higher education has allowed me to perceive the political, organizational, and bureaucratic ways that colleges

function within student affairs, academic affairs, and all other administrative units. This perception allows me to understand the racialized experiences of SOC on college campuses co-exist with the tensions for higher education institutions to effectively operate and advance their individual missions in accordance to local, state, federal, and political forces. I believe this aspect of my identity will influence the ways I frame the recommendations for practice within this dissertation. I understand scholarship must speak to both scholarly educators and administrative practitioners. The implications I will present in this dissertation will be written through my lens as both an advocate of students, and a practitioner of the student affairs field who understands action-oriented recommendations must speak to incremental change that can be embraced by administrators who are bound by the aggregate of individual responsibilities, political pressures, and organizational cultures within higher education.

As a Chinese American man, I have experienced and continue to experience the effects of structural racism within the site of study for this dissertation, and within the community that I reside. I believe that Asian American students experience daily oppressive signals (i.e. microaggressions) that indicate they are outsiders to the institution and are not welcomed on campus because I have personally encountered these messages as a student on campus. I also understand my personal experiences do not necessarily translate to a similar experience for other Asian American experiences at East Oak University. My personal experiences have influenced the way I have framed the protocols and will influence the probes I will use within the data collection portion of this study. I perceive a hostile environment at the site of study based on my experiences on campus,



and this consciousness has manifested itself within my predicted findings for this research.

Despite these experiences and perceptions, I will present the findings of this study, and frame the implications for practice in a way that honors the lived experiences of the participants who participated within this dissertation, and also remain conscious of my role as a student and administrative professional at East Oak University. The political nature of addressing racism within a campus community is one in which I understand requires both sensitivity to the administrative structure and advocacy for liberation to the student body. Therefore, the tone, the sentiment, and the insights that I will provide in this dissertation will represent my multiple identities of a student, scholar, and practitioner at East Oak University.

I have previously documented expected findings (e.g. the presence of online racism negatively impacts sense of belonging for Asian Americans students toward the greater campus community, but students engage in familiar ethnic group interactions to deflect from this hostile environment) for this dissertation in a previous dissertation fellowship application and justified the predicted findings within lived evidence from my personal experience, anecdotal evidence from the Asian American students who took part in the pilot study to this dissertation, and from the literature that has overwhelming documented the hostile setting of a PWI toward SOC. While I have predicted these findings, I am not engaging within this research to prove a particular hypothesis. Rather, I engage in this research being open to whatever findings may emerge from this study, even if those findings contradict the previous knowledge and conceptions that I have formulated based on my experiences, knowledge, and intuition. I understand the

uncertainty of what the researcher may find or encounter is the nature of qualitative research.

The sum of these perspectives and experiences are present within the lens that I will engage within this dissertation. I recognize that my experiences have been unique to my identity and status as a doctoral student at East Oak University, and the presentation of data and findings will not reflect any type of objectivity. Rather, the CRT framework is one in which I resonate with and embrace for its ability to uncover the subjective experiences of marginalized participants, encourage counter narratives to dominant paradigms, and mobilize individuals to facilitate social change within particular contexts.

Given these realities, I have outlined and presented a number of ways that I will work to ensure this study most accurately captures the voice, experiences, and perspectives of the participants of interest while adhering to the thorough moral standards of qualitative research within this chapter. Multiple safeguards to ensure validity and reliability of the collection of data and interpretation of findings have also been delineated and will act as a means to hold me accountable for an ethical and robust research processes. It is through this positionality, reflexivity, and transparency that I frame my data collection, analysis, presentation of findings, and future recommendations for scholarship and practice.

### **Limitations**

While a number of precautions have been taken to anticipate and address bias and trustworthiness, all study designs possess limitations that further warrant attention. First, the generalizability of this study is limited due to the restricted scope of the sample, time available to conduct the study, and the accessibility of resources for the researcher. While

this research is phenomenological and ethnographic in nature, the study design is more simplistic in scope than either of the previously mentioned methods due to the lack of time and resources that would necessary to properly design a phenomenology or ethnography. As a result, the findings of this study are not meant to be generalizable to larger populations beyond the site of study. Rather, this study and these findings are designed to inform future studies that may be leveraged to further probe the phenomenon of online racism and the impacts on racially minoritized college students.

Although every attempt will be made to attain a sample that satisfies the maximum variation of the Asian American population, the nature of identifying and confirming participants for qualitative research restricts the ability to coerce any student from participating in this study. As a result, there may exist information rich sources on campus who may not agree to take part in this study and restrict the robustness of data available to the researcher.

Additionally, the acute nature of the research site and participant selection where this study occurs restricts the ability to generalize these findings to institutions and populations that do not share the same cultural profile. While this may be the case, the findings and implications of this study may be helpful to inspire best practices for other institutions facing similar incidents of racism on the social media environments on campus.

As in all types of qualitative studies, researcher bias is a quality that must be carefully defined and identified through all aspects of a study. In this case, researcher positionality has been defined, though it does not safeguard against the unconscious bias that is inherent within all types of research. Because this study is purely qualitative in

nature, the findings, discussion, and implications for practice will not reflect an objective stance. Therefore, practitioners or scholars who engage with this study are encouraged to understand how researcher positionality may bias any content within this dissertation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: Findings**

### **Introduction to Findings**

This chapter presents findings concerning the relationship between the encounter of racialized aggressions on social media and sense of belonging for Asian American college students. The findings that emerged from this research are organized according to four themes, and organized as follows: 1) Assumptions About Campus Culture 2) Anonymity on Social Media, 3) Alienation of Asian Americans, and 4) Institutional Accountability.

The first theme, Assumptions about Campus Culture, presents findings about the face-to-face experiences at East Oak and does not include evidence from social media. The second theme, Anonymity on Social Media, introduces findings regarding how racialized aggressions emerged on social media, especially on the anonymous platform Yik Yak. The third theme, Alienation of Asian Americans, draws attention to the ways sense of belonging was impacted for participants in this study. The final theme, Institutional Accountability, summarizes participant recommendations as they relate to remediating racialized aggressions on social media.

Each theme presented in this chapter is supported by multiple pieces of evidence collected during the study including participant collected screen captures of racialized aggressions on various social media platforms when artifacts are available. The encounter of racialized aggressions on social media and participant responses to these online aggressions were generally consistent across age, ethnicity, and class year.

Efforts were made to identify a diverse pool of participant ethnicities, but attempts to recruit students from ethnic backgrounds such as Japanese, Thai, Cambodian,

and Pakistani resulted in no individuals who expressed interest in participation. The response rate for participation from men was also lower than the response rate for women. The final sample of participants included twenty-nine individuals. Table 4.1 details demographic data on all the participants in this study.

*Table 4.1. Participant-selected pseudonyms and self-identified demographics*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>Class Year</b>
Alex	Male	21	Chinese	Communications	4 <sup>th</sup>
Ariel	Female	18	Chinese/Vietnamese	Nursing	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Ashley	Female	20	Chinese/Taiwanese	Finance	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Carly	Female	21	Chinese	Communications	4 <sup>th</sup>
Chandler	Male	18	Filipino	Economics	1 <sup>st</sup>
Chloe	Female	20	Korean	Psychology	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Eunice	Female	22	Korean	Int'l Studies	4 <sup>th</sup>
Fitz	Male	19	Chinese	Biochemistry	1 <sup>st</sup>
Gilly	Female	21	Korean	Sociology	4 <sup>th</sup>
Haley	Female	22	Korean	Political Science	4 <sup>th</sup>
Holly	Female	21	Korean	Psychology	4 <sup>th</sup>
Ja	Male	21	Chinese	Communications	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Joey	Male	21	Korean	Economics	3 <sup>rd</sup>
John	Male	18	Korean	Biochemistry	1 <sup>st</sup>
Kara	Female	18	Korean	Sociology	1 <sup>st</sup>
Kasey	Female	22	Taiwanese	Nursing	4 <sup>th</sup>
Keith	Male	18	Indian	Biology	1 <sup>st</sup>
Kelsey	Female	21	Chinese	Psychology	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Kylie	Female	19	Korean	Communications	1 <sup>st</sup>
L.L.	Male	19	Indian	Finance	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Mary	Female	20	Korean	English	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Melvin	Male	21	Filipino/Chinese	Finance	4 <sup>th</sup>
Mia	Female	21	Korean	English	4 <sup>th</sup>
P.P.	Female	21	Korean/Japanese	Communication	4 <sup>th</sup>
Pat	Female	20	Chinese	History	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Scout	Female	19	Korean	Biology	2 <sup>nd</sup>
T.S.	Female	19	Korean	Political Science	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Vicky	Female	18	Vietnamese	Undecided	1 <sup>st</sup>
Yoo	Male	21	Korean	Education	4 <sup>th</sup>

### **Assumptions of Campus Climate**

Participants regularly described racial tensions that were hostile in nature both in the physical campus setting and the social media environment at East Oak. Participants stated that their negative experiences in face-to-face interactions on campus informed their encounters of the more racially hostile climate on social media, which implied Asian Americans are outsiders to the campus community. Though the focus of this research was to ascertain the nature of online racialized aggressions, it became clear that any discussion or examination of online assaults necessitated a consideration of face-to-face racialized experiences on campus. As previous research has noted, the college campus and its climate are now both virtual and real (Martínez-Alemán & Wartman, 2009). The proceeding findings summarize the connection between the online and face-to-face campus culture at East Oak.

### **An Unwelcoming Campus Culture**

As a consequence of social interactions and classroom experiences at East Oak, participants felt unwelcomed on campus. Participants recalled a number of instances that conveyed East Oak did not accept Asian American students as part of the campus culture. These observations included a lack of visible racial diversity within the student body, classrooms devoid of non-White faculty, and the absence of culturally welcoming spaces and resources designed for a racially diverse population.

These observations led participants in this study to believe that campus' social and academic lives were intrinsically designed for "...White students... It's not for Asians" (Focus Group Participant). The categorization of East Oak's campus as one that was culturally dominated by the predominantly White population indicated to participants

that Asian Americans were not viewed as an intrinsic component of the campus community. Participants repeatedly stated that Asian Americans were perceived as “different,” “outcasts,” and “foreign,” compared to what L.L. described as the “...typical East Oak student... He’s White...” in all aspects of campus life. The perception of being typecast as an outsider to East Oak was widely cited by participants as a common experience.

In an example that typified the implicit perception of being unwelcomed on campus, Kylie reflected upon her attempts at becoming engaged in extracurricular opportunities at East Oak. When asked to describe if she feels like Asian Americans are treated hospitably on campus, Kylie described,

Sometimes I feel like I have less opportunity to do things because I'm Asian here. I don't know. As a communication major, I really wanted to join the TV station on campus and all that but I was scared that they might think that, like, Asians shouldn't be on the ... Like, shouldn't be who people want to see on a TV screen here. Just little things like that... No one's ever said [I can't join the station], but it's just kind of that feeling that's held me back.

Kylie's hesitation to engage in this co-curricular leadership position was illustrative of the implied discrimination toward Asian Americans on campus. The sentiment that Asian Americans were to be excluded from opportunities, rather than embraced as part of the campus community, was expressed by numerous participants in this study. While never explicitly notified that she was not welcomed at the television station, Kylie's perception that East Oak's culture was unreceptive to Asian Americans



stymied her attempt to engage in an opportunity that she characterized as one that was readily available for White students.

In another instance that illustrated the inherent alienation cited by participants at East Oak, Alex described a common attitude he believed was shared by White students on campus when he stated, “It’s kind of known that White people do not want to hang out with the Asians at all in [a campus dining hall]. They don’t want to be seen with us.” When asked to further explain how he confirms that White students do not want to be associated with Asian American students on campus, Alex elaborated that “White people at [East Oak], they tend to ... They can only confide in other White people about [not wanting to be around Asian Americans]. The one thing that White people fear the most is being considered racist publicly to other people.”

This description regarding Alex’s suspicion about the segregated quality of social life between Whites and Asian American students, along with Kylie’s description of her “...feeling that’s held me back” acknowledged the innate means that racial prejudice was experienced at East Oak by participants. These reflections suggested that Asian American students were perceived as racial outsiders to East Oak and conveyed what Scout described as signaling “...Asians aren’t the most accepted people...” on campus. The testimonials that follow in this chapter further confirm that Asian Americans students were alienated as outsiders to the East Oak community.

**Pathologizing Asian American Culture.** A prominent observation that participants addressed during interviews and focus groups was the way in which Asian American students were perceived as abnormal on campus. This sentiment was supported

by East Oak's perception that the cultural foods, languages, and behaviors that were attributed to Asian cultures were regularly stigmatized or deemed exotic.

Participants were often asked to explain the foreignness of Asian cultures to their White peers as it related to food and/or cooking utensils. Ariel described her experience of preparing dinner in the presence of her White roommate during her first semester on campus when she reflected,

I realized that my roommates don't really know much about Asian culture. They think some of the stuff I'll make or kitchen stuff I use are weird... You know those big peelers, the wooden ones? The first time I used them, they were like staring at it like 'what is this thing?' I was like 'it's a peeler! It's really good. It's efficient! It's not like the plastic ones.' I laughed at it at first, but then I found it kind of rude.

Kasey also encountered a similar interaction with her roommate during her first year on campus, and expressed her frustration with feeling like she was ostracized from her residence hall room due to having a snack that was commonly found in Asian households. She described,

During freshman year I was acutely aware of my Asian-ness. I remember my mother sent me a care package and my roommate had grown up in a very White community and she would just wrinkle her nose and say, 'What's that? It smells really bad.' It was a Lychee gummy! One of those regular gummies, you know? I mean, c'mon, it's not bad. I don't really want to be mean to her, though, so what I ended up doing is I would only eat that food outside of my room, or in the hall because the smell irritated her so much. It kind of hurt me a bit.

These experiences described by students represented a few of the ways that Asian American students and their cultures were habitually characterized as foreign and peculiar at East Oak. The participants in this study expressed frustration, annoyance, and disappointment toward their White peers during individual interviews and focus groups regarding these experiences. While Asian American students rarely ascribed these frustrating interactions to overt intolerance, the participants did note that the accumulation of these daily subtle racial slights were prominent, and contributed to feelings of being unwanted on campus.

**Microaggressions Toward Asian Americans.** Throughout this study, participants described the hostility of campus through a number of microaggressions aimed at Asian Americans. Joey noted an experience that was common to multiple participants in this study, as he detailed,

Students here would always ask me things like ‘Where are you from?’ The classic where are you from line and then say, ‘Where are you *really* from?’ The White population at East Oak isn't aware that we're not exactly the same. That we do have different values, different ideals, and different upbringings.

Microaggressive encounters were not limited to interactions with other students at East Oak. A few participants also detailed microaggressions that occurred in interactions with administrators and staff, including the campus police at East Oak. In one incident, Chloe elaborated on her experience with a campus police officer by saying “I was talking to [a campus police officer], just casually walking by. He goes, ‘Where are you from?’ I was, ‘Oh I'm from New York.’ He's like, ‘but where are you *from*?’ I knew what he was trying to say but I was just kind of like avoiding the kind of question.”

Microaggressions at East Oak were described by students in both interview and focus groups as being representative of the pervasive, subtle, and veiled messages of bias directed toward Asian Americans in day-to-day interactions. Students further asserted that the regular occurrence of encountering microaggressions perpetuated the feeling that East Oak was not an inherently hospitable campus for Asian Americans.

**Homogenizing Asian Ethnicities.** Participants described a number of bothersome generalizations aimed at Asian Americans, which suggested that White peers at East Oak perceived what multiple focus group participants described as a belief that “All Asians are the same.”

Several participants described being mislabeled or mistaken for the wrong ethnic identity at East Oak. This problematic issue was reoccurring for a number of participants in their interactions with White peers. For example, Keith described how being a South Asian American student was often equated to the being a “Muslim terrorist” on campus. When asked to describe his experience of being incorrectly ethnically labeled, he asserted,

I really hate that I'm apparently the same person as someone who's a Muslim, because I identify as Hindu, and it irritates me. I'm not the same person as a Muslim, but I get clumped into jokes. The stereotype isn't that Indians are terrorists; the stereotype is that Muslims are terrorists, but for whatever reason here, I'm put into that [Muslim] group and therefore seen as terrorist.

Keith's experience of being typecast as a terrorist was unique to the South Asians within this study. The only other participant who described similar experiences of being labeled a radical Muslim terrorist was L.L., who also identified as South Asian.

Other participants in the study also cited experiences of being incorrectly identified by the wrong ethnicity. Carly, a Chinese American, noted an instance where a White student yelled the Japanese greeting “konichiwa” to her, and Vicky, a Vietnamese American, explained how she was often assumed to be Chinese when White peers first meet her. These ethnic mischaracterizations conveyed to participants that “All Asians are the same” and were consistently bothersome to students on the receiving end of these communications.

Frustration was also expressed by participants when White students misidentified study participants for other Asian American peers on campus. As an on-going source of frustration, Gilly described a situation where her White peers on campus could not distinguish her from her Asian American roommate,

...my roommate [roommate’s name] ... Her and I get mixed up for literally all the time. Oh my God, we just talked so much about this because we're making a board. We're literally going to make a board of when I'm called [roommate’s name] or when she's been called Gilly and who it is in tally marks next to them. Specific people have mixed up us a hundred times. How are we supposed to feel when people mistake us? We have to go and think like, ‘Is it because they think we look exactly the same, that we're not different enough?’ That's the unfair aspect of us being mixed up. It's annoying. It's frustrating that we have to continuously be mixed up.

This case of mistaken identity exemplified the frustrating process of Asian Americans being perceived as lacking personal distinctiveness on East Oak’s campus.

Participants were readily homogenized, ethnically mislabeled, and mistaken for other students that ultimately acted to reinforce feelings of not being welcomed at East Oak.

### **Hostility in Classrooms**

Students also frequently drew attention to the problematic nature of their Asian American identity in academic spaces. Classrooms were locations where participants cited feeling hyper visible, socially invalidated, and singled out due to their racial identities.

In describing her experience of being perceived as a “shy Asian” and being mistaken as an Asian international student in the classroom, Chloe explained,

Even in group settings, professors don’t overly expect Asians to really talk out or participate as much... I feel like I have to keep fighting against that expectation to kind of prove that like, I’m not like your typical Asian girl. I could actually talk and I like participating in class... It’s also really hard sometimes especially since when you have so many international students on campus. For professors, they don’t really see that difference. They only see us as one group of Asians.

The additional descriptions of being perceived as a “quiet,” “passive,” and “nerdy” were other descriptive terms repeatedly cited by students in this study, and aligned with Chloe’s above experience.

In another example of personal invalidation within an academic context, Mia illustrated the daily psychological burden she faced as a student when she described, “In the classroom, as an English major who is Asian, I’ve had the feeling of ‘do they think I’m good enough because I’m Asian?’ I’ve had teachers tell me I’m bad at English just because I’m Asian.” The experiences described by Chloe and Mia reflected the regularity

of bias expressed toward Asian Americans by the predominantly White faculty at East Oak, and were perceived as an intrinsic component of the unwelcoming classroom experience for many participants in this study.

Students were not apt to respond or negatively react to these hostilities from faculty because participants feared professors would retaliate in response to challenges to their authority. Participants regularly stated they did not confront faculty because of anxieties that their final grades would be jeopardized by appearing antagonistic toward a professor. As noted by L.L., who was asked how he reacted when a faculty member directed a racially insensitive comment toward him in class, L.L. stated, “To be honest, I didn't say anything. Maybe I should have. I didn't want to hurt my chances at getting a grade. Yeah, I didn't want to say anything that would make [the faculty] not like me, and I didn't find it worth it to start a fight.” L.L.’s statement resonated with other students in focus groups; no participant in this study felt comfortable directly confronting a faculty member’s racially insensitive communications.

### **Response to Hostility**

Participants in this study responded to the unwelcoming physical campus by expressing both their anger and annoyance at the predominantly White student body at East Oak for perpetuating an oppressive institutional environment. Participants did not regularly implicate faculty in their angered responses, but were more apt to direct their frustration toward their White peers.

For example, P.P. elaborated on her frustration of living with the daily racist remarks she received on campus from White peers when she declared, “I was angry. I was annoyed by things in terms of racism some kids say every day. I’m getting tired of

it.” P.P.’s sentiments indicated the rooted anger that was expressed by the majority of participants in this study. Multiple participants in focus groups reaffirmed P.P.’s response to encountering racism on campus when they asserted the racial climate at East Oak left them feeling “pissed off,” “mad,” and “resentful.”

Another study participant, Ja, more explicitly expressed his frustration by describing his furor toward White students who perpetuate what he described as “racism on campus.” When asked to describe how he responds to the offensive racial comments he frequently encounters in his interactions with White individuals on campus, Ja answered,

Sometimes I'll try to brush it off and be like, you know what, whatever. That's their thing. They're White. They can go on living their misinformed lives. Other times I do think and want to let them know that hey, what you're saying isn't cool. Sometimes I get straight up aggression. Like, ‘That's really messed up! I'm going to take this brick and throw it at you!’ which is another option but that's not going to exactly solve the bigger issue at hand. It does make me so mad.

Participants commonly voiced their annoyance, displeasure, and resentment of White students at East Oak during interviews and focus groups in response to constantly navigating an unwelcoming racial climate on campus. Most respondents in this study explained that navigating these daily hostilities were both emotionally taxing and mentally exhausting, and because of this fatigue, participants were not apt to respond to racialized aggressions encountered online, or attempt to hold the perpetrators of these hostilities responsible for their offensive comments.



## **Aversive Racism**

Participants in this study purported that the racial hostilities within face-to-face settings were most regularly assigned to well-meaning individuals who were prone to hide their biases and prejudices toward Asians through thinly veiled attempts of politeness. This portrayal of well-intentioned but insidious communications aligns with the phenomenological characteristics attributed to aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000). In an explanation that reflected this aversively hostile campus climate, Pat described her White peers by saying,

I always felt like a lot of people have opinions that they don't want to talk about publicly with you [as an Asian person]. I think that just because I'm not a White boy, they know I wouldn't be cool with what they really want to say, so they stick to safe stuff. I think they'll be more careful about what they say around me because I'm Asian, so, I always feel like there is more under the surface than what I hear.

The active avoidance by White peers of stating overtly racist and hostility was echoed by Fitz, who stated that White students intentionally sidestepped conversations pertaining to race and racism on campus for fear of being labeled a racist. He described,

I get the feeling that White people harbor opinions about Asians that I wouldn't be too happy about hearing, but oftentimes they just don't voice them. For whatever reason, I feel like White kids hold negative opinions on campus... There's definitely an aversion to talking about race here. Very few people overtly say anything negative, but I feel like they want to if they could... I'd think it's because they don't want to be called a racist.

These findings support the claim by participants that the physical campus setting was one that was implicitly unreceptive toward Asian American students, resulting in perceptions that Asian Americans were alienated as part of the campus community. While these characterizations of the physical campus setting were concerning for Asian American students, the presence of overt racialized aggressions on social media at East Oak further reinforced the sentiment that Asian Americans did not belong as part of the campus community

### **Anonymity on Social Media**

The racial climate on social media at East Oak was primarily characterized as extremely hostile and overtly racist toward Asian Americans. Participants typically encountered racialized aggressions in three ways on social media. Firsthand encounters on anonymous social media platforms (e.g. Yik Yak) were most readily cited by students in this study as the location where racialized aggressions proliferated. Hearsay/second hand encounters via close peers were the second most common means by which participants encountered racialized hostility. Firsthand identifiable encounters (e.g. Facebook, Tinder, and Snapchat) with racialized aggressions were the most uncommon means of encountering racialized aggressions by participants in this study. Regardless of how students encountered racism online, almost all participants stated they had encountered racialized aggressions on social media through one of these three means.

While participants noted that firsthand encounters of racialized aggressions where perpetrators were identifiable on sites such as Facebook and Snapchat were rare because of the closely curated nature of their friendship networks, the anonymous first and second hand encounters on the social media app Yik Yak were more prolific at East Oak.

Participants conjectured that the anonymous and un-curated nature of Yik Yak's functionality enabled uninhibited views regarding racialized minorities to thrive and proliferate on this social media.

### **Anti-Asian Sentiments**

The scope, quantity, and explicit expressions of racial antagonism on social media were regularly identified by almost all participants in the study as being "...definitely more racist online than in person" as stated by a participant in the focus groups. Participants often cited that their Asian racial/ethnic identities were targeted on social media, and that Asian American cultural habits were ridiculed online as different, strange, and undesirable at East Oak. This antagonism occurred occasionally on user-identified social media platforms such as Facebook, but more regularly on the anonymous social media app, Yik Yak.

Very few participants recognized the presence of racialized aggressions on identifiable social media, but John described the widespread meme (Figure 4.1) that was posted on Facebook by a non-Asian peer at East Oak as an example of the type of racial antagonism that may be found on this social media platform,



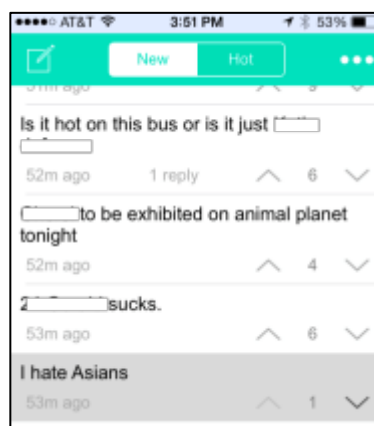
*Figure 4.1. Meme as a racialized aggression*

On Facebook, I actually saw a lot of posts where there's a picture of a random

Asian person or a group of Asian people and there's a meme about it. There was a picture of this guy holding like seven [eggs] on his one hand and then the caption says, "You rack discipline," which is like mocking at the Asian accent of confusing the R and the L and then just kind of mocking us and, like our ... I don't know how to say ... How almost like how hard workers we are

Image 1 was retrieved online through an Internet search and confirmed by John as the described aggression. John elaborated on his frustration of encountering this type of racialized aggression when he stated "You never see memes making fun of White people" but stated that "...it's OK to laugh at Asians, so I guess we get made fun of."

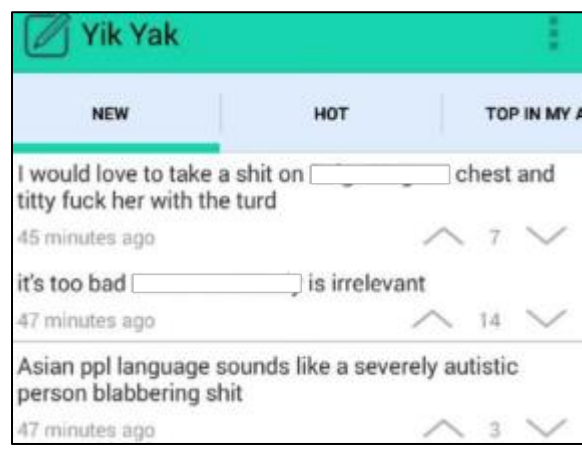
More regularly, participants stated that racialized aggressions were most noticeable, explicitly expressed, and prolific on the anonymous social media platform, Yik Yak. An illustration of the racialized aggressions encountered by participants in this study was captured in a screen shot and saved by Gilly during what she described as a "...semester-long period of hating on Asians" on Yik Yak. Gilly's documentation of a racialized aggression presented in Figure 4.2 was one of the clearest representations of racialized aggressions that students in this study described.



*Figure 4.2. Racialized aggression proclaiming hate for Asians*

The statement proclaiming “I hate Asians” was an unmistakable expression of detestation toward the Asian American campus community. While Gilly encountered this racialized aggression first hand on Yik Yak, several participants in this study were familiar with this screenshot as a hearsay encounter via peers. Participants described anti-Asian aggressions such “I hate Asians” as occurring on a regular basis on Yik Yak at East Oak.

Another example of the hostility that participants encountered on Yik Yak included a demeaning reference describing “Asian ppl language” as sounding “...like a severely autistic person blabbering shit.” The following artifact (Figure 4.3) of this racialized aggression was archived by two students, T.S. and Gilly, before this study took place and forwarded from their personal archives. This aggression was noted by multiple participants in focus groups as one of the more infamous anti-Asian racialized aggressions that was familiar to students in the Asian American community at East Oak. One student in the focus group stated that these types of expressions directed at Asian Americans were “...typical for what you see...” on Yik Yak.



*Figure 4.3. Racialized aggression demeaning Asian language*

Racialized aggressions on social media tended to ridicule the behaviors of Asian

American students. Ja described a post he encountered on Yik Yak referencing the commonly cited stereotype that Asian-Americans on campus were habitual smokers by recounting a statement that read “Why should I pay money to see the Chain Smokers [The name of a DJ duo who were playing a concert in downtown] when all I have to do is look for the Asians in front of [the library]?” In another instance, P.P. reflected “People think like there's a free pass to make fun of Asians. Like, there's saying there's a posse of Asians in front of [the library] smoking, and that they're part of the Asian mafia or something stupid.”

In response to these aggressions, participants responded with assertions that these hostilities were rooted in the ignorance of East Oak students not comprehending non-White culture behaviors. For instance, Chloe explained,

In the Korean culture, people smoke a lot. When they're stressed, a cigarette is like the first thing they go to. I don't see what's wrong with that, but everyone make's fun of it here. If they took a deeper look of why people smoke, maybe they'd understand why it's just our thing... It bothers me that we get singled out for something [White students] don't understand. It just speaks to how the privileged population here doesn't understand anything below the surface.

Mary also explained that

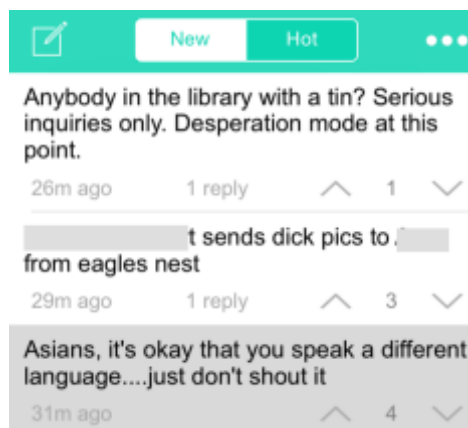
Just because some Asians smoke outside the library doesn't mean that all Asians do it. If you know, it's mostly a few Asian students who have smoking habits that are about their culture and that's fine, but the image of them just easily feeds into the stereotype that we all do it and somehow we can be made fun of. It's an easy joke that anyone can make if you're Asian and it's not fair.

These reflections by participants represented the frustration that Asian American students experienced when they were directly or indirectly targeted for exhibiting social behaviors deemed objectionable by their predominantly White, East Oak peers.

Participants explained in focus groups that they interpreted these anti-Asian expressions as denigrating sentiments that Asian Americans were not socially accepted on campus.

Participants cited additional demeaning social media messages that they noted as unfairly singling out Asian Americans. When reflecting on the grievances that Asian American students were “loud” and “annoying” in the library that regularly appeared on Yik Yak, Yoo lamented the fact that he frequently observed White students also causing disturbances in quiet study areas but only non-White students were targeted online for their behaviors. Yoo stated, “You’ll see things [on Yik Yak] like ‘Do Asians live at [the library?]' or ‘Why are Asians so loud in the library?’ but it’s not just us. Everyone talks in [the library]. Have you ever been in [the library] during midterms? Everyone is there. Like, White kids can be the most obnoxious and loud ones.”

Eunice also reflected on similar sentiments she read on Yik Yak captured in Figure 4.4.



*Figure 4.4. Racialized aggression demonizing communication*

Eunice reflected, “Yeah, maybe we can sometimes speak kind of loud in the library, but it’s not all the time. I don’t get why they only talk about [Asian Americans] as the loud ones. It’s like they purposely pick on us for some reason.”

Similar to how participants stated they were annoyed by being consistently misidentified in face-to-face encounters with their peers, racialized aggressions on social media also reinforced this generalization by conveying “All Asians are the same.” For instance, Joey stated that one of his frustrations was that racialized aggressions on social media made no distinction between the various ethnic identities within the Asian American umbrella when the population was targeted. When describing his encounters with racialized aggressions on social media, he explained,

Asians are only seen as one thing if you look at Yik Yak. I think, for the most part, the White population at [East Oak] isn't really too, too aware of, I guess, the differences in Asians. That we're not, exactly the same, that we do have different values, different ideals, and different upbringings. They just say ‘Asians.’

Joey’s thoughts of how online aggressions homogenize the Asian American student population on Yik Yak were further supported by Melvin who stated,

Oh, the message [on Yik Yak] is that all the Asians here are the same. How they describe something about us, or how they complain about us, they get into this thing about there’s ‘no difference.’ They have no idea about what’s Filipino, or Japanese, or Chinese. They just talk about the Asians, but I believe it’s our responsibility to break that stereotype because the community has a ton of different needs depending on who you talk to.

Participants noted that the pervasive presence of racialized aggressions on social



media, especially on Yik Yak, made it daunting to believe that Asian Americans were accepted as part of the East Oak community. As asserted by Scout, “It’s clear [perpetrators of online aggression] don’t like [Asian Americans], but we have to live with it. Asians are just the easy target, I guess.”

### **Anti-Black Aggressions**

While participants identified racialized aggressions toward Asian Americans as a concerning behavior, students also noted the quantity and hatred toward Black students on campus was particularly disturbing. While encountering online anti-Asian racialized aggressions were the most salient offenses reported by students in this study, participants noted anti-Black aggressions were also likely to proliferate on social media at East Oak. Participants were most likely to encounter anti-Black aggressions firsthand or hearsay on Yik Yak, and rarely through identifiable social media.

Mia observed that, “The more Black students you see protesting on campus, the more racial slurs on Yik Yak.” Additionally, Melvin described how anonymous social media became a forum for perpetrators to voice their displeasure toward the campus’ celebration of the Black History Month,

To see stuff on Yik Yak is very disconcerting. People have been using it more often than not, especially with the elections coming around, and with the rallies that have been on campus the last few years like Ferguson. Yik Yak has always had this hostile thing. For example, two nights ago... I think about 10pm someone posted on Yik Yak, ‘Oh. Only two days left in February. Thank God because I was getting tired of Black History Month,’ something like that. Comments like that are definitely just like, Why? Why is this even necessary?

In another example, L.L. described his experience of attending a dance performance on campus featuring his Black peers. He recounted how he came across an aggression on Yik Yak during the performance that read, “Someone should get these apes off the stage.”

The majority of participants in this study stated that racialized aggressions on social media contributed to skepticism and distrust of the East Oak campus culture. Participants described the presence of anti-Black aggressions on social media as particularly disturbing because the existence of these statements, in conjunction with an excess of anti-Asian hostilities, collectively implied non-White students were not accepted as part of the East Oak Community. In response to encountering these racialized aggressions on social media, participants stated during individual interviews and focus groups that they were likely to distance themselves from the identity of the student culture at East Oak. Whether racialized aggressions were directed at Asian students or Black students, participants uniformly agreed that such online hostilities were detrimental in facilitating a welcoming campus community.

### **White Perpetrators**

Unlike encountering prejudice and racism in face-to-face settings and on identifiable social media, racialized aggressions on Yik Yak did not permit students to confirm the identify of perpetrators who dispensed offensive comments. Students hypothesized and came to consensus during the focus groups that the likely offenders of racialized hate at East Oak were their White peers. In particular, participants implicated White men at East Oak as the most probable perpetrators of racialized aggressions on Yik Yak. In describing his rationale for implicating White men on campus as the dominant

culprits of racialized aggressions on anonymous social media, Joey proclaimed,

I think most [offenders on Yik Yak] would be like, I guess like the typical [East Oak] bro. The guy that just dresses in all the preppy clothes, just goes out drinking all the time. He's the typical White guy who goes to the gym all the time. I guess that classic, [East Oak] model bro, because those are the people for the most part are the ones on the weekends that has the reputation of having one too many drinks and they kind of lose their filter and say anything.

The concept of "bro culture" was something that students regularly identified as a problematic issue on campus that served to perpetuate a hostile climate at East Oak and fuel racialized aggressions online. As Joey stated, the bro culture was primarily defined as being part of an upper class, privileged, culturally insulated White, male population who was notorious for unapologetic, drunken acts of hostility and ignorance at East Oak. L.L. endorsed Joey's assessment that the main perpetrators of online hate were White men and noted, "I know I have an image in mind about [who is posting on Yik Yak]. It's probably someone upper class. It's probably someone White. It's probably male. It's probably someone who fits that [East Oak] mentality of being tall or being athletic like the bro."

When asked to elaborate on who she thought was likely responsible for the offensive comments online, Chloe did not identify men, but definitely stated "They're all White people." Kylie also affirmed, "White people are those that post the most [racialized aggressions]" without incriminating specifically men. The near absolute agreement from participants in this study that the White population (regardless of their gender) was chiefly responsible for racialized aggressions on social media had

implications for the manifestation of cultural distrust by Asian Americans students.

### **Distrust of East Oak University**

The experience of encountering anonymous racialized aggressions on social media caused students to harbor feelings of distrust toward the predominantly White student body. As described by Scout, "...since you don't know who is saying [racialized aggressions on Yik Yak], you kind of assume every person you interact with is a potential person who said this thing. It kind of makes me generalize people... It's especially if you're White." The inability to identify the agents of online hate on Yik Yak resulted in participants second guessing the authenticity of their relationships with students on campus, but particularly, their White peers. For instance, Mary elaborated, "'Oh you can't trust any of the White students in your classes because they could be the ones posting on [Yik Yak.]" This level of distrust toward White peers was commonly expressed by the majority of participants.

Kara resonated these feelings of skepticism when she stated,

To think that I was walking on the same campus as people who are so racist kind of scared me. I was like, oh, what are people going to say about me or when I walk by them what do they think about me kind of a thing. I thought I was in this community where people were accepting and diverse, but to think that there were still people on this campus who thought these nasty things was pretty upsetting to me. It makes me wonder what people really think about me when I first meet them.

Fitz also observed,

Face to face, I've never been insulted. I definitely have on Yik Yak. In person, not

so much, but online, all the time. It makes you think about what people are holding back in person, what's actually real. You don't know what you can trust.

Students attributed the increased severity of hostility on social media compared to face-to-face encounters to the fact that the online environment harbored a protective buffer between the perpetrators and the targets of aggression, which protected offenders of hate from retaliation. Ja acknowledged this dynamic by when he stated,

I think [racism] is definitely more prevalent online because you don't have to be face-to-face with a person. You can do it from the safety behind your phone or your laptop. If you do it in person, whoever is doing it has to gather up the courage to be discriminatory in an area where people might be like, 'Hey, that's messed up. No.' I think it's definitely more ... It's more common online. I think people get the sense that they're more protected when saying stuff like that versus in person.

Ja's reflections were supported across focus groups participants who emphasized that it was atypical to encounter overt racism on campus, but normal to encounter explicit racialized hate online.

Holly noted that racialized aggressions were inhibited in face-to-face interactions because such hostile communications were socially unacceptable in physical settings, but those social norms could not be enforced on anonymous social media. She emphasized previous claims that the anonymous attribute of Yik Yak enabled East Oak students to express hostile and socially unacceptable thoughts in a public forum without being held accountable for their expressing such statements. Holly explained,

Yeah, I feel like the anonymous side of [social media] kind of takes out the 'I'm

going to get judged if I say this.’ Like now, people want to be so politically correct, and they know they're going to get judged if like their name is attached to something they say, so I feel like Yik Yak gives people a chance to like speak what's really on their minds I guess, and not like hide it if we were talking in person.

The nature of encountering these anonymous racialized aggressions resulted in consequential outcomes that ultimately included students feeling alienated from the campus community. The hostile sentiments expressed online further impacted sense of belonging for Asian Americans at East Oak in negative ways, and implied that Asian Americans were not welcomed nor belonged on campus.

### **Alienation of Asian Americans**

The encounter of racialized aggressions on social media by participants in this study were detrimental in nature and suggest that Asian American students at East Oak were not welcomed part of the campus culture. The encounter of racialized aggressions on social media compelled participants to further emphasize their connections to smaller Asian ethnic subgroups on campus rather than their relationship to the larger East Oak community. These findings and supporting testimonials are further detailed in the following subsections.

### **Sense of Belonging**

The overwhelming message conveyed by racialized aggressions on social media, and especially on Yik Yak, suggested that Asian American students were not welcomed nor valued at East Oak. The proliferation of anti-Asian sentiments expressed on social media was interpreted by participants as communicating Asian Americans were alienated

foreigners to the campus community. Ultimately, students stated that the presence and encounter of racialized aggressions on social media contributed to feelings that they did not belong on campus. Additionally, the encounter of racialized aggressions on social media strengthened pre-existing notions that Asian Americans were not welcomed at East Oak, but these sentiments were not unanimous. In two instances, students stated that racialized aggressions on social media were not relevant to their experiences at East Oak, and thus, online hostile encounters did not have any impact on their belonging to campus. These responses are detailed below.

Some participants stated that the presence of racialized aggressions on social media had a direct negative impact on their sense of belonging on campus. These students stated that the presence and proliferation of racism on social media were too hurtful to not elicit a negative response regarding their belonging. When asked if his encounters with racialized aggressions on campus had any impact on how he felt he belonged on campus, Keith emphatically stated, “If anything, [racialized aggressions on social media] makes [my sense of belonging] worse! It shows me racism is real here and maybe I don’t shouldn’t be here.”

Kelsey echoed the feelings expressed by Keith when she stated that the encounter of racialized aggressions on social media had a “negative” impact on her sense of belonging because statements on Yik Yak, in particular, conveyed to her that she was not part of a supportive community. Kelsey stated,

[Seeing racialized aggressions on Yik Yak] makes me distance myself from the community. Like, in class the other day, my professor asked if we would put a [East Oak] bumper sticker on our car. I was thinking like, ‘No, I would not.’

Because if I can see these things being said and other people can see them, then the perception of [East Oak] includes being racist and being majority White.

That's not something I want.

In the most extreme example within this study of how racialized aggressions (both online and in person) negatively impacted a student's belonging, Vicky described how she felt the nature of racialized aggressions on social media confirmed to her that East Oak was not a place for Asian Americans and other students of color to ever feel like they belonged. She stated,

I feel like [racialized aggressions on Yik Yak] strengthens my feeling of not wanting to be here. [What I see on Yik Yak] tends to disagree or have opposite views on how I see things. I'm actually leaving [East Oak] at the end of this semester because of it all. I've made that decision. It's time... I've seen stuff happen here like my [Black] friends got chicken thrown at them during the late night event, and no one did anything to the guys who did it. And snarky remarks like what are *you* doing living here? Everything on Yik Yak. Like, it's so obvious you can't be comfortable unless you're White.

Students previously described a number of oppressive microaggressions and antagonistic racial interactions in the physical campus setting, which originally triggered participants to question their belonging on campus. These experiences, in conjunction with encountering racialized aggressions on Yik Yak, verified participant sentiments that Asian Americans did not belong at East Oak. As Alex explained, "I never will have the chance to be included by the majority of [East Oak's] community. I've never felt connected here. Yik Yak only validates that feeling."



Racialized aggressions on social media further confirmed students' suspicions of the problematic racial tensions within the physical confines of campus. Carly described this campus racial climate in her explanation of how racialized aggressions on Yik Yak substantiated her intuition of not feeling welcomed at East Oak,

Oh yeah, I feel like [racialized aggressions on Yik Yak] confirms what I suspect about this hidden prejudice that people aren't overtly... Like yeah, a lot about racism isn't overt but it's just like these little things that add up. You just feel perpetually foreign type of thing unless you're White. What's on Yik Yak is exactly what you feel here. [Seeing racialized aggressions on Yik Yak] makes [the feeling of not belonging] real.

The reflections that East Oak was inherently designed for White students, not Asian students, and that racialized aggressions on social media served to alienate Asian Americans from campus was overwhelmingly reiterated by participants during all four focus groups. Only two students contradicted these sentiments and stated they were surprised that a blatantly hostile and unwelcoming social media racial climate for Asian Americans was an emergent issue of concern at East Oak.

**Racialized Aggressions are Nonexistent.** Two students stated that racial antagonism and racism were not concerning issues that needed to be addressed at East Oak. These students refuted the idea that racism on social media was problematic, and thus stated that racialized aggressions on social media had no impact on their sense of belonging.

These students, Chandler and Haley, both stated that accusations of racial tensions were “overblown” and “exaggerated” on campus. Unlike other participants in this study

who racially identified as Asian-American, Chandler and Haley personally attested that they were more comfortable identifying themselves as culturally White as opposed to their inherent Asian American identity. Both participants also described themselves as “atypical” (Chandler) or “...not your typical Asian” (Haley), and described their friendship networks as being associated with predominantly White peers on campus. When Chandler and Haley were asked how their Asian American racial identities were received by their White peers, both participants responded that their closest networks on campus were those who didn’t see nor care about race.

Haley explained that she was unaware that racial offenses on social media and sites like Yik Yak were problematic issues of concern. Additionally, she stated that it was “shocking” that anyone in the East Oak community could be capable of dispensing malicious thoughts either in person or online. Haley expressed she was “surprised” and “saddened” that other participants had regularly encountered racialized aggressions both in person and online at East Oak, and excluded herself as someone who had experiences with these online encounters. While she acknowledged that racism may exist on campus, Haley stated that any campus community was going to “...have its flaws,” and such negative incidents were isolated in nature and didn’t reflect the more pervasive reputation of the East Oak campus as one that was welcoming for students of all races. Haley stated that she was certain that none of her White friends were capable of saying or thinking racially malicious thoughts, let alone post those hostilities online.

Chandler expressed similar sentiments as Haley, and stated he felt East Oak was a highly welcoming campus environment. Chandler also expressed he didn’t perceive racism or racial prejudice as being problematic issues that should be concerning for the

campus community because the majority of his peers could be described as “...good people.” He stated that the few racialized aggressions that may hypothetically exist on social media and in person were only problematic if you “...let them bother you to begin with.”

In one instance, Chandler described how he personally posted a joke on Yik Yak poking fun at a #BlackLivesMatter protest at East Oak in an effort to create humor on social media and to show that students shouldn’t “...take everything so seriously” as it related to racial issues in society. Chandler didn’t consider his actions on social media objectionable, nor did he believe his statement conveyed any detrimental sentiments because his humor “...got a ton of up votes. Everyone loved that joke” and was well received on Yik Yak.

When asked to further elaborate on his thoughts about the hypothetical existence of racialized aggressions at East Oak, Chandler claimed that he was unqualified to answer this prompt because he asserted, “As far as racism goes that I've experienced, I've never experienced real... I haven't experienced or been offended by racism like that at all... Like, really ever.” Chandler’s testimonial went on further to state that encounters with racialized aggressions on social media would hypothetically have no impact on his sense of belonging because he personally believed that the best way to neutralize racism was to “...stop being so sensitive to someone’s opinion.”

Both Chandler and Haley put forth perceptions about the campus racial climate that contradicted and challenged the dominant sentiments presented by the majority of participants in the study that racialized aggressions and racial tension were imminent issues of concern at East Oak University. As a result of these students being unable to

identify personal encounters with racialized aggressions and their overwhelmingly positive description of East Oak's racial climate, both participants stated that there was no impact upon their sense of belonging as it related to encountering racism on social media platforms.

### **Ethnic Subgroups**

In response to feeling alienated from the predominant East Oak Institutional identity, many participants acknowledged the critical role that their non-white peers and ethnic student organizations played in helping validate their Asian American presence within the racially unwelcoming face-to-face and social media climate of East Oak. In her explanation of why the Asian American community on campus was so important to her, Mia stated, "...subconsciously, [racialized aggressions] pushes me more towards the Asian community. I know people won't be racist there, that's my mindset." Mia's statement affirms the importance of surrounding herself with similar ethnic identified peers who support her at East Oak.

Kara reiterated Mia's feeling that the alienation caused by racialized aggressions on social media cause Asian American students to more intentionally seek out supportive friendship non-White networks when she stated "I think [Yik Yak] just makes me try harder to find people who aren't like that and stick with my good friends...Some of the close ones are Asian." T.S. further elaborated on the importance of Asian American communities at East Oak in her sentiments that, "If you are involved in the Asian community, everyone is like you or you have people who support you. When you're in the community, you don't have to worry about being targeted by [those who identify with you in your community]."

Chloe also noted, “When you see more of your [Korean] people from [campus ethnic club] representing [East Oak] and things like that, it really encourages you. It kind of makes you feel a little bit more a sense of belonging versus like all White people everywhere. It gives you hope that maybe we are seen as part of [East Oak].” Chloe’s statement further emphasized the benefits of ethnic subgroups on campus. These subgroups were asserted by multiple participants to serve several purposes on campus that included psychosocial support, insulation from encountering racialized aggressions, and increased sense of belonging to an ethnic subculture of campus.

Although Asian student organizations were typical outlets that students readily engaged in, not all participants in this study cited campus sponsored ethnic subgroups as their primary support network on campus. For those who were not involved within Asian student organizations, students regularly credited close friendship groups on campus who shared a common Asian racial or ethnic identity as critical support networks. For example, Yoo described the importance of his racially familiar friendship networks at East Oak,

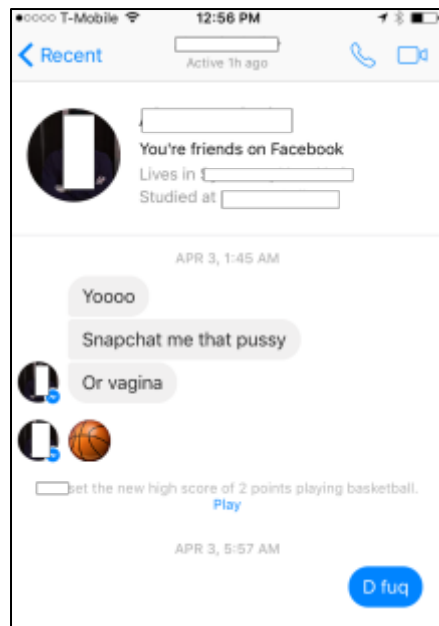
All my friends, or most of my friends are Asian Americans. The communities that I hang out with are Asian American. The people that I live with are Asian American, so my [East Oak] experience as an Asian American is basically just surrounded by other Asian Americans. Hanging out with other Asian Americans is where I find most comforting and most at home here. I never think about this racist stuff when I’m with them.

Surrounding themselves with peers who were similar in racial or ethnic identity played a valuable role in helping participants feel like they were valued, accepted, and

welcomed within a subculture of the East Oak institutional identity. These findings suggest that while the encounter of racialized aggressions both in person and on social media may have hindered sense of belonging to the dominant reputation of the institution, ethnic subgroup communities at East Oak mediated the impact of these racist encounters on campus.

### **Objectification of Women**

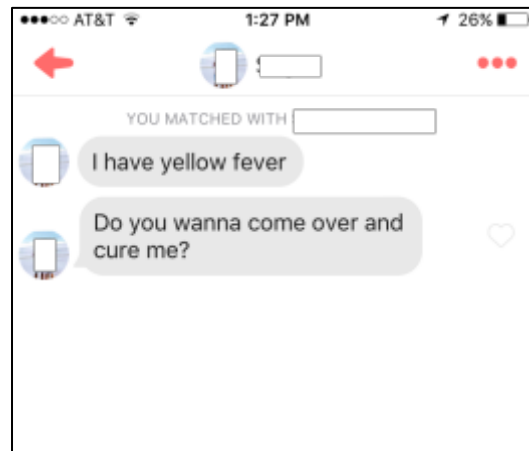
In addition to encountering racialized aggressions, women in this study specifically cited both direct and hearsay experiences of encountering disturbing sexual messages on social media. These hostilities that targeted women were apt to occur on any social media, identified or anonymous. For example, Pat documented an interaction with a former peer who was a student at East Oak University, but now is an alumnus of campus. The screenshot below, Figure 4.5, documented both the message and platform (Facebook Messenger) where this communication occurred.



*Figure 4.5. Objectifying communication on Facebook Messenger*

Pat elaborated on her discomfort with receiving this communication from a former peer on campus, but simultaneously described the climate on social media was one that particularly enabled objectifying messages such as this to be an unsurprising encounter as a woman on campus.

Kasey further supported Pat's description of receiving disturbing sexually themed messages on social media and further elaborated that racial fetishizing was another issue that Asian American women encountered on dating apps like Tinder. Kasey stated that while she regularly received these racially fetishized messages through Tinder, she couldn't attest to the fact that the sole perpetrators of these aggressions were students at East Oak because the functionality of this social media app did not identify user's by specific campus location.



*Figure 4.6. Racialized/gendered aggression on Tinder*

Within a span of a week, Kasey received multiple messages racially/sexually objectifying her, including the communications captured by Figure 4.6 (above) and Figure 4.7 (below), which were sent by two different, White offenders.



*Figure 4.7. Racialized/gendered aggression pt. 2 on Tinder*

Kasey elaborated that online dating social media apps were unquestionably locations where Asian American women were regularly racialized and objectified because of racial identity. While the majority of women participants in this study did not personally use mobile dating apps such as Tinder, almost all women participants were able to corroborate Pat and Kasey's previous assertions by citing their familiarity with similarly racialized and gendered online communications during focus groups.

Though other forms of racialized aggressions (both in person and online) were primarily purported to originate from White perpetrators, racially gendered hostilities toward women were attributed to men of all racial backgrounds, including other Asian Americans. The experience of being objectified as a woman online aligned with the regularity of being fetishized/racialized on campus and caused women participants to distance themselves from the reputation of East Oak. Women in this study elaborated on the ways that men of all racial backgrounds regularly fetishized Asian American women at East Oak and the discomfort that these interactions caused. In examples that were lucidly recanted, Gilly recalled her interactions with male students at a party during her first year on campus. She described,



I remember at least three very specific instances. Some of them are verbatim quotes still in my head. This one White dude being like, "Oh, I've never hooked up with an Asian girl before." I was like, "Well, tonight's not going to be your first night." Then someone else, who is also Asian, like South Asian, came to me and he's like, "Oh, I have yellow fever," but clearly intending to mean East Asian, Korean, Japanese, Chinese. Other creepy instances like that, they've been very fetish-y and kind of gross.

Vicky also described her experiences of being on campus and constantly being harassed by men of all races because of her race and her gender. These incidents caused her to become skeptical and distrusting of all men at East Oak. She explained her experience by documenting,

I feel like my race plays into this fetish. When I first came [to East Oak], I felt so degraded and objectified. If I wore a tank top, people would be like 'You're trying to do things, Asian girl.' People would come up to me and say 'What you're wearing is going to get you raped, Asian.' Little comments like that. It's very worded in a strong manner that it penetrates deeply... I've had all types of men come up and say that to me.

This intersection of racialized and gendered aggressions elaborated by participants resulted in what many women in this study described as profound expressions of distrust toward the men on East Oak's campus. Even though the perpetrators of these gendered experiences were often unable to be confirmed as East Oak students on mobile dating platforms, the women in this study confidently attributed the gendered aggressions on social media as a reflection of their face-to-face encounters

with men on campus. The overwhelming sentiment expressed by the women who took part in this study was that Asian American women were regularly and consistently objectified both online and face-to-face at East Oak, resulting in a cynicism of the campus' male student body.

### **Emasculation of Men**

Men in this study also encountered sexualized aggressions on social media, although not as pervasive in quantity as the aggressions encountered by women. Rather than be fetishized and objectified online, men were apt to experience and encounter online aggressions that were emasculating, suggesting that Asian men were not heterosexually desirable at East Oak University. In one instance described by Fitz, he stated

I do remember reading a comment about Asians on Yik Yak. It was kind of disparaging. Generally, things that Asian guys get picked on for is being nerds or something like that. And, small dicks. Yeah, that a lot, and also just not being sexually desirable.

Within the focus groups of this study, male participants reiterated the encounter of online aggressions that Asian men were not desirable heterosexual partners in comparison to their female counterparts. Yoo clearly articulated the differences between Asian men and women on campus and stated "Asian males tend to be seen as feminine and weak and whatever, but the Asian female is seen as more valued in the sexual conquest. The general stereotype you see is that Asian males aren't sexually attractive." Male students in this study were almost unanimously in consensus that the sentiments of being heterosexually undesirable and emasculating comments were commonly expressed on

Yik Yak.

The sexualized nature of racialized aggressions on social media contributed to feelings that Asian American men were heterosexualized as deficient, while women's encounters online conveyed they were solely desirable in serving as men's sexual conquests at East Oak. The nature of these racialized and gendered aggressions on social media reinforced the endemic nature of hostility that participants described as embedded qualities of the East Oak campus culture that was detrimental to facilitating a positive sense of belonging.

### **Institutional Accountability**

In response to encountering and experiencing racialized aggressions on social media, students suggested a number of approaches they wanted campus East Oak administration to consider as a means to remediate racialized hostility on social media. These suggestions for action included A) Admit and recognize racial tension, B) Educate campus, and C) Promote racial equity. These suggestions for institutional action are further detailed below.

#### **Admit and Recognize Racial Tension**

A primary step that students in this study advised East Oak administrators to consider as a remedy for racialized aggressions on social media was for campus leaders to formally recognize the problematic nature of racism on campus. Participants reflected back to the decision to sanction students who took part in the campus die-in during the spring 2015 semester as an example of the institution's tolerance for racial discrimination to persist within the campus culture. T.S. explained,

For example, with the die-in last year for Eric Garner and the probation the

students were placed on. It upsets me, and then the resulting student feeling online that that was a good action to take to sanction these students. It upsets me that I go to an institution that doesn't supports all students. I think what needs to be done first and foremost is for administration to recognize that racism is an issue. There are multiple incidents when administration has failed to acknowledge that.

Minority students don't feel comfortable on campus and then it shows up online. [Administrators at East Oak] just don't believe in that or just can't see it happens to us every day, so, they obviously won't understand it. I think [administrators at East Oak] have to realize that students struggle, and that reflects poorly on [East Oak].

T.S.' sentiment concerning the lack of East Oak's administrative recognition that students of color faced problematic issues regarding racism on campus was a popular opinion that was stated multiple times by her peers throughout this study.

Melvin also voiced his frustration with the fact that he believed the consistent deflection by administrators regarding racial issues was designed to stymy student activism and delay administrative action until racial issues dissipated on campus. Melvin hypothesized,

The policy of addressing racism here has always been a matter of deflection. The policy is all about trying to make it be water underneath the bridge. It gives the impression that the administration wants to delay the process of talking about the issues here, so that one day we too will graduate, and that's when they can ignore the issues again. The longer this goes without action, the longer everything here stays the same.

The recommendation that East Oak leaders formally acknowledge the presence of a hostile racial climate on campus was almost universally voiced by participants in this study. Students asserted that acknowledge of East Oak's racially unwelcoming learning and social environments for students of color by the senior administration was vital in order to change an institutional culture that was afraid to confront issues related to racism. Joey built on this sentiment when he elaborated,

I think, if [East Oak administrators] get comfortable with being uncomfortable talking about racism, that's the only way to address the problems. If you don't talk about [racism], people who are [perpetrating hostile acts] are just going to keep on doing it. It'll stay the same and nothing happens. I think if [East Oak administrators] have open discussions and open forums and talk about problems, maybe we'll get started to understand all the issues.

Participants further explained that neutralizing racialized aggressions both in person and online could be effectively realized through a number of additional actions that included educating the East Oak community regarding the state of racism on campus, and increasing the effort to hire more faculty and staff of color into administrative and faculty positions.

### **Educate Campus**

Participants in this study repeatedly stated that they believe the East Oak community could be effectively transformed as an institution that was invested in fostering welcoming learning communities through the promotion of educational opportunities that raised awareness of the oppression experienced by students of color on campus. Participants frequently described their frustrations with combating racialized

aggressions both in person and online as being partly rooted in the absence of an institutional culture that promoted education and cultural competencies crucial for interacting with, and comprehending the experiences of a rich multicultural community.

Yoo reiterated this sentiment and stated,

I want people to be educated. I want people to be culturally aware, and not so culturally insensitive. It's obviously really concerning, in the sense of ... I don't know. In order to be global citizens, and public citizens of America, you have to be open minded and understand people of different cultures. You have to be culturally aware, culturally understanding. I understand that race is a very big issue, and that can't be solved tomorrow, but if we're going to graduate from [East Oak], then we need to know how to respect others who are different and... I don't think we have that sort of opportunity to do that here at [East Oak]. I think [the cultural education] is definitely needed.

In some instances, participants spoke directly to the need for their White peers to further educate themselves regarding the diverse identities and oppressive experiences lived by Asian-Americans at East Oak as a means to develop empathy toward and common bond with other students. Keith described his frustrations with his White peers,

My theory is that you have White kids that don't interact with anyone who doesn't look them, right? So they see me and they see brown. That's all they see, right? They don't know any different. Because they see brown, they assume that, 'Oh, he's from India, he must be from that part of the world, generally speaking. [Students on campus] just need to open their minds more and get to know me. I'm from Jersey. I play football. I probably have a lot in common with you but you got

to try with me.

In another instance, Chloe described the need for outreach by the Asian American community to engage with non-Asians at East Oak, but also asserted the principal onus should not be on Asian Americans to educate White students. Chloe described,

I kind of wanted to use [the Korean Student Organization] as a way to really educate others about the Korean culture and invite people to our programs, but especially with the whole North Korea-South Korea thing, that really bugs me. Always people keep asking me if I'm from North Korea and I'm like, people cannot leave North Korea. Why can't you guys understand that? You need to learn that somewhere and stop asking me. Like, go learn that. You should figure it out yourself. Try to learn something that's not about you some time.

Almost all participants in the study agreed that eliminating the stigma against Asian American students on campus and on social media could be remedied through targeted, intentional, and recurring education at East Oak. While participants did not offer recommendations for how education could be enacted directly on social media, participants hypothesized that addressing the root causes of racialized aggressions within the physical campus setting would result in decreased racialized hostility being dispensed online.

### **Promote Racial Equity**

Numerous testimonials from students in this study attributed the problematic racial dynamics on social media due to a lack of racially diverse faculty and staff at East Oak. Carly stated that a straightforward solution to promoting a more inclusive campus

both in person and online was to “Hire more Asian faculty...” Participants theorized that a critical mass of Asian American staff and faculty would act to mediate racialized aggressions both in person and on social media. L.L. affirmed this sentiment by stating,

[An Asian American faculty member] has always been involved in helping me think about racial inequality and things like that at [East Oak]. I have a lot of conversations with her and I think that when I think about how to fix [East Oak] per se, I think the major thing that would be helpful fixing [racialized aggressions] would be having more Asian people here, or having more diversity in the community so we can talk about these issues more openly with people who get it.

Eunice also reflected on the sentiment that East Oak needed to further diversify in both the breadth and depth of racial diversity on campus as she described her experience of being unable to identify administrative support for the Asian American community,

Like, the [multicultural center] is for African American students and Hispanic students or Asian students who go to [East Oak], but that’s the only thing here. So, if you don’t feel like you are being understood by the workers in that office, there’s no other connection. I think that there is a disconnect and [East Oak] needs to consider the Asian culture groups need staff who can help us. There are no Asian staff we can turn to ... I know two faculty who are Asian, but not any other workers at [East Oak who are Asian American].

Participants also hypothesized that racially diversifying the faculty and staff across the university would create increased opportunities for Asian American students on campus to identify mentors, advisers, and confidants who possessed the necessary



skills to effectively support Asian Americans within a predominately White institution. Mary affirmed the importance of diversifying the faculty and staff at East Oak when she stated,

Actually, the first thing that came to mind is having leadership roles that are not White males. I think it helps if you have representatives on the campus that understand Asians. I've only encountered one Asian professor, [name of professor] who was my Asian-American lit professor. He's awesome. He's the only Asian professor I know, and the only professor who's really understood me.

Two other students (Ashley and Pat) further identified the same Asian-American lit professor as the only faculty member the participants felt like they could connect with regarding their racialized experiences as Asian Americans at [East Oak]. Kasey further restated the importance behind hiring more Asian Americans,

This is a big one. Hiring Asian faculty beyond the Asian-American studies department. I think that would be really valuable. To have someone to look up to or have a mentor or an adult that you can go and talk to... I have a few mentors right now. None of them are Asian. It would be nice to have an Asian face to go to and ask what can I do if I experience discrimination. A woman, too. I know I'm going to be judged based on being Asian. I'd be curious to know what someone who is Asian can tell me about advice I should take.

The recommendations to hire greater numbers of Asian American faculty and staff were pressing suggestions proposed by most all participants in the study. Regardless of a participant's encounter or lack of the encounter with racialized aggressions on social media, it was clear that increased representation of Asian American faculty and staff was

a priority as it related to facilitating more positive, welcoming, and affirmative campus experiences.

### **Summary of Field Notes**

The findings presented in this chapter were further supported and verified through field notes that were maintained throughout the duration of this study. A sample of the excerpts from the field notes that follow in this section directly aligned with the testimonials cited by the study's participants during individual interviews, observations, focus groups, an artifact analysis. The coherence between this chapter's findings and content within the researcher's field notes further strengthened the relevance of the previously described themes regarding the relationship between racialized aggressions on social media and sense of belonging at East Oak.

### **Confirmation of Findings**

Field notes indicated that participants were most invested in elaborating how anonymous racialized aggressions were detrimental for their student experience. In many cases, field notes indicated that "[the student] was thankful to have the opportunity to speak about these issues in private, and [he/she] felt the interview was more like a therapy session where [he/she] was venting their frustration about their campus experience. 80-90% of the interview always came back to Yik Yak and the anonymous nature of racialized aggressions."

Another repetitive theme within the field notes for in this study included the observation that "[The student] visibly conveys [his/her] anger and frustration explicitly and at length when asked to reflect upon the relationship between the Asian American student community and the White student population regarding racism on social media.

[He/She] wishes [he/she] could talk about these issues more often on campus.” Another field note states that “This interview felt like it was going to be an hour of gripes directed at White students on campus if I didn’t more intentionally prompt [the student] to the next question. [He/she] says this is the first time anyone has asked [him/her] about racism at [East Oak] and the conversation is therapeutic.” Such observations resonated with the findings in this chapter that racial tensions at East Oak were characterized by high levels of anger and distrust, especially between the Asian American community and White peers on campus.

### **Reflections on Protocols**

The observation protocol as part of this study was described in the researcher’s field notes as being “...not productive for observing direct encounters of racialized aggressions as originally hypothesized within the method section of the study.” While observations of a few participants’ [e.g. Gilly and Kassy] social media produced direct evidence of racialized and gendered aggressions on Yik Yak and Tinder, the majority of observations were recorded in field notes as “No direct evidence of racialized aggressions... [Participant] stated it was awkward to show me their social media because [he/she] felt like there was pressure to find a racially offensive post on the spot. [He/she] said they will go home and forward me examples what is on their timeline or old screenshots of Yik Yak they saved or were sent later on... Observation was ended in less than 10 minutes.”

While the observation protocol did not yield a high quantity of direct evidence implicating the presence of the racialized aggressions on participants’ social media accounts, this process was noted to be effective in prompting students to pay closer

attention to what was posted online during their participation in this study. Multiple reflections were expressed in the focus groups that the interaction of scrolling through individual social media with the researcher during the observation portion of this study allowed students to be more "...aware of what to look for" in sending screen capturing and forwarding artifacts to the researcher.

### **Confounding Testimonials**

Extensive field notes were recorded in this study as it related to two participants (Chandler and Haley) who were described as outliers as it related to encounters of racialized aggressions at East Oak. Both of these students keenly asserted during individual interviews and within the focus groups that racial hostility on social media was not a concerning issue that was relevant to address on campus.

Both participants were also assigned to the same focus group, and openly challenged the sentiments of the six other students in the group discussion who expressed prejudice toward Asian-Americans was an emergent issue at East Oak. In multiple instances, both Chandler and Haley asserted to other participants in the focus group that the Asian American community on campus needed to what Haley described as "...look beyond itself..." and consider what Chandler described as "Racism is only a problem if you're too sensitive to it. I mean, I'm fine with it." The resultant outcome of these statements silenced and discredited the reflections expressed by the other participants during this focus group. Field notes recorded this particular focus group was "...not productive nor beneficial for collective dialogue. After Chandler and Haley discredited the group's assertion that racism was an issue on campus, the focus group was mostly

silent the rest of the time together. It was clear the other students felt invalidated by Chandler's and Haley's statements."

Interestingly, both Chandler and Haley briefly presented private reflections with the researcher after the interviews and focus groups ended (i.e. the recorder had stopped actively recording) that provided confounding testimonials as it related to the absolute nature of their transcribed statements. During her exit from the room after the individual interview, Haley made a comment to the researcher that she "...sometimes feel guilty" about actively turning down Asian peers' invitations to hang out because she doesn't want to be seen as "...trapped in the Asian community." Haley noted that she sometimes wished she could take part in outings with her Asian peers, because she knows that she is potentially "...missing a good time..." but that at the end of the day, she has made a decision to associate more strongly with White women at East Oak over Asian Americans. Field notes from this interaction indicated that the participant "...expressed a noticeable level of conflicted emotions when leaving the room. She didn't necessarily invalidate what was said in the interview, but she introduced a diverging perspective as it relates to her view of the Asian American community on campus."

Chandler expressed his own confounding statement as it related to the narratives he presented in both his recorded individual interview and reflections asserted during the focus group. During his exit from the individual interview, Chandler noted that he was currently researching and trying to better understand why Asian Americans and other non-White peers consistently cite discrimination as a commonly lived experience, yet he never mentioned this in his interview or focus group. Chandler also made note that he was incentivized to take part in this study because he was trying to expand his knowledge

on a topic area he knew little about (e.g. the Asian American community and their encounters of racism). This interaction was noted in the field notes and describes Chandler as a student who "... does not totally discounted existence of racism in society. He's actively trying to comprehend what racism looks like, and also said that part of the reason why he wanted to take part in this study is because he acknowledges he knows very little about racism and discrimination."

While no follow-up questions or meetings were coordinated with these two participants beyond the stated protocols, the researcher reached out to Chandler and Haley multiple times during the artifact collection phase of this study to solicit them to send potential examples of racialized aggressions they may have witnessed online or encountered through hearsay, but neither participant responded back to the researcher, or acknowledged this request. Thus, these field notes serve as the primary evidence regarding Chandler and Haley's disputing perspectives to their original narratives.

### **Researcher Positionality**

The most extensive documentation of field notes in this study encompassed the researcher's reflections regarding his experience of feeling emotionally overwhelmed and mentally anguished as a result of internalizing the cumulative burden of oppressive experiences described by participants during the study. In the most representative instance of the impact that this study had on myself as the researcher, a sample of my field notes stated:

I'm angry that students are describing their experiences so negatively. I have to be in better control of my body language and tone during interviews. I am constantly reminding myself I am not a professional who can offer direct help in this

moment. These stories have become much more impactful to me because I see myself in these students. I've become too invested in their stories. As I hear more about what it means to be an Asian American undergrad at [East Oak], I become more enraged, depressed, and worn about having to listen to these narratives without being able to actively help the students.

This reflection epitomized the draining nature of conducting the research that is described throughout this study. The researcher intentionally recorded his thoughts on a daily basis over the course of the four weeks that individual interviews occurred, and then again over the course of two weeks that focus groups occurred at the end of the spring 2016 semester. At the end of data collection, no interaction with the data or the field notes occurred over the course of six weeks in summer 2016 until the researcher felt he could effectively summarize and analyze the study's findings without feeling emotionally fatigued during the process.

Chapter 5 presents a synthesized summary of the findings described in this preceding chapter, and further analyzes the significance of these findings through the lens of critical race theory. Implications for theory, practice, and future research are also presented.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: Analysis, Discussion, and Implications**

### **Analysis of Findings**

The previous chapter presented an overview of the encounters of racialized aggressions on social media by Asian American college students at East Oak University. To address the research question and to call attention to implications for policy, research, and practice, the significance of these findings is analyzed and interpreted in this chapter using a CRT framework.

The findings suggest that sense of belonging for Asian American college students at East Oak is constrained, in part, by the encounter with racialized aggressions on social media. Participants suggest that their feelings of exclusion on campus were due to an accumulation of online and in-person experiences that alienate Asian Americans from the predominant campus culture, and communicate that Asian Americans are not welcomed at East Oak. Against the backdrop of a perceived hostile racial campus climate, online racialized aggressions appeared to intensify Asian American students' detachment and separation at East Oak.

The analyses of the research findings are organized in this chapter in the following manner: A) Racialized Aggressions and Sense of Belonging, B) Endemic Racism and Ethnic Sub-communities, and C) Privileging Counter Narratives. Recommendations for practice, and implications for research and scholarship are presented in response to the findings and analysis of this study's research question.

#### **Racialized Aggressions and Sense of Belonging**

This study's findings that infer a hostile racial climate is a detriment to sense of belonging is in alignment with widely cited research that states racially hostile campus



cultures are correlated with decreased sense of belonging among racially minoritized students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Johnson et al., 2007). The participant testimonials from this study assert that the existence of racialized aggressions on anonymous social media can heighten the phenomenon of cultural mistrust among Asian-American students at a PWI. The manifestation of mistrust supports previous research that states Asian American students are prone to racialized adversities in college despite claims by the model minority image that this population is devoid of such experiences in higher education (Garcia et al., 2011; Kotori & Malaney, 2003; Lewis et al. 2000; Museus & Truong, 2009; Sue et al., 2009; Teranishi et al., 2008). Additionally, the documentation of online racism expands these previous scholars' findings by extending the existence of racialized aggressions to the virtual campus culture on social media.

These findings also expand upon and challenge previous understanding regarding sense of belonging. The literature relating to sense of belonging has primarily relied on assessing the climate of peer interactions or environmental barriers that exist within the face-to-face environment. This dissertation expands the scope with which sense of belonging among Asian American college students is impacted by suggesting that the racialized environment of social media negatively contributes to the ways these racially minoritized students feel like they are welcomed, respected, valued, and matter. Revisiting Strayhorn's (2012) definition regarding sense of belonging is warranted in light of these findings.

Strayhorn (2012) defined sense of belonging in a way that attempted to bridge the multiple psychosocial and cultural aspects of the college student experience when he stated this phenomenon was "...perceived social support on campus, a feeling of

sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)” (p. 3), but this definition did not explicitly consider social media’s role in shaping campus culture. As stated by previous scholars (Martínez-Alemán, & Wartman, 2009), today’s college students perceive campus culture as existing both in person and online through a continuous, singular experience. Because of the assertion, literature that attempts to describe sense of belonging on today’s college campuses must consider how to explicitly integrate the online components of the student experience in any definition of this phenomenon. The findings from this dissertation uphold this sentiment.

Rather than suggesting that sense of belonging refer to the ways that individuals perceive a supportive environment “on campus,” it is suggested that the definition of sense of belonging be expanded to include the ways students perceive a welcoming environment both on campus *and on social media*. This addendum to Stayhorn’s (2012) definition is justified due to the testimonials presented in this dissertation that stated the encounter of anonymous racialized aggressions on social media were detrimental in facilitating a positive sense of belonging. Expanding the definition for sense of belonging to encompass experiences on social media is also in alignment with research that states the online environment actively shapes the psychosocial outcomes of today’s college students, and that these outcomes necessitate future scholarly attention (Mastrodicasa & Metllus, 2013; Tynes & Markoe, 2010; Tynes et al., 2013).

### **Cultural Mistrust**

Participants in this study perceived the encounter of racialized aggressions on social media, especially those on Yik Yak, increased their previously extant feelings of

suspicion toward White peers at East Oak. Asian Americans were likely to indicate they felt excluded from East Oak in response to these feelings of mistrust that emanated from encountering anonymous racialized aggressions. The presence and encounter of racialized aggressions on social media at East Oak then suggests that Asian Americans are not part of, nor valued within the campus community. Such a finding is in conflict with Strayhorn's (2012) definition of sense of belonging that states individuals should feel "...cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)" (p. 3).

While research has previously developed scales to measure mistrust within predominately White environments, these scales have exclusively used metrics that describe racially hostile experiences within the physical environment (Terrell & Terrell, 1996; Whaley, 2002). This current study contributes to the above-mentioned literature by extending the development of cultural mistrust to online spaces. The hostile experiences Asian American students encountered online appear to facilitate suspicion of a predominantly White environment, and this finding implies that racialized aggressions on anonymous social media are likely to intensify perceptions of mistrust toward White peers on campus.

By harboring feelings of suspicion and mistrust stemming from anonymous racialized aggressions, participants in this study implicated the entire White community as a generalized untrustworthy population. The generalized perception White individuals at East Oak as a dishonest population further implies that the formation of a cohesive community between Asian American and White students is inhibited due to the presence of anonymous racism on social media. This finding has consequential implications for

higher education because the obstruction of community is in conflict with the outcomes and values professed by student affairs administrators and many college campuses (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

These feelings of distrust and the implied barriers impeding community formation are suggested to be rooted in the CRT tenets that racism is endemic within the East Oak culture, and that the property of whiteness is privileged within all aspects of campus life. The nature of East Oak's predominantly White identity conveys that the institution is inherently developed for White students. Because of this characterization, it is inferred that Asian Americans are excluded from the social and academic structures that are welcoming for White communities, elevating feelings of skepticism toward the dominant campus community for participants in this study. In particular, encountering racialized aggressions on Yik Yak intensified participants' mistrust of their White peers, and participants perceived this anonymous online platform as a significant barrier that inhibited sense of belonging.

**Anonymity Fuels Mistrust.** The inability to categorically determine the identities of offenders who dispensed racialized aggressions on social media is suggested to be an impetus that amplified cultural mistrust for Asian Americans at East Oak. Participants stated that they were not likely to encounter overt racialized hate in face-to-face settings, but regularly cited the encounter of racialized aggressions on Yik Yak.

Participants suspected that anonymity protected offenders who posted racialized aggressions on social media from being held accountable for their offensive communications, and that the anonymous functionality of Yik Yak eliminated the inhibitions that mitigate overt racism in the physical campus setting. Scholars have

asserted that the shield of anonymity promotes uninhibited online behaviors (Kiriakidis & Kavoura, 2010), and these types of offensive communications are attributed to the online disinhibition effect (Joinson, 2007; Suler, 2004). The findings of this study support the validity of these anonymous hostile online behaviors and further imply that Asian Americans respond by expressing skepticism toward the campus community where these aggressions originate. Such feelings of skepticism are in conflict with Schlossberg's (1989) concept of mattering, which may suggest students feel they are of less importance to campus, are less connected to the East Oak community, and that they are unappreciated by their peers.

Without the ability to concretely identify the perpetrators of racialized aggressions on Yik Yak, participants were left to become suspicious of the predominantly White community, and to further doubt the authenticity of their relationships with White peers. This dynamic exemplifies the entrenchment of endemic racism that is rooted at East Oak. The institutional culture and social interaction with peers both in person and on social media are dictated by culturally hostile norms that alienate Asian Americans from the campus' identity, and suggest mistrust is an appropriate response to these anonymous communications.

Although racialized aggressions in this study did not exclusively reside on Yik Yak, participants were adamant that explicit racial hostility was more prevalent on anonymous social media than on user-identified social media and dating sites (e.g. Facebook and Tinder). These findings suggest that online anonymity, and the conditions that harbor anonymous social media on college campuses are critical components that fuel racialized aggressions at East Oak.

It is through anonymous racialized aggressions that social media are claimed as White property that reflect the historical presence of racism within the United States. Similar to the ways that White-centric policies and White supremacist hate groups facilitate oppression within physical environments, the enactment of anonymous racism on social media claims the online setting as White property. This claiming of social media as a property affirms White ownership of both the physical and virtual settings that define campus culture. Whites, then, possess, dictate, and maintain social media at East Oak by dispensing and engaging in anonymous racist discourse through spaces deemed as home territories (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996).

### **Endemic Racism and Ethnic Sub-Communities**

This study's findings regarding the perceived inhibition of sense of belonging are analyzed through the CRT tenet that racism is normalized and reproduced within educational settings. The testimonials asserted by students in this study imply that East Oak's campus culture is endemically uncondusive to advancing Asian Americans' feelings of being welcomed within the predominantly White environment. These perceptions are attributed to the everyday interactions that subtly conveyed Asian Americans are outsiders to East Oak (e.g. pathologizing microaggressions), and the engrained cultural stereotypes/practices that invalidated the identities of participants in this study (e.g. exotic labeling of Asian foods, lack of a culturally diverse academic curriculum, etc.) both in person and on social media.

### **Regulation of Behavior**

The rampant nature of implicit (in person) and explicit racism (on social media) at East Oak was regularly described by participants in their testimonials, and students

described this racism as a barrier that hindered their sense of belonging. Endemic racism is normalized at East Oak through cultural practices such as the lack of non-White faculty/staff and an emphasis on Eurocentric curriculum that structurally represent what Gusa (2010) refers to as a White institutional presence (WIP). Participants described racial subjugation on campus through the encounter of racialized aggressions on social media and through chilly face-to-face communications with White peers in social/academic settings. In some instances, participants were unable to quantify their feelings of discomfort at East Oak, but Kylie described this uneasy sentiment as “...just kind of that feeling that’s held me back” to represent the deep-seated nature of racism at East Oak.

These feelings of constraint on campus are attributed to an implicit categorization of Asian Americans as being inferior to their White counterparts. This classification is dispensed at East Oak through the endorsement of a normative White culture on social media that renders Asian American identities as powerless in comparison to whiteness. Endemic racism and racialized aggressions on social media further delineate the cultural terms (e.g. Asians are same, don’t speak your language) by which participants are forced to operate on campus, and represent the oppression that Asian American students exist in at East Oak.

The maintenance of racism at East Oak on social media is further reflected by participants who sought to deviate from White normalized expectations. In response to Asian Americans who resisted whiteness, social media monitored participants in this study through surveillance and dispensing racialized aggressions that targeted these students on anonymous and identifiable online platforms (e.g. Yik Yak and Facebook).

The virtual means to collectively supervise, define, and enforce culture through online communications embodies the enactment of White cultural dominance and further validates the presence of endemic racism at East Oak. This White dominance is a central means of regulating (Foucault, 1977) Asian Americans as a subordinated group, especially on social media. It is through the manifestation, enactment, and protection of whiteness at East Oak both in person and online that Asian Americans described themselves as perennial outsiders and not belonging to the campus culture.

### **Intersectional Oppression**

While the purpose of this study is not to investigate the gendered means by which students encountered hostility on social media, the testimonials by participants that the online environment is more hostile for Asian American women than Asian American men deserve attention and are critically examined.

The CRT principle that racism intersects other forms of social oppression to affirm the dominance of privileged identities and the subordination of marginalized identities has been asserted by scholars (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991) who state that an intersectional analysis can effectively uncover the ways that racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of persecution act to maintain hierarchies. These interlocking systems of inequality encompass all social identities and are rooted in feminist theories such as “race-class-gender” (Choo & Ferree, 2010) and “multiracial feminism” (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996), which incorporate multiple spheres of social identity within their analysis of oppression. An intersectional framework also debunks what is regularly referred to as the hierarchy of oppression, and dismisses the claim that one type of oppression (e.g. racism) should be privileged over another (e.g. sexism) (Andersen &



Collins, 2001). Ultimately, intersectionality affirms the presence of any oppression imposes the burden of social stratification upon a society, which acts to impede humanity's collective liberation (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996).

Women in this study regularly stated that men of all races and social identities (including Asian Americans) were likely to perpetuate sexually unwelcoming online messages at East Oak. While Asian American men regularly received communications on social media that conveyed their racial group was not welcomed on campus, Asian American women simultaneously received hostilities that their gender identity situated them as inferior to even their racially similar male counterparts. Women were specific in their assessments of the East Oak environment that the hostile climate on social media communicated that campus was not welcoming for students who fell within the social identities of marginalized groups. This compounded oppression described by women (encountering both gendered and racialized aggressions on social media) further suggests that the culture of East Oak actively persecuted non-privileged identities of all types, not just those of subjugated racialized identities, to maintain hierarchies of power (i.e. whiteness and men are privileged over non-Whites and women). The compounded nature of oppression that is uncovered from an intersectional analysis confirms the deeply entrenched means by which both racism and sexism reinforce themselves at East Oak on social media.

The importance of recognizing the intersectional identities of study participants is necessary within a CRT framework because this type of analysis also draws attention to the distinct internal diversity (e.g. sexual orientation, ethnicity, generational status, ability, class, religion, etc.) that exists within racially minoritized populations (Baca Zinn

& Thornton Dill, 1996). Highlighting the nuances of Asian American identity through intersectionality also challenges East Oak's perceived understanding of this racialized group as a "monolithic" community. In relation to this study, intersectionality is effective in elevating the dissimilar experiences and divergent backgrounds (Burnham, 2001) of unique Asian American experiences at East Oak. Simultaneously, intersectionality contextualizes the broad impact that oppression has upon impeding sense of belonging for those within this diverse racialized population.

### **Sense of Belonging and Ethnic Subgroups**

The majority of participants in this study responded to racialized aggressions on social media through a close identification with ethnic sub-communities. These sub-communities are suggested to serve as sites of resistance against the endemically hostile East Oak campus both in person and online. Participants described stronger belonging to ethnic subgroups at East Oak (e.g. ethnic student organizations, ethnically similar residence hall floor mates, etc.) compared to their belonging to the general campus culture in this study. In particular, participants cited the absence of encountering racialized aggressions on social media when immersed with these sub-communities as a reason for their increased affinity to ethnic communities on campus. This finding regarding participants' connection to ethnic subgroups supports previous assertions by Maramba and Velasquez (2012) and Museus and Maramba (2012) who emphasized the importance of ethnic subgroup cohesion for promoting SOC's sense of belonging at culturally unfamiliar institutions. This current study extends the literature regarding ethnic subgroups at predominantly White institutions by highlighting findings that suggest participation with culturally familiar communities on campus in response to

encountering racialized aggressions on social media may be beneficial for promoting sense of belonging for Asian American college students at a PWI.

These findings also call attention to the CRT tenet that emphasizes the need to actively uncover marginalized voices within PWIs because these distinct student narratives provide insight to the multiple forms of truth that exist within an educational setting. The testimonials documented in this research challenge the majoritarian perception at East Oak that Asian Americans are unnatural outsiders on campus. Rather, the presence of ethnic subgroups and participants' affinity to those communities at East Oak reflect a counter narrative that conveys Asian Americans possess a rich cultural identity that is inspirational, uplifting, and supportive of one another against the backdrop of an endemically racist educational institution.

At East Oak, Asian American students find spaces of comfort that empower them in the face of racialized aggressions within sub-communities. The development of counterspaces or subcultures by ethnic subgroups at East Oak enables Asian Americans to elevate their cultural identities in spaces where they are shielded from racialized aggressions on social media and the ridicule of their White peers.

It is within counterspaces that participants are able to exert agency against whiteness by celebrating and exploring their cultural identity, while collaboratively developing strategies to navigate racialized aggressions both in person and online. Privileging these experiential narratives of Asian Americans is in alignment with the tenets of CRT, and uncovers the importance of counterspaces in accentuating the rich lived experiences of individuals in this study who experience racism. Counterspaces have been found to increase opportunities for positive peer support and mentoring among SOC

to mediate the race related stress that manifests from existing in predominantly White settings (Yosso, 2006). It is through these counterspaces that participants in this study stated they felt validated on campus, identified a sense of belonging to a sub-community, and developed strategies to manage the stress that emerged from encountering racialized aggressions on social media.

**Ethnic Subgroups Mediate Stress.** Scholars note that existing within racially hostile environments is likely to induce stress on targets of racism (Aneshensel, 2009; Franklin, 1999; Nadal, 2011), and the findings of this dissertation suggest that race-related stress is likely to result from encountering racialized aggressions on social media. Throughout this study, participants described the ways encountering racialized aggressions contributed to outcomes associated with race-related stress that included: anger (Gibbons et al., 2012), annoyance (Sue et al., 2009), and fatigue (Smith et al., 2007).

While identification with ethnic sub-communities has been previously documented to lessen distress resulting from encounters with racialized hostility in the physical campus setting (Syed & Juan, 2011), only one previous study has asserted that identification with ethnic sub-communities is effective in mediating the stress that results from encountering online racialized aggressions (Tynes et al., 2012). While this current study did not focus on measuring ethnic identity, the testimonials from participants at East Oak are in alignment with Tynes and associates' (2012) findings, and suggest a strong affiliation with ethnic subgroups may act to buffer feelings of anxiety that result from encountering racialized aggressions on social media.

The importance of ethnic sub-communities within a predominantly White institution is emphasized as a key component of the social experience for Asian Americans at East Oak for multiple reasons. First, Asian Americans perceive ethnic subgroups as crucial communities that substantiate cultural identities within an endemically hostile racial environment, and second, these ethnic communities are suggested to play a role in reducing the consequential outcomes that are associated with the manifestation of race related stress on social media.

### **Privileging Counter Narratives**

The need to centralize and validate the lived experiences of participants in this study highlights the significance of prioritizing counter narratives in response to encountering racialized aggressions on social media. Privileging counter narratives is an action of empowerment for racialized minorities that is rooted within the principles of a CRT framework. Emphasizing counter narratives also advances social justice on college campuses by uncovering racism in a way so that it inspires action-oriented responses for social change. Participants in this study asserted the fallacy of Asian Americans being described as a homogenous population on social media through the expression of counter narratives. In response to online sentiments that Asian Americans are foreigners on campus, participants offered numerous testimonials that dispelled the myth of this normative “truth” assumed by their White peers.

The counter narratives within this study are not positioned in direct response to a single majoritarian story (e.g. White experience at East Oak). Recent scholarship calls to intentionally privilege the lived experiences of Asian Americans as unique and distinctive chronicles (Poon et al., 2016). Emphasizing a counter narrative in comparison to a

normative reference situates Asian Americans within a deficit framework that diminishes the testimonials (Ikemoto, 1997) in this study. Instead, the counter narratives of Asian Americans in this study stand on their own as distinctive experiences that call attention to CRT's principle for institutional change through individual and collective action that can eradicate oppression (Delgado, 1995).

Participants regularly explained that their lived experiences of navigating a racially hostile online environment were not regularly acknowledged by peers, faculty, or administrators at East Oak. The absence of opportunity to narrate and dictate their own stories at East Oak, especially on social media, implies that Asian Americans are confined to the margins of institutional culture. This study aims to move participant narratives from those margins, and situate the Asian American student experience as the central privileged voice that can facilitate institutional change to remediate the proliferation of racialized aggressions on social media.

Within this study, participants stated they believed their calls to administrative action could effectively reform race relations on social media. Emphasizing counter narratives as valid lived experiences, and purposefully integrating these student recommendations in administrative frameworks are vital to honor CRT's commitment to social justice. Through a dedication to social justice, equity can be advanced in an action-oriented manner that undermines the foundation of endemic racism, while simultaneously advancing the formation of an interconnected community at East Oak. Placing emphasis on the counter narratives in this study further strengthens movements that emphasize traditions of "...social, political, cultural survival, and resistance" (Solórzano & Yosso,

2002, p. 32) that may ultimately eliminate the structural mechanisms that perpetuate racialized aggressions on social media.

### **Racial Identity as Counter Narrative**

CRT values perspectives and lived experiences by all individuals, so emphasis is dedicated in this section to participants who did not resonate with the counter narratives expressed by the majority of participants in this study. Two students, Chandler and Haley, offered rebuttals to the central assertion by participants in this study that East Oak harbors an endemically hostile racial climate. While thorough insight regarding the identity development of Chandler and Haley is essentially absent from the collected data, a hypothesis is proposed to explain these two participants' confounding testimonials.

Kim (2012) writes that the formation of racial identity is in response to how individuals respond to the effects of racism within society. Additionally, social identity theory proposes that an individual evaluates the prestige of his/her own racial identification according to how that particular racial identity enhances or devalues his/her self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Kim (2012) writes that Asian Americans are especially sensitive to the dynamics of external perceptions by others, and states that a rejection of Asian identity may be common. This rejection typically does not stem from a lack of awareness of one's racial identity. Rather, rejecting Asian identity is a reflection about how one feels that racialized identity is valued within a particular social environment. Kim (2012) states that it is possible for racially defined Asians to actively or subconsciously reject Asian identity for White identification due to the internalization of racism.

Kim's (2012) framework is a possible explanation for Chandler and Hayley's identification with White identity given that implicit and explicit racism demeaned Asian Americans within all aspects of academic and social life at East Oak. It is hypothesized that the extensive prevalence of racism directed toward Asian Americans at East Oak may have contributed to Chandler and Hayley actively or subconsciously rejecting their Asian identity in exchange for White identification. Through racial identity and social identity analysis, the distancing of Chandler and Haley from an Asian identity is attributed to an extensive cultural diminishing of Asian Americans within both participants' lived experiences. The rejection of Asian identity and the siding with whiteness may be a developmental response to racism that acts to insulate these participants from the distress of encountering racialized aggressions at East Oak. While there is limited data to support each of these participants' developmental arc, it is also possible that Chandler and Haley's identification with Whiteness developed prior to their arrival at East Oak in response to racism encountered during high school or other social settings beyond college that are not documented in their interviews. Without further data regarding these participants' backgrounds, this hypothesis of White identification is only speculative because it is beyond the realm of this dissertation to affirmatively pinpoint the moment or reason why Chandler and Haley identify with their non-Asian identity.

Another possible explanation emerges using the CRT tenet of whiteness as property that rationalizes Chandler and Haley's embracement of a White identity. Through a CRT lens, the embracement of whiteness is a pragmatic response that confers value and property. In this study, property is expressed as the protection against racialized hostility at East Oak. It is possible that active identification with, and the



protection of whiteness within their own personal identities permitted Chandler and Haley to freely navigate the social and academic environment of East Oak without the concern of racialized persecution. Because both Chandler and Haley enacted and defended whiteness as a privileged identity among their White peers, it is possible they may have been afforded protections against the impacts of endemic racism that other Asian Americans cited as problematic to their campus experience. Whiteness possesses inherent value because it situates the owner of that identity atop the categorical racial hierarchy, which grants access to social, political, and psychological protections not available to those who are non-White. Chandler and Haley are benefactors of these properties of whiteness in this analysis.

The analyses of Chandler and Haley's shifting racial identity within the context of a predominantly White institution further reflects the problematic issues for Asian Americans that are embedded within the institutional culture at East Oak. Regardless of their perceptions of how or if racialized aggressions on social media impacted their sense of belonging, the centrality of racism and whiteness are dominant themes that are suggested to dictate and shape the behavior and identity of Asian Americans at East Oak. Counter stories that emphasize the responses to encountering racialized aggressions are valuable because these narratives call attention to the entrenched nature and nuanced complexity of how racism continually manifests itself within Asian American experiences. In accordance with CRT, privileging, analyzing, and comprehending counter narratives is a vital step to further evaluate the impact of racialized hostility at East Oak, which can inspire policy, interventions, and scholarship that act to unseat racism's entrenched presence at this predominantly White institution.

## **Implications for Higher Education**

Today's institutions of higher education are besieged with incidents of online racialized hate. These incidents have contributed to calls for the promotion of positive student experiences of racially minoritized populations and the elimination of oppression on college campuses. Because CRT privileges participant voices in facilitating social change, higher education administrators should first prioritize the multiple recommendations stated by participants in this study. These recommendations include racially diversifying faculty and staff, and promoting education that develops the cultural competencies of the campus community to alleviate the reproduction of racialized aggressions on social media.

Further implications for practice and research include actions such as the promotion of institutionally sponsored counterspaces on social media, the promotion of institutional activism on social media to neutralize racialized aggressions, a revision of developmental/leadership theories to consider the impact of online racism on those frameworks, increased attention toward assessing mental health on college campuses, and evaluating the limits of free speech as it relates to the expression of racialized hostility on social media. These implications and recommendations for practice are discussed below.

### **Counterspaces on Social Media**

The endorsement of counterspaces on predominantly White college campuses has been shown to be effective in facilitating opportunities for minoritized students to build community through empowerment and healing (Grier-Reed, 2010; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso, 2006; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Within this study, participants described ethnic student organizations

and friendship groups at East Oak as counterspaces that were effective in promoting sense of belonging in spite of the presence of racialized aggressions on social media. While such counterspaces exist and have been promoted in the physical campus setting, little attention has been paid to how higher education can encourage and foster similar spaces on social media in response to online racism. Physical counterspaces are institutionally sponsored at many college campuses in the form of ethnic student organizations, off campus retreats, and mentorship programs, but few campus initiatives have advanced online counter spaces on social media. The initiation and promotion of online counterspaces is a suggested institutional response to mediate the encounter of racialized aggressions on social media.

The employment of hashtags on Twitter and engagement within group pages on Facebook have emerged as strategies employed by students to communicate amongst one another and actively call attention to numerous racial injustices within society (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015). These spaces are regularly engaged by students and have been characterized as effective avenues of elevating individual experiences within the back channels of social media in response to racism (Florini, 2014). Administrators within college settings are called to engage with students through these online forums in ways that validate both the existence of these virtual counterspaces, and recognize the need to support students within an online capacity.

Strategically engaging within counterspaces on social media and building coalitions among oppressed populations on these spaces can provide administrators with valuable insight regarding the ways students respond to racialized aggressions on social media, provide further documentation regarding the depth and breadth of online stresses

students encounter, and elevate the counter narratives that are regularly expressed on these “backchannels” of institutional culture. Most importantly, recognition of these online counterspaces calls attention to the need for administrators to actively establish online interactions that support students in these social media locations (much like they do in the face-to-face setting of counter spaces) so that sense of belonging can be advanced through an institutional presence that conveys students of racially minoritized identities are seen, welcomed, valued, and respected on campus.

### **Institutional Activism**

In conjunction with promoting visibility of virtual counterspaces, administrators are encouraged to leverage social media on their campuses to establish a virtual culture of institutional activism in response to online racialized aggressions. The appearance and proliferation of racialized aggressions on social media have been prominent at multiple institutions within the United States, and select college campuses have proactively responded to these racialized threats through unified online institutional action that have neutralized these offensive behaviors.

In one high profile example, Colgate University responded to a barrage of racist and sexist statements posted on Yik Yak by mobilizing faculty and staff to inundate the social media site with encouraging messages aimed at uplifting the spirits of students who were targeted on their campus (Mulhere, 2014). In another instance, Westfield State University emboldened their community in an “upvote campaign” to endorse positive messages on Yik Yak in an effort to ensure racist, sexist, and offensive messages were overwhelmed and ultimately buried by the campus’ ongoing messages of positivity (Zalaznick, 2015). A similar “positivity” campaign was also enacted at York College of

Pennsylvania (Zalaznick, 2015), and these institutionally sponsored actions have been effective in combating the negativity that results when racialized aggressions on social media appear on college campuses.

Such campus-wide responses are important, because participants in this study stated that the visibility of institutionally sponsored activism by leaders of an institution have the potential to mediate the impact from encountering online racialized aggressions as they relate to students' sense of belonging. Stemming from the testimonials documented in this dissertation, it is recommended that current college campuses follow in the footsteps of these previously identified institutions and actively combat the presence and reproduction of racialized aggressions on social media by assembling faculty, staff, and student communities to admonish racism directly on the social media where such aggressions may manifest. Additionally, training and professional development sessions should be offered/encouraged for faculty and staff who are not familiar with how to navigate social media for these activism purposes to mobilize an entire campus community to take a stand against the presence of online racism.

Institutions dedicated to eliminating racialized aggressions on social media should also dedicate their energies to purposing social media as a space that promotes anti-racism efforts and student engagement. Senior leadership on college campuses can further establish their presence and institutional values on social media by using these virtual spaces to promote anti-racism resources (e.g., readings, programs, dialogues) for the community to engage in online. Institutions that approach the combating of racialized aggressions in an active, multi-faceted manner can establish a culture that conveys online spaces will not be claimed for racialized hostility, but instead, these social media will be

defined as spaces that endorse the inclusion of all individuals on a college campus to better advance sense of belonging for all students.

### **Theory Building and Practitioner Training**

The establishment of social media as a ubiquitous component of student life, and the proliferation of racism on these platforms has implications for theory building and academic preparation in the training of higher education professionals. Scholars have critiqued seminal student development and leadership theories because these frameworks do not often account for the impact of racism in their practice (Torres, 2009; Torres & Hernández, 2007) and therefore do not provide an accurate assessment of how these theories are applicable in today's racialized climate of higher education (Hernández, 2016).

Similarly, few developmental and leadership theories have considered the impact of the ways social media shapes and influences those frameworks. The limited research that has been conducted regarding online identity (Dalton & Crosby, 2013; Luppigini, 2012; Stern, 2015) also has not examined how racialized aggressions on social media intersect these emerging theories. Because of these critiques, it is recommended that the emergence of new developmental models intentionally consider how online racism impacts theoretical frameworks and leadership models. Additionally, scholars are encouraged to revisit pre-established theories and reassess those developmental models in the context of today's racialized climate of social media.

Graduate programs that prepare higher education/student affairs professionals are also called to assess their curriculum in a way that critically examines how their courses build proficiencies for addressing racialized aggressions on social media. Today's college

students and institutional cultures exist in hybrid virtual and physical spaces, but higher education/student affairs graduate programs tend to strictly emphasize competencies that only apply to the face-to-face campus setting (Junco, 2014).

If graduate programs aspire to sufficiently prepare administrators and scholars to work with today's student populations, they are urged to integrate academic curricula and practitioner training as they relate to both comprehending the impact of social media within the student experience, and identifying the consequential outcomes of perpetuating racialized aggressions on these virtual forums. Given the emphasis of producing multiculturally competent (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004) administrators who are equipped to address racial bias, facilitate inclusive learning communities, develop student leaders, and promote equity, the integration of addressing social media and online racism within course curricula and assistantship experiences will ensure graduates from higher education/student affairs programs are equipped to navigate the complexities of today's college campuses and its students to promote belonging.

### **Campus Safety/Mental Health**

Higher education must address how social media permits and enables the expression of threatening acts of physical and/or emotional violence to manifest on college campuses. Recent examples of threats to students and institutional communities posted on social media can be readily identified within the past year, and include expressions of violence toward Black students at the University of Missouri, Penn State University, Charleston Southern University, Emory University, Texas A&M University, and Brigham Young University-Idaho (Ward, 2015).

Racially minoritized students have expressed their emotional discomfort and fear stemming from these previous incidents (Samee, 2016). These detrimental outcomes should be concerning for those working on today's campuses because limited policy has been advanced that directly addresses the root causes of online racialized aggressions. While some institutions have endorsed crisis management teams and collaborations with campus police as safeguards against emergency situations (e.g. hate crimes, threats to safety, etc.), increased attention is required to further advance policies that are not only responsive to online racial threats, but speak to CRT's objective of actively and structurally eliminating racialized aggressions from an institution's existence, both in person and online. This may be accomplished by a thorough assessment of an institution's cultural values and practices by cultivating a unified commitment to advance the shared humanity amongst all its community members, especially as it relates to speaking out against racialized aggressions exhibited on social media.

It is also necessary to address the public health implications that emerge from maintaining learning environments that are psychologically unwelcoming due to racialized aggressions on social media. Recent reports within higher education indicate that counseling centers continue to be overwhelmed by students seeking support due to mental distress (Jaschik, 2016), and the continued reproduction of racialized aggressions on social media may further compound the workload on mental health professionals on college campuses. This anecdotal evidence, combined with the findings from this study, should boost an initiative that prioritizes the advancement of funding of and training for mental health professionals who are prepared to assist students encountering inhospitable online racial climates. Mental health professionals and campus counseling centers cannot



be situated as peripheral resources on college campuses, but must be integral partners with faculty and staff in the structural neutralization and combating of racialized aggressions on social media.

### **Freedom of Expression**

The rise of racialized aggressions on social media also calls attention to the nuances that shape the boundaries of speech and expression on college campuses. While racialized hostility and oppressive expression on social media are incongruent with the democratic values and mission of higher education, censorship of these objectionable online comments are likely to cause conflicts with the constitutional rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. Today's college campuses administrators are faced with the dilemma of identifying, assessing, and acting upon racialized aggressions on social media in ways that convey an institutional commitment to reject these statements of racial hostility, but simultaneously protect the guaranteed Constitutional rights of expression.

Courts have generally conceded to specific campus policies regarding the limitations of speech when despicable expression impacts the learning environment (Feine v. Parkland College, 2010; Harrell v. Southern Oregon, 2009; Rollins v. Cardinal Stritch University, 2001). Such deferral is empowering to higher education, but simultaneously necessitates institutions embrace an agenda that explicitly delineates when, where, and to what extent online speech is a disruption to the educational process. These policies will require increasing clarity regarding the difference between constitutionally protected individual expression and communications that vigorously impede academic learning. This is especially relevant regarding situations where perpetrators of hate speech cannot be identified on anonymous social media.

The findings from this research suggest that racialized aggressions on social media are rooted in the perpetuation of structures of racism and the protection of whiteness that infiltrate both the social and academic makeup of higher education. The implications for higher education are clear; scholars and administrators are called upon to address the origins of these racially hostile online behaviors and a WIP that are embedded within all aspects of campus life in ways that destabilize endemic racism's establishment within educational structures.

### **Future Areas of Study**

The fast pace that social media and mobile apps continue to evolve on college campuses necessitates a proactive and progressive research agenda examining these technologies. Suggested areas of scholarly interest that researchers are encouraged to examine include: investigation of the evolving nature of anonymity on current and emerging social media, examinations of how other racially minoritized students encounter and navigate the experience of encountering online racialized aggressions, and inquiries that examine how evolving political climates shape online behaviors in higher education.

### **The Evolving Nature of Online Identity**

Researchers and scholars have formally identified an online sense of unidentifiability (Lapidot-Leffler & Barak, 2011), and online disinhibition (Joinson, 2007; Suler, 2004) as enablers for racialized aggressions to manifest and be perpetuated on social media. Previous Studies (Black et al., 2016; Gin et al., 2017) and the findings from this dissertation confirm anonymous social media promotes racialized hostility. These previous scholars have cited the inability to identify perpetrators of racialized hostility as

a cause of racism's proliferation on social media, but anecdotal challenges to these assertions have rapidly emerged within recent incidents of racialized aggressions on college campuses.

Since data collection ended for this dissertation study (a time period of 5 months from the writing of this chapter), the popularity of Yik Yak has substantially declined (Dewey, 2016), and this anonymous platform has been deemed by as an antiquated mobile app among young adults (Kircher, 2016). Coinciding with Yik Yak's downfall among college-aged students, racialized aggressions have become more prominent on user identified social media such as Snapchat.

Recent examples of racialized aggressions on Snapchat that have caused controversies across college campuses include posts of a White student in Blackface at Quinnipiac University claiming "Black lives matter" (Rummuni, 2016), a student who posted racial slurs toward Black students at Kansas State University (Svrluga, 2016), a racially charged message that threatened violence via a "bullet to the head" for Black NFL football players posted by a student at Belmont University (Staff Report, 2016), and multiple anti-Black references expressed by White students at the University of North Dakota (Hawkins, 2016). This recent trend of inflammatory behaviors on Snapchat seemingly runs counter to the findings from this current study that suggest racialized aggressions are most prominent on anonymous social media, but scholarship has yet to fully critique how anonymity is valued by today's college students. Additionally, research has not yet considered the influence of how individuals may be recently emboldened by President-elect Donald Trump's use of inflammatory language and

xenophobic agenda to dispense racialized aggressions without the protection of anonymity.

Anonymity is often understood by scholars and administrators as the absolute absence of identification (e.g. Yik Yak), but this definition is being challenged by the online locations where emerging racialized aggressions are being documented within higher education. Recent evidence of racialized aggressions on college campuses suggests racialized hostility is not exclusively confined to what are traditionally understood to be anonymous social media.

Current incidents on Snapchat may be explained by a hypothesis that students perceive a sense of protection when they post racialized aggressions on this social media due to the belief the disappearing nature of their messages, and closely curated network of peers are inherent safeguards (a characteristic formally associated with complete anonymity) from being held accountable for expressing offensive communications. Because little is known about these student behaviors on social media, future research is warranted regarding this phenomenon on various social media platforms.

### **Evolving Political Climates**

The recent election, of President Donald Trump, who regularly expresses inflammatory sentiments towards non-White, women, Muslim, and GLBT communities, and the contentious racial climate that followed his political victory is a historical benchmark that has opened up an area of future research, especially as it relates to online racialized aggressions. The employment of antagonistic language, appointment of cabinet members endorsed by White supremacists, and policy proposals from the President-elect that are aimed at curtailing the rights for GLBT, undocumented individuals, and Muslims

has been correlated with the documentation of over 400 hate crimes (40% of which have been documented occurring at schools and colleges) within the span of six days following the 2016 election both in face-to-face and social media settings (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016).

Anecdotal evidence exists to support the correlation of racialized aggressions on college campuses coinciding with Trump's Presidential victory, including the defacing of a door to a Muslim prayer door at New York University posted on Facebook (Landsbaum, 2016), students at Illinois College in Blackface in front of a Confederate flag posted on Snapchat (Kenney, 2016), women at Wellesley College being harassed with a Donald Trump flag (Anderson, Element, & Annear, 2016), and physical hate crimes against Muslim students occurring at San Jose State University and San Diego State University (Dickerson & Saul, 2016). The brazen expression and sudden rise of recurring racialized aggressions (both face-to-face and on social media) on college campuses are relevant to higher education for a multitude of reasons, including but not limited to: concerns for student safety, the increase of emotional distress among students, and the active threatening of community values through actions and policy that violate democratic principles.

Given these threats and other violent incidents have occurred online and face-to-face toward minoritized populations in response to the Presidential election's outcome, scholars are encouraged to advance a research agenda that aims to uncover how the current shifting political landscape shapes the expression and dispensing of racialized aggressions both in person and online. Particularly, an impending research question may be examined that asks how the vitriolic and author identified bigoted discourse of Donald

Trump's sentiments toward non-White communities has given license to the non-anonymous expression of social media on college campuses? Online racism may no longer need the cloak of anonymity if it is politically privileged and White-owned, as exemplified by the actions of the President-elect.

### **Student Experiences**

This current study honed in on the experience of Asian Americans at a single predominately White institution, but the nature of the racialized aggressions cited by students in this study indicate that further attention should be paid to the experiences of other racially minoritized groups. For example, the anti-Black sentiments (e.g. describing Black students as “apes”) that were described on social media within this study merit a future inquiry to examine how these online racialized aggressions affect the experiences of Black students on college campuses, but especially at predominantly White institutions where racialized aggressions are likely to proliferate (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

The manifestation of race related stress from encountering online racialized aggressions also deserves attention as it relates to the experiences of other non-White groups. Future research should explore how encounters with racialized aggressions on social media contribute to experiences of psychological and emotional harm for students of color on college campuses, especially given the blatantly offensive online sentiments regarding #BlackLivesMatter that have appeared on social media (including this study). Future areas of research include examinations of the relationship between racialized aggressions on social media and sense of belonging for Black, Latino/a, and Indigenous

students, and an inquiry examining how encounters with racialized aggressions on social media affect cross-cultural relationships on college campuses.

Additionally, future studies regarding the encounter of online hostility should also disaggregate the ethnic identities of students who fall under the Asian American umbrella and study those sub-populations separately. Such recommendation is in alignment with scholarship that states the internal diversity of the Asian American population is so rich that it necessitates research that uncovers the divergent experiences that exist within particular ethnic populations (Museus, 2009).

Follow up studies should also investigate the dynamic of mobile online dating apps as it relates to sexual objectification and racialization of individual identities through intersectional frameworks of oppression. Statistics from the Pew Research Center indicate that mobile dating apps are becoming increasingly popular among college aged individuals (Smith & Anderson, 2016), and such trends necessitate institutional knowledge regarding the potential impacts that may emerge from this popularity. Although sexualized and gendered assaults were not the focus of this dissertation, the finding from this study regarding unwelcoming communications on Tinder and Facebook are evidence that concerning issues regarding gender on social media are worthy of administrative/scholarly attention.

Given that colleges and universities have come under increased scrutiny from the federal government to operate under compliance of Title IX standards, future research should emphasize how the dynamics of sexualized communications from online dating may make students susceptible to stress/trauma, and if/how this online culture threatens the development of healthy dating relationships. Based on the findings from this

dissertation study, researchers may also want to explore how social identities are racialized on dating platforms, and how these online interactions contribute to, and shape campus culture as it relates to issues such as affirmative consent and sexual assault.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this dissertation contribute to the growing literature of social media on college campuses by describing the impact of racialized aggressions on sense of belonging for Asian Americans. The hybrid face-to-face and online nature by which today's campus culture is shaped necessitates scholarship and institutional action that aims to not just remediate the effects of racialized aggressions on social media, but aspires to ultimately eliminate the presence of racism. This commitment to eliminate racism both in person and online can lead to collective liberation and belonging on college campuses and can advance justice in ways that resonate the possibilities of higher education as a democratic lever of equity.

The intersection of racism and social media on today's college campuses is undoubtedly influencing and shaping the landscape of higher education. Today, more so than ever before, administrators and scholars need to develop a thorough comprehension of the impact that racialized aggressions on social media have within higher education and intervene those hostilities. While additional research and action are necessary to completely disrupt the reproduction of racism online, future scholarship and practice can advance more positive student experiences by continuing to recognize and address the problematic presence of racialized aggressions on social media. Such actions are necessary to foster healthy learning communities and to promote sense of belonging for all students in the campus cultures of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.



## **APPENDIX A. PRE-INTEREST SURVEY**

### **Social Media and Asian American Student Campus Experiences Pre-Interview Interest Survey**

Hello,

You have indicated you would like to participate in a research study to investigate the relationship between social media and Asian American student campus experiences. This study is interested in documenting your use of social media, your student experience on campus, and the ways social media may affect your campus experiences. The study will include an individual interview, a private observation of your preferred social media platform(s), and a focus group with selected peers who are eligible and selected for participation.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose to end your participation at any point in time. Your identity and all statements made in an interview will also be kept confidential. If you are selected and agree to participate in this study, you will be compensated with a \$30 gift certificate (\$15 after an interview, \$15 after a focus group) to the campus bookstore or a local eatery at the completion of the study.

In order to determine your eligibility, please complete the below questionnaire that should take 5 minutes to complete. Your responses are confidential, and all identifying information will be removed from to ensure your privacy after your eligibility to participate in this study has been determined. If you qualify for this study, you will be contacted at the email you list in the survey.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Kevin Gin at [gink@bc.edu](mailto:gink@bc.edu).

Sincerely,  
Kevin Gin

**Accompanying questionnaire is included on the following page**

Questionnaire will be administered online

1. Your Full Name
2. Your email address where you prefer to be contacted
3. What is your gender?
4. What is your age?
5. How would you describe your religious affiliation (i.e. Catholic, Buddhist, atheist, no affiliation)?
6. Do you identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans\*, or queer? Please indicate all that apply.
7. How would you describe your racial identity?
8. How would you describe your ethnicity?
9. Are you an international student?
10. Where do you identify as your hometown?
11. Are you a first generation college student (i.e. the first in your family to attend college)?
12. What college are you enrolled in (i.e. Arts & Sciences, Carroll School, etc.)?
13. What is your major, or intended major?
14. What is your class standing (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> year, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, etc.)?
15. Do you live on campus in a residence hall, or off campus? What residence hall?
16. Are you involved with any clubs or organizations on campus? If yes, please list.
17. List the social media you most often use. If you don't use social media, please write "N/A":
18. How many hours each day do you estimate you use social media?

## **APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**



### **BOSTON COLLEGE Department of Education Leadership and Higher Education**

**Research Study:** Social Media and Asian American Student Campus Experiences

**Researcher Name:** Kevin Gin

#### **Project Consent Form**

##### **What is the Research?**

You have been asked to take part in a research study about the use of social media and the encountering of racial hostility in social media platforms. The purpose of this study is to uncover what racialized aggressions you encounter in your use of social media, and how these encounters affect your student experience.

##### **Why have I been asked to take part?**

You are an undergraduate at a predominantly white institution (Boston College) and identify as an Asian American. We would like you to participate in this study to understand your encounters of racism, prejudice, and bias within both anonymous (i.e. Yik Yak) and identifiable (i.e. Facebook) forms of social media, and how these encounters impact your student experience at this college.

If you agree to participate in this study, we ask that you will:

- Participate in an interview no longer than 60 minutes with the researcher of this project about your student experience, your social media use, and your encounters of online racial hostility. The interview will take place and be audio recorded between February-March, 2016.
- Participate in a 1:1 observation lasting no longer than 45 minutes immediately following your individual interview. The researcher will sit with you individually and document what racialized aggressions you may encounter and your reactions to those encounters in the real-time usage of your preferred social media platforms. You will be asked to screenshot evidence of online racism and email them to the researcher. No personal identifying information or activities about anyone within your networks will be disclosed.
- Participate in a focus group lasting no more than 1 hour in the month of April or May 2016. The focus group will ask you to collectively validate or dispute the initial findings identified by the researcher. You will also be asked to collectively identify and analyze examples of common racialized aggressions that exist in

social media as a group. The focus group will be audio recorded.

### **Voluntary Participation**

- Participation in this project is voluntary-you do not have to take part if you do not want to.
- If you do not take part, it will have no effect on your student record.
- If any aspect of the study makes you feel uncomfortable, you do not have to participate in the study.
- You may leave the study at any time for any reason.
- You may skip any questions you do not want to answer at any time, for any reason.
- You may ask to turn off the audio recording of this interview at any time, for any reason.
- The PI can withdraw a participant if there is a failure to comply with the study requirements.

### **Risks**

- This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.
- There may be possible psychological risk when discussing encounters of racialized aggressions if a student is recalling a traumatic experience they faced in social media.
- If a participant becomes upset, or uncomfortable during this study, the participant will be given the option to end their participation at any time. Additionally, a list of campus resources will be provided to the participant for him/her to utilize. These resources include, but are not limited to University Counseling Services, the Dean of Students Office, and Boston College Police.
- Anonymity cannot be guaranteed during the focus group portion of this study, but every attempt will be made to maintain confidentiality of individual's responses.

### **Benefits**

- Participants will have a chance to reflect on their experiences with racism and discrimination in social media settings in individual and group settings. This information may be helpful for the facilitation of interventions that can better support populations facing these difficulties on campus.
- The results of this research may be presented at meetings or in published articles.

### **Privacy**

- Your privacy will be protected.
- Your name will not be used in any report that is published. Any reference to your identity will be through a pseudonym.
- The study components will be kept strictly confidential.
- All research data will be stored in a locked file cabinet, and the audio recording of your interview will be erased after the data has been analyzed.
- If a BC researcher finds out during the talk that that child abuse or neglect is

- suspected, the BC researcher is required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to state officials as required by Massachusetts State law.
- We will make every effort to keep your research records confidential, but it cannot be assured.
  - The Boston College IRB or Federal Agencies overseeing human subject research may look at records that identify you and the consent form signed by you.
  - If the tape recorder is used, it will only be used to remind researchers what was said during the interview.
  - The facilitators of all components of the project, including graduate students, have been trained in CITI human subjects' certification.

### **Payment**

- You will receive a \$30 certificate (\$15 after an interview, \$15 after a focus group) to the campus bookstore or local eatery at the completion of the study.

### **Costs**

- There is no associated cost for you to take part in this study, other than the time that has been stated in the outline of this project. You will not be required to contribute any monetary funds, or other costs that have not been described in this consent form.

### **Audiotape Permission**

- I have been told that the interviews/focus groups/observation will be tape recorded only if I agree.
- I have been told that I can state that I don't want the discussion to be taped and it will not be. I can ask that the tape be turned off at any time.

I agree to be audio taped \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

### **Questions**

I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I wish regarding this evaluation. If I have any additional questions about the evaluation, I may call Kevin Gin at 510-517-9468.

If I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Boston College Office for Research Protections at (617) 552-4778 or [irb@bc.edu](mailto:irb@bc.edu), and I will receive a copy of the consent form.

I have received a copy of this form \_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No

*Please print your name below and check yes or no if you want/do not to participate in this study. Please sign your name at the bottom.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
NAME

- ☐ Yes, I would like to take part in this study.  
☐ No, I would not like to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

## APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Social Media and Asian American Student Campus Experiences Individual Interview Protocol

#### Objective:

- To document Asian American students' patterns of social media use.
- To gain student perspectives regarding their student experiences at a PWI.
- To classify the racial climate on social media platforms used by students.
- To identify racialized aggressions students may encounter in their use of social media, where they may occur, and how/if they respond to these messages.
- To uncover if/how online racialized encounters impact students' sense of belonging (i.e. feeling welcomed, valued, like they can contribute to the campus community).
- To solicit student feedback re: how the campus climate can be further advanced to promote positive student experiences for Asian Americans at a PWI.

#### Individual Interview Instructions

- All individual interviews should be booked for an hour, with the goal of at least 45 minutes being spent on the interviews. If the student has previously agreed, a 30-minute observation of the student's social media use will follow the interview.
- Throughout the interview process, and after the process has been completed, write down any notes/impressions that will be helpful in data analysis.
- Once the interview has been saved, convert the audio file to an MP4 file. Rename the file with the date of the interview and the researcher's name [e.g. 11-08-15-Kevin]. If multiple interviews are conducted on the same day, add the number of the interview after the name [e.g. 11-08-15-Kevin1, 11-08-15-Kevin2, etc.].

#### INTERVIEW AGENDA

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- Welcome Introductions
- Review agenda and purpose of interview
- Remind student of the consent form they signed as a condition to this study and say:
  - **"This interview is voluntary—you do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you find any questions uncomfortable, it's OK not to answer them. You can leave the interview at any time. Your privacy has been and will continue to be protected. We will not use your real name in any report or published research. The interview is kept confidential."**
- Identify use of recorder
- Interview Questions
- Wrap up
- Observation of social media platforms (if applicable)

## **INTRODUCTIONS**

1. To start out, I would like to know a little bit about you:
  - a. Can you tell me about your class year? Major/intended major? Academic interests? Hometown?

## **RACIAL IDENTITY**

1. You indicated on your form that you identify as an Asian American. How would you describe the experience of being an Asian American student on this campus?
2. What do you think most students on campus think the Asian American experience is like on campus? How do you think Asian Americans are perceived on campus?
3. How does your personal experience align or contradict the perception of the Asian American experience by the campus community?

## **SOCIAL MEDIA USE**

1. Since this a study about social media, I'd like to talk a bit about your use of social media. Can you tell me what social media you are a part of (i.e. specific sites, platforms, etc.)?
  - a. What are your favorite social media?
    - i. How do you access social media (phone, computer, tablet)?
  - b. How often do you use social media?
  - c. Why do you use social media?
2. Can you tell me what social media you do not use (i.e. specific sites, platforms, etc.)?
  - a. Why do you not use these sites/platforms?

## **RACIAL CLIMATE ON SOCIAL MEDIA**

I'd like to build off the topic of social media a bit more. In the past year, there has been more attention paid to offensive racial material being posted online on college campuses. I'd be interested in hearing some of your thoughts about these controversies, and if you have ever encountered or seen anything that is similar to those messages. (NOTE: if students claim they do not encounter or know of anything offensive on social media, frame the questions below if they are able to identify a friend/peer who has been the target of offenses.)

1. Have you ever seen or experienced anything on social media that you think is racially offensive, or has made you upset?
  - a. If yes, can you describe what those social media posts look like and why they were bothersome to you?
  - b. If no, have you seen or heard of any friends or peers who have encountered these type of posts?



2. Where do you typically see or experience offensive posts?
  - a. Is there a specific social media platform you encounter these posts/messages more often than others (i.e. yik yak, snapchat, instagram, facebook, etc.)?
    - i. Why do you think you see these posts more on one platform than another?
  - b. How often do you think you encounter these racially themed posts/messages on social media (i.e. daily, multiple times a day, weekly, don't really notice, etc.)?
3. Can you tell me who typically posts these racially themed messages? Friends? Classmates? Strangers?
  - a. Are they White students? Other Asian students? Other students of color?
    - i. Does it make a difference to you who is posting these racially themed messages?
  - b. Can you give an example of a recent post or statement you found to be offensive?
4. What is your reaction when you come across or experience an offensive or insensitive post on social media?
  - a. Do you spend any time thinking about these messages?
    - i. If so, how much time do you spend thinking about them? What do you think about? If no, why not?
  - b. How do you feel when you encounter these messages/posts?
  - c. Do you ever respond to these messages?
    - i. If so, how do you respond?
    - ii. Why do you decide to respond?
    - iii. How long does it take you to respond?
    - iv. Do you ever unfollow, block, or disconnect someone who posts these messages? Why, or why not?
5. Do you ever encounter any other offensive posts on social media that are not racially related (i.e. gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, class standing, etc.) that bother you?
  - a. Can you describe what you remember about the post/message, and what you found bothersome about the post?
  - b. How are these posts different than posts you encounter about race?

### **SENSE OF BELONGING -> SOCIAL MEDIA**

I'd like to circle back a bit and revisit your campus experience. I'm interested in hearing if you think there is a connection between any experiences you've had on social media and your experience as a student on campus.

1. Do you think what you see on social media is a reflection of the campus climate here at Boston College?
  - a. Do you think this campus environment is a welcoming one for Asian

students based on what you have seen or experienced on social media?  
Why or why not?

- i. Based on social media experiences, do you think campus is a welcoming environment for students of color in general? Why or why not?
2. Considering your experiences on social media, do you feel like your experiences on social media contribute to you feeling like you are part of the campus community?
3. How do you think what you encounter on social media impacts the way you feel like you belong on campus?
  - a. What are examples of ways social media has been helpful in making you feel like you belong on campus (i.e. in academic and social settings)?
  - b. What are examples of ways social media has made you feel like you don't belong on campus?
4. Is the way you interact with peers, friends, or strangers on campus impacted based on the experiences we've talked about today social media?
  - a. Do you feel more or less connected to the student body based off your experiences seeing or encountering racial messages online?

### **CALL TO ACTION**

We've spent time talking about your personal experiences, but I'd also like to understand how you hope to see these experiences being improved, or to hear your thoughts about what you would like to see accomplished on campus to better your student experience on campus.

1. Based on your experiences, do you think there is a problem on campus with offensive material being post on social media?
  - a. If yes, what do you think should be done about the issue?
  - b. If no, if other students are experiencing this problem, what do you think should be done about this issue?
2. How do you think campus can better promote Asian American students feeling like they belong on campus?
  - a. Do you have any suggestions for improving the racial climate, or maintaining the current climate if you don't think there is a problem with anything at the moment?
3. Based on your experiences on campus and social media, what do you hope the campus community understands about being an Asian American student on campus and feeling like you belong to the campus community?
4. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share about social media, your personal experience?

TRANSITION TO AN OBSERVATION OF STUDENT'S SOCIAL MEDIA IF THE PARTICIPANT HAS AGREED TO THIS PORTION OF THE STUDY AND IS STILL WILLING TO HAVE YOU OBSERVE.

## **APPENDIX D. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL**

### **Social Media and Asian American Student Campus Experiences Observation Protocol**

As a means to better understand responses to racialized prejudice in social media, and to document the type and frequency of these messages through digital artifacts, this observation is conducted to supplement the retroactive recall of encountering racialized aggressions as documented in the individual interview.

#### **Objective:**

- To document participant reactions and reflections to encountering incidents of racialized aggressions on their preferred social media platforms in real-time settings.
- To validate the type of racialized aggressions occurring in social media by observing the content feeds of students in conjunction with the participants of this study.
- To create an inventory of digital artifacts documenting online racialized aggressions.

#### **Logistics:**

- Observations will ideally take place immediately following the individual interview of each participant. If an observation cannot take place, the researcher will reschedule the observation with the student at a later date. Observations will last approximately 30-45 minutes and will take place in a private conference room.
- Observations will be audio recorded and saved by the date and number of the observation (i.e. 04.06.16-Kevin1). Recordings will be destroyed upon transcription.

#### **Observation Protocol:**

Prompt students to open their preferred social media platform(s) on either their preferred device. A laptop computer will be available for use if students do not have access to technology during the observation. Guiding questions will be determined based upon the responses re: social media use and encounters of racialized aggressions given during the individual interview (i.e. if a student says he or she regularly uses Facebook and has seen racialized messages, the participant will be asked to browse their personal Facebook feed with the researcher).

Additionally, the researcher may potentially identify what he deems a social media post of interest (i.e. a racialized post not identified by the participant) and ask the student to reflect upon that particular post, as well. Participants will also be asked to take screen shots of racialized aggressions identified in the observation and email those artifacts to the researcher. The observation may span a single social media platform or multiple, depending on what platforms are most used by the participant.

#### **Observation Agenda:**

- Review agenda/consent and purpose of observation
- Recap of initial reflection of what was documented in the individual interview.
- Observation of social media and questions based off immediate reflections from the individual interview.
- Wrap up and thanks

## **APPENDIX E. FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**

### **Social Media and Asian American Student Campus Experiences Focus Group Protocol**

The goal of this study is to understand how Asian American students' sense of belonging are affected by encounters of online racialized aggressions. As a means for triangulation, this focus group and subsequent focus groups are conducted so participants can collectively respond to themes that the researcher identified as emerging from individual interviews and observations of students' social media use.

#### **Objective:**

- To triangulate the findings and themes from individual interviews and observations of encounters with racialized aggressions on social media in a group setting with other participants.
- To validate findings, or to weed out extreme findings proposed by the researcher from an analysis of the data.

#### **Logistics:**

- The researcher will be schedule and facilitate focus group interviews with students who have completed individual interviews and observations (if applicable). Focus groups will be scheduled to include no more than 10 participants per session and reflect a stratified sample of participants in this multiple case study.
- Focus groups will ideally take place during April 2016. Focus groups will last approximately 60 minutes and will take place in a private conference room.
- Focus group interviews will be audio recorded and saved by the date and number of the focus group (i.e. 04.06.16-Focus1). Recordings will be destroyed upon transcription.

#### **Focus Group Protocol:**

Questions and prompts for the protocol will be based off the findings of the individual interviews. There will be no set of questions until completion and initial interpretation of individual interviews and observations has concluded. Students will respond to themes and findings from individual interviews and observations as a means to triangulate findings across multiple phases of this study.

#### **Focus Group Agenda:**

- Welcome
- Review agenda/consent and purpose of focus group
- Identify use of recorder and/or sign consent forms
- Introductions/selection of pseudonyms
- Focus group questions (will be based off findings from individual interviews and observations)
- Wrap up and thanks

## **FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**

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1. How have you all been since we last checked in with each other a month ago?
  - a. Have you noticed anything new on your social media that we didn't get to talk about last time?
  - b. How has the process of screen capturing your social media been?
    - i. Is there anything that surprised you, or anything that you didn't get to send my way?

**I want to summarize the initial findings that I compiled from our interviews, and would like to get your opinions about these the themes I would like to write about. Can you give me your reactions to these findings and other thoughts that may have come into your mind over these past few weeks?**

2. Face-to-face vs. online
  - a. The majority of you talked about [East Oak] being much more racist online than in person. Can you elaborate on where you see those differences? Why do you think online is more racist than your in person experiences?
3. Yik Yak vs. Facebook
  - a. Most of you said that you don't use Yik Yak, but were familiar with the content on Yik Yak. You also said Yik Yak was much more hostile than Facebook. Can you talk more about the differences about why you use or don't use Yik Yak vs. Facebook?
4. Most all of you said that you thought it was White students who were perpetrators of racism on Yik Yak. Can you explain why most of you think White students are responsible for what you see on Yik Yak?
5. Sense of belonging
  - a. Some of you say you feel like you belong less
  - b. Some of you feel like you belong more (is this accurate?)
  - c. Some of you say it has no impact on your belonging
6. Gender differences
  - a. Do you think there are differences between the hostility that women receive online vs. men?

7. Calls to Action:
  - a. I noted that many of you want [East Oak] to take action by recognizing racism is a real issue on campus. Can you speak more about what you hope campus does to recognize this racism online and in person?
8. I want to show you some of the screenshots that you sent me over these past few weeks, and would like to know if you think these are representative of the type of offensive communications you are used to seeing on your social media
  - a. Show participants the screenshots that were sent.
9. Are there themes or findings that I've presented to you today that you disagree with?
10. Are there themes or findings that most resonate with you?
11. Are there themes or findings that you thought I was going to write about that I didn't mention today?

THANK STUDENTS FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY, AND  
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