THOSE ASIAN AMERICAN WOKE KIDS: ASIAN AMERICAN HASHTAG

ACTIVISM, IDENTITY, AND INTERRACIAL SOLIDARITY

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examined the discursive strategies employed by Asian American activists engaged in interracial solidarity activity on Twitter. In light of the recent anti-Asian racism due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the long-standing model minority stereotype, studying Asian American identity and activity is a timely and relevant endeavor. The study contributes to a rich understanding of race relations in the United States beyond the black-white binary and furthers research on Asian American representation and use of social media for activism purposes.

I use theories of racial formation and racial triangulation to make sense of the current racial order. I also conceptualize Twitter as a space conducive for the creation and maintenance of counterpublics through its affordances and build upon scholarly work on racial biases and representations online. I use critical discourse studies, discourse tracing, and guided interviews to answer the research question, how do Asian Americans express solidarity with other people of color online? I select three hashtags for analysis: #Asians4BlackLives, #JusticeForAkaiGurley, and #NotYourWedge. I also conducted interviews with seventeen respondents who participated in at least one of the hashtags above.

I found in my analysis that Asian American activists employ several discursive strategies that redefine Asian American identity and position in the racial order. Because I theorize race as context specified and mutually constitutive, I found that in expressing interracial solidarity Asian American activists must interrogate their own racializations

and challenge a racial order in which Asian Americans as a group are used to uphold white supremacy. They do this by creating alternative racial projects and use their racial identities as a mechanism or technology to accomplish their goals. However, challenging the racial order involves provisional and liminal redefinitions of identity and position. I also problematize the educational and class barriers to Asian American activism within the context of the model minority stereotype and techno-Orientalist perspectives.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Race and ethnicity have been major factors in the history of the United States. From slavery to Jim Crow laws to the civil rights movement, race has shaped American economy, its identity, its laws, and its foreign policy. These examples of racism and racial progress, however, belie the more complex picture of race and ethnic relations in the United States. Discourse about race in a black-white binary leaves no room to discuss discrimination against ethnically Chinese laborers and Japanese American citizens during World War II, and the symbolic annihilation of Latinx characters in popular entertainment media, for example. In addition, interracial conflict and coalition building among minority groups is also omitted, such as when black residents and Korean shop owners clashed in both Brooklyn and Los Angeles in the early 1990s, or when Japanese and Mexican laborers united to strike against sugar beet growers at the turn of the twentieth century. Thinking about race relations in terms of black and white flattens a multidimensional understanding of how racial groups are formed in the United States through interactions with one another.

This multidimensional understanding of race in the United States gives insight into how racism is perpetuated through racialization of groups (Omi & Winant, 2015; Kim, 1999, 2000). Racial formation in this mutually constitutive way ultimately perpetuates a racial order which reinforces a system which privileges whiteness at the expense of racial minorities. Racial orders define the racial status of groups in relation to

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one another (Kim, 2000). Asian Americans are used to uphold the current racial order, particularly through use of the model minority stereotype over the past half a century. However, in light of the recent COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic Asian American racialization has evolved to include the yellow peril stereotype, an historic stereotype which portrayed Asians as a threat to the American way of life (Okihiro, 1994). Asian Americans may contend with being racialized as model minorities on the one hand and the yellow peril on the other. Although as of this writing it is difficult to predict the extent to which the yellow peril racialization will persist, there are indications anti-Asian racism may be on the rise. The Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council (A3PCON), for example, has been tracking anti-Asian racism in real time since the spread of COVID-19 and has reported 1500 cases of harassment, shunning, and physical assault in a one-month period (Asian Pacific Policy, n.d.).

Since its popularization in the 1990s the Internet has pervaded nearly all aspects of American life, with 89% of adults reportedly using the Internet in 2018 (Pew Research Center, 2018b), and 69% of adults reporting use of some type of social media in 2017 (Pew Research Center, 2018a). Social media are an important way Americans are using the Internet to engage with social and political issues. Half of Americans have engaged in some form of political or social activity on social media in the past year, and 67% say social media are somewhat or very important in sustaining movements for social change (Anderson, Toor, Rainie, & Smith, 2018). Social media and the Internet are woven into our daily lives, and as such it is important to examine how different demographics are using the Internet. More specifically, social media are sites where

groups can challenge dominant conceptions of race which privilege whiteness by upholding the racial order (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015; 2016; Kuo, 2018a).

A subset of Asian American activists engages in discursive activities on social media which challenge the racial order. They take advantage of the features of social media which allow for the creation and maintenance of counterpublics (Fraser, 1992; Squires, 2002). Squires (2002) defines counterpublics by the public communication marginal groups engage in with the dominant groups to "argue against dominant conceptions of the group and to describe group interest" (p. 460). She also states that counterpublics may seek out solidarity with other marginal groups. They are distinct from enclaves – which utilize space and discourse which is hidden from the dominant public – and satellite publics – which are publics separated from other publics. Asian American activists seek out solidarity on Twitter through discourse which is mostly public and indexable through the use of hashtags to campaign for interracial solidarity and thereby challenge their own racialization.

As Asian American activists challenge race representations they can help fellow activists, scholars, community organizers, and others concerned with race representation gain insight into the naturalized racial order and the strategies they employ to critique that order. Although other scholars have studied the use of social media for activism purposes around issues such as race and gender (Brock, 2012, 2016; Florini, 2014; Lavan, 2015; Kido Lopez, 2016; Kuo 2017, 2018a), few appear to center interracial solidarity building (Kuo 2018b). Because race is mutually constitutive (Omi & Winant, 2015), Asian American racialization is tied to the racialization of other groups in the

United States, particularly other communities of color. As such, it is important to study

the intersection of Asian identities with the identities of other communities of color, and

the work that Asian American activists do at the crossroads of these identities. In short,

racism exists on a structural level in the current racial order, and examining how Asian

American activists challenge the racial order through their interracial solidarity discourse

helps in understanding Asian American racialization, the Asian American racial group's

place in the racial order, and how Asian American activists use social media as a

counterpublic to facilitate their challenge of the racial order.

The current dissertation seeks to understand the place of Asian Americans in this

racial order, and examines how Asian Americans may challenge this racial order through

offering alternative discourses to dominant conceptions of Asian Americans (i.e., the

model minority) by engaging in social media activism, specifically around interracial

support and coalition building. Therefore, the first research question I aim to answer is

RQ1: How do Asian Americans express solidarity with other people of color
online?

Because 'online' is a broad concept, I chose to focus on the activities on Twitter and

selected three hashtags to examine. I chose to examine hashtags because many activists

use hashtags to amplify their messages. I've developed a clarifying question on the *how*

RQ2: What discursive practices do Asian Americans employ in hashtag activism on Twitter around interracial coalition building?

In engaging in hashtag activism to challenge dominant conceptions of Asian American racial identity as model minorities, Asian American activists may eschew the model minority identity in favor of an alternative identity. Because racial formation is mutually constitutive with other racial groups, the identity formation of Asian Americans is directly related to other people of color. Furthermore, online activity and identifications have been shown to be congruous with so called offline identities even in pre-Web 2.0 spaces (Gatson, 2011). As such the activities users engage with online may be assumed to be reflective of and constitutive of authentic identities. Therefore, another question that I seek to answer deals with Asian American identity. Who are we? How do we understand our place in the United States, and how do we interact with other racial groups? The second research question is

RQ3: How do Asian Americans construct their identities through the discursive practices in hashtag activism around interracial coalition building?

In order to answer these questions, I use Omi & Winant's theory of racial formation and their concept of racial projects as the building blocks of racial formation. Their theory assumes race is formed within sociohistorical contexts and therefore subject to change. I also use Kim's (1999; 2000) theories of racial triangulation and racial order

which contextualize race relations to the United States, specifically explaining the two planes on which Asian Americans and African American are marginalized in different ways to uphold a white supremacist racial order. From new media technology studies, I employ technological affordances (Hutchby, 2001) to conceptualize how Twitter's features are conducive for counterpublic discourse. However, I also borrow from the premises of scholars such as Benjamin (2016, 2019) and Brock (2012, 2016) who theorize that although platform like Twitter may have certain affordances race-neutral technological platforms veil embedded white biases. These white biases are pervasive beyond the use and design of new media platforms. Scholar have theorized that Asians have been perceived historically through the lens of Orientalism, a view that positions Asians as objects of domination by the West (Said, 1979). The centering of a Western view of Asia and Asian Americans with the emergence of digital media is described as techno-Orientalism. Techno-Orientalism is the worldview which positions Asians and Asian Americans as Other but who are also hyperconnected to technology (Morley & Robbins, 2002). I contextualize the use of Twitter by Asian American activists within this view of techno-Orientalism. Finally, I use the metaphor of race as technology (Chun, 2013; Coleman, 2009) to explain how race is used by Asian American activists to redefine their identities in liminal and provisional ways. My main argument is interracial solidarity discourse by Asian American activists redefines Asian American group identity and position in the racial order in liminal and provisional ways. They do this by using race as a technology to build alternative racial projects to the ones that perpetuate

dominant racialization of Asian Americans and other communities of color. Through the use of hashtag activism Asian Americans create a counterpublic space on Twitter.

I use critical discourse studies (CDS) as a broad methodological lens and employ discourse tracing as the specific method to examine the discursive strategies that Asian Americans use with hashtags. Because discourse is context specific, I examine discursive activities around three sets of hashtags across time: #Asians4BlackLives, #JusticeforAkaiGurley, and #NotYourWedge. #Asians4BlackLives is a hashtag developed in support of the #BlackLivesMatter movement and began with the Oakland Police Department shutdown by Asian, black, and white activists in November and December of 2014. #JusticeforAkaiGurley was used prominently by Asian American activist organizations to express solidarity with Akai Gurley's family and African American communities. Gurley was a young black man who was shot and killed by rookie police Officer Peter Liang in November of 2014. Finally, #NotYourWedge was used as a pro-affirmative action response by Asian Americans to the high-profile lawsuit brought against Harvard University by the Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA), and was prominently used between 2017 and 2019. These hashtags were selected because they contain concentrated discursive activity around racial positioning and coalition building by influential Asian American activists, scholars, and organizations.

In addition to analyzing discourse, I also conducted interviews with seventeen Asian Americans to explore how the act of using these hashtags is a reflection of their identity formation. These Asian Americans were selected because they participated in at least one of the aforementioned hashtags.

This dissertation has five chapters. The current chapter first offers a brief history of Asian American identity formation including the development of a pan-ethnic identity, followed by overviews of representation of Asian Americans in entertainment and news media, and a history of interracial partnership and conflict with other racial and ethnic groups. I then establish the theoretical foundations for the study. I use Omi & Winant's (2015) theory of racial formation and Kim's (1999, 2000) theory of racial triangulation and concept of racial order, which are built upon and in response to Bonilla-Silva's (2000) racial hierarchy. From new media studies I use the theory of technological affordances (Hutchby, 2001), studies on racialized technologies (Benjamin, 2016, 2019; Brock, 2012; 2016), techno-Orientalism (Morley & Robbins, 2002) and race as technology (Coleman, 2009; Chun, 2013).

Chapter two introduces and justifies the use of critical discourse studies (CDS), discourse tracing, and interviewing as methods of inquiry. The model minority stereotype is the naturalized, dominant discourse surrounding Asian Americans. In standing in solidarity with other people of color, Asian Americans must create alternative discursive practices, which may also be reflections of alternative identity formation.

Chapter three is the first of three chapters reporting on the finding of data analysis. It reports on the analysis of the first two hashtags, #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley, which roughly cover the period between December 2014 and July 2016. Chapter four reports on the findings of #NotYourWedge, that covers the time period between August 2017 and March of 2020. These chapters answer RQ2, what

discursive practices do Asian Americans employ in hashtag activism on Twitter around interracial coalition building? Chapter five reports on the findings of the guided interviews with 17 interviewees who participated in at least one of the aforementioned hashtags. This chapter answers RQ3, how do Asian Americans construct their identities through the discursive practices in hashtag activism around interracial coalition building? In the concluding chapter I summarize the findings of the study and offer several limitations of the current study and future directions in research.

In concluding this section I'd like to offer some notes on terminology. First, in this study I use the terms solidarity and coalition building interchangeably. I find Kuo's (2017) conceptualization of solidarity useful. She understands solidarity as between communities who are marginalized. Solidarity statements are "a recognition of mutual interlocking oppression" (p. 183). In her work on intersectional Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) movements she writes that Black liberation and AAPI liberation are bound together. Solidarity is achieved when marginalized communities are bound together to work toward liberation. Coalition building, while having a stronger connotation of sustained, organizational partnerships between communities, is used interchangeably with solidarity here because my study does not make a distinction between Twitter discourse as activist work in itself versus Twitter discourse as reference to broader activist movements or events. In other words, my focus is on the discourse and less on the other crucial work done by activists, freedom fighters, and community organizers. To assume Asian American activists engage in solidarity discourse is to

assume identification as marginalized in some way, a theme which much of the discourse will reflect.

However, there are instances in which Asian American activists use sympathy language in their discourse. I understand this language to be discourse of allyship in contrast to solidarity or coalition building. Allyship connotes different positions and levels of privilege of parties involved. Asian Americans may be afforded privileges other communities of color may not be and therefore may use allyship language in discourse. Social justice organizer and poet Tawana Petty (2017) wrote of the need to move beyond language of allyship to co-liberation because allyship language focuses on white privilege. But white people are also dehumanized by a white supremacist system, hence Petty's call for co-liberation.

Secondly, I offer an explanation of my use of racial terminology. I use the term Asian American in this study. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the term Asian American, as cited in the Pew Research Center (2013) report, is used to refer to "persons having origins in any of the original peoples in the Far East, Southeast Asia or the Indian subcontinent" (2013, p. 22). Academics and others have recently used more expansive terms to include Pacific Islanders in the racial group: Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) or Asian Pacific Islander Americans (APIAs). In addition, the term Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA) is also used in spaces to intentionally highlight South Asian identities. The changes in terminology demonstrate the socially and politically constructed nature of racial identity. Another example of the socially constructed nature of race is the Asian American Journalist Association (AAJA)

categorizing those of Middle East descent as Asian American, while the U.S. Census Bureau categorizes them as white Americans (Wu & Izard, 2008).

I'm using the term Asian American because the majority of current literature (from the 1980s to the present day) and institutions (including the Association for Asian American Studies, the Pew Research Center, and U.S. Census Bureau) use the term Asian Americans as an historical group. The U.S. Census Bureau, as of this writing, specifically lists 'Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander' as a race separate from 'Asian.' Because this is a critical study it would be naïve of me to assume the decisions of institutions are accurate and in the best interest of groups involved. Are Pacific Islanders automatically grandfathered in as model minorities because of a new, more inclusive racial category? Is it accurate to use APIA or AAPI if I am studying Asian Americans only? Will we lose ethnic specific history markers should the experiences of Chinese Americans be consolidated with those of Native Hawaiians? These questions are ongoing and reflected in the data I collected and analyzed. In both interviews and on Twitter participants use Asian American and AAPI while also problematizing these terms. Because of this I use the term Asian American with the understanding that the term is limited and, in my findings, highlight where participants chose to problematize this label in favor of alternative identities. As racial categories and identities are political and in flux, these categorizations are bound to change.

In this study I primarily use African American to describe those of African descent living in the United States. This term is used interchangeably with black on several occasions. It should be noted that there are African-Americans who are recent

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immigrants who may primarily identify ethnically, such as Nigerian Americans, in contrast to African Americans who have lived in the United States for several generations. This distinction ought to be made where politically and socially necessary, though the studies cited in the dissertation do not make that distinction when using the terms African American or black, and therefore the distinction is not made in the dissertation.

Finally, though Latino/a Americans and Hispanic Americans are not categorized as a separate race by U.S. Census category, scholarship makes a distinction between white Americans and Latino/a and Hispanic Americans for political and social purposes. For example, the Pew Research Center uses white, black, Hispanic, and Asian as racial categories, and historically these groups have been categorized as separate from white Americans of European heritage. To that end, the study refers to this racial group as distinct.

Asian American identity formation

In this section I highlight several prominent Asian stereotypes, the development of the panethnic Asian American identity, and the marginal representation of Asian Americans in both entertainment and news media.

Prominent stereotypes and their development

Asian Americans are defined as persons "having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia or the Indian subcontinent" (Pew Research

Center, 2013, p. 22). In this section I focus on three prominent stereotypes of Asian Americans: the yellow peril, model minority, and perpetual foreigner.

Asians first immigrated to the United States in the mid-1800s when the gold rush attracted a considerable Chinese labor population who worked to mine gold and to build the railroad system. Cheap labor, coupled with the 'nativist' movement at the time produced animosity, not just towards Chinese immigrants but the Irish and Germans as well (Daniels, 1988). Animosity toward the Chinese resulted in increased violence and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which suspended the lawful entry of Chinese laborers into the United States. Chinese laborers in the late 19th century were seen as a threat to white laborers, and as such were deemed a yellow peril (Pew Research Center, 2013).

The yellow peril stereotype extended to next century when Japanese and Filipino sugar plantation workers in Hawaii struck for fair pay. The strike was seen not solely as a domestic labor issue. Okihiro (1994) quotes a federal commission's investigation of the strike "'to curtail the domination of the alien Japanese in every phase of the Hawaiian life… that will soon overwhelm the Territory numerically, politically and commercially'" (p. 135). The most famous example of the yellow peril stereotype is when between 110,000 and 120,000 Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps following the Pearl Harbor incident in 1941. The loyalty of these Japanese Americans was in doubt, and their foreignness was highlighted as a reason to take this precaution (Okihiro, 2001).

The fear of the yellow peril is predicated on the perception that Asian immigrants are more foreign than they are American. The term 'oriental' was used to describe people of Asian descent. Orientalism denigrated Asian as "inferior to and deformations of Europeans" (Okihiro, 1994, p.11). Much like the nativist movement's criticism of Catholics, Japanese Americans were thought to have loyalties to Japan over the United States. In addition, their cultural ties with their home lands made them more foreign than domestic.

One would assume that the succeeding stereotype of the model minority in the 1960s would be a positive break from the negative yellow peril stereotype. The model minority stereotype as applied to Asian Americans is attributed first to sociologist William Petersen in his 1966 *New York Times* article on the success of Japanese Americans. The model minority stereotype paints minority groups as upstanding and high achieving. However, what both of these stereotypes initially had in common were the attribution of foreignness to Asian Americans. Okihiro (1994) asserts that yellow peril and model minority stereotypes both uphold white supremacy in that the images. They "form a circular relationship that moves in either direction… In either swing along the arc, white supremacy is maintained and justified through feminization in one direction and repression in the other" (p. 142).

Petersen's article was limited to lauding Japanese Americans. That same year, however, U.S. News & World Report published an article praising Chinese Americans, a large majority of who "are moving ahead by applying the traditional virtues of hard work, thrift, and morality" (p. 7) without anyone's help.

These observations carried into the 1980s, when Time magazine published an article using the category of Asian American to praise the high achieving members of that group, particularly singling out Chinese, Korean, and Indochinese (a term used to refer to refugee groups particularly from Vietnam and Cambodia) students (Brand, 1987). Since then, demographic data on Asian Americans has established that they are highly educated and are the only minority group with a higher median income than white Americans, reinforcing the model minority stereotype.

By lauding the achievements of Asian Americans despite past discriminations, however, media reports like the Petersen and Brand articles belie the civil rights issues Asian Americans faced going into the 21st century. What these news articles fail to emphasize is the complex picture of Asian American achievement.

Government reports and academic journal articles took on the task to paint a more nuanced picture. For example, studies found that investment in success paid off less for Asian Americans than it did for majority Americans (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1980; Hurh & Kim, 1989). Furthermore, Chun (1980) writes of how the model minority myth lacked the nuance. "Had one incorporated additional controls such as occupational type, tenure, upward mobility, and the number of wage earners, the glitter of success that many reported in the 1960's would have disappeared even more rapidly" (p. 6). Other factors explained the comparable median income between Asian and white families, including high cost of living in the metropolitan areas where Asian Americans predominantly reside, and the higher percentage of Asian family income coming from someone other than the husband (Chun & Zalokar, 1992).

The picture of Asian Americans remains complex when parsed out. The Pew Research Center's (2013; 2017) findings are consistent with reports from the 1980s and 1990s: average figures belie the complexities of Asian American experiences, including the wide range in median income when disaggregated by race, higher number of people per household and corresponding income earners, and lower rate of home ownership than the average American.

The model minority stereotype may give the impression that Asian Americans are widely accepted and do not encounter discrimination and marginalization. There is little data which track generalized trends in discrimination against Asian Americans. Chou & Feagin (2015) found that respondents will initially deny experiencing white racism, and then refer to such incidents further along in the in-depth interviews. Chou and Feagin refer to white racism specifically as racism perpetrated by whites on both a personal and a systemic level. They use the term 'white racial frame' to describe the totality of racist stereotypes, concepts, images, emotions, and narratives that white Americans employed (p. 5). In another example Ascend, a pan-Asian leadership organization, published a report about the upward mobility of technology workers in the San Francisco area from 2007-2015 and found that "despite being outnumbered by Asian men and women in the entry-level professional workforce, white men and women were twice as likely as Asians to become executives and held almost 3x the number of executive jobs" (Gee & Peck, n.d., p. 3).

External forces may combat marginalization and discrimination against Asian Americans. For example, scholars pointed out South Korea's 'soft power' potential –

defined as influence by attraction rather than coercion – through the influx of the Korean Wave, the export of cultural goods in the form of Korean television dramas, music, food, among others (Nye, 2009; Jang & Paik, 2012). There is some evidence to suggest that the Korean Wave has positive effects on Asian Americans, particularly college aged women who feel socially marginalized by American popular culture (Ju & Lee, 2015), and both Korean transnationals' and non-Korean Americans' affinity to Korean culture (Yook, Yum, & Kim, 2014).

However, the difficult with Asian positionality in the United States is that discrimination may at times be based on physical appearance rather than ethnic identity or culture. More recently, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic anecdotal reports of anti-Asian racism in the United States and across the world have been on the rise. The Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON) has been tracking incidents of anti-Asian racism in the forms of verbal harassment, shunning and physical assault. A3PCON reported on April 23 that since March 19 they have received 1500 incidents of verbal harassment, shunning and physical assaults (Asian Pacific Policy, n.d). Although a plurality of the victims in the report identified as Chinese, other victims identified as Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, Filipino, Asian, among others, demonstrating that racial discrimination ironically does not discriminate based on ethnicity or culture. In the U.S. these attacks are couched within the context of the deliberate use of the pejorative and colloquial 'Chinese virus' by political leaders including President Trump. That Asian Americans are connected in negative ways to China and a virus which ostensibly originated in Wuhan may demonstrate a real time shift in racialization from the model

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minority to yellow peril for certain groups such as East Asian and Southeast Asian Americans. It is also further evidence of Okihiro's (1994) observation that, at the end of the day, Asian Americans are marginalized in favor of white supremacy whether as model minorities or as yellow peril.

The third stereotype, which connects the yellow peril and model minority stereotypes, is of the perpetual foreigner (Ono & Pham, 2009; Wu & Lee, 2009). Although less insidious than the yellow peril stereotype, the implication of the perpetual foreigner stereotype is that they do not belong. Both the yellow peril and the model minority stereotypes are predicated on the assumption that Asians are seen as perpetual foreigners, and therefore any progress or success in the United States is not seen as progress and success for Americans, but for foreign entities. For example, Petersen's article states that Japanese Americans could overcome systemic racism because of "their meaningful links with an alien culture. Pride in their heritage and shame for any reduction in its only partly legendary glory – these were sufficient to carry the group through its travail" (p. 43). It was their unique Japanese-ness that contributed to their success. This perpetual foreignness was also highlighted in 2007 by Timothy Egan for *The New York Times*, in which Asian Americans at the University of California, Berkeley were described as being "linked by common ancestry to countries far across the Pacific" (para 6), and that Berkeley "looks toward the setting sun for its identity"(para 8). The perpetual foreigner stereotypes also persist in education (Lee, 2005; Ng, Lee, and Pak, 2007; Egan, 2007), entertainment (Hamamoto, 1994), and in politics (Wu & Lee, 2009).

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In addition, the question often asked of Asian Americans, "where are you really from?" is discourse that further perpetuates the assumption that an Asian American can't really be an American. Wu (2002) observes that this question naturalizes this stereotype; the person who asks that question is unaware of the already implicit belief which reinforces dominant discourse that Asian Americans are perpetual foreigners.

All of this paints a complex picture of the history of Asian Americans when given a nuanced examination, from yellow peril to model minority to perpetual foreigner, from Chinese immigration postbellum to the Japanese internment, from Oriental to Asian American.

Formation of Asian American as a panethnic group

Asian American as a panethnic, racial category was not something with which ethnic Asians always identified. In fact, historically there have been instances of Asian ethnic groups intentionally creating distance and distinction between themselves and other Asian ethnic groups, as when the Japanese did it at the turn of the 20th century, and when other Asians did it during the Japanese internment during World War II (Espiritu, 1992, pp. 20-24). Some Chinese Americans wore buttons that read "I'm Chinese" and "I Hate Japs Worse than You Do" (Daniels, 1988, p. 205). In the case of Japanese internment, Chinese and Japanese Americans did not identify with one another as fellow Asian Americans as much as they may have sought to draw a distinction. Yet from the outside these groups may have been lumped together, or a person of one ethnicity may have been mistaken for a person of another ethnicity, as was the case in the death of

Vincent Chin, a Chinese-American man beaten to death by white automobile workers in Detroit in 1982 after being mistaken as Japanese.

Daniels (1988) made the observation that Asian American cohesion that exists has "been largely imposed from without by discrimination" (p. 5). Espiritu (1992) similarly traces the development of a panethnic Asian identity to the 1960s by way of externally imposed identities upon a group by a dominant group in what she labels categorization. Tuan (2003) makes a similar observation in testing assimilation theory. Although assimilation theory posits that white ethnics will eventually assimilate to the broader culture with succeeding generations and have a choice in identifying with their ethnic heritage (i.e. Irish, German, French), Tuan observes that

> People of Asian ancestry in this country are relegated to the margins based on race and on what I call an *assumption of foreignness*. That is, they continue to be seen as somehow more Asian (or Chinese or Japanese) than American (p. 18).

Although the Asian American identity may have been significantly shaped externally, a key component of the identity was also formed through internal cohesion. Espiritu traces the origins of Asian American panethnicity to a political need in contrast to a sense of shared culture. "[P]anethnicity is not only imposed from above but also constructed from below as a means of claiming resources inside and outside the community" (1992, p. 14).

Pan-Asian organizations began in California in the late 1960s to consolidate their influence to fight racial injustice and oppression, taking influence from the black power movement (interracial coalition between Asian Americans and African Americans is treated in a later section). In 1968 a conference at the University of California Los Angeles discussed issues of 'yellow power,' identity and the Vietnam War. That same year, the Asian American Political Alliance was founded at the University of California Berkeley. According to Espiritu, the term Asian American was created to include Filipino Americans who identified as brown, and as a term that countered the passive and stereotypical connotations of the term 'Oriental.' Around the same time Asian American studies as a field of study was established. Concurrent with the consolidation of an Asian American identity were political concerns, including anti-Vietnam War movements, New Left movements, and women's rights movements (pp. 42-49).

Similarly, the Asian Americans for Action group (AAA) was established in 1969 as the first pan-Asian organization in New York. The "AAA became guided by a radical ideology opposed to racism, capitalism, and imperialism and focused heavily on opposing the Vietnam War" (Fujino, 2005, p. 237).

Asian stereotypes in entertainment and news media

Stereotypical portrayals of Asian Americans are reinforced through both entertainment and news media. Media institutions reinforce the racial order through perpetuating dominant discourses (Hall, 1990). In entertainment media, Asian Americans are historically underrepresented, portrayed in stereotypical ways, and their

portrayal is determined by domestic and international political interests (Hamamoto, 1994; Mok, 1998; Shah, 2003; Kawai, 2005; "Asian Pacific Americans in Prime Time," 2006; Deo et al 2008; Ono & Pham, 2009; Abramowitz, 2010; Smith, Choueiti, & Pieper, 2014; Davé, 2017; Smith et al, 2018; Hunt et al, 2018). These portrayals mirror the stereotypes of the perpetual foreigner, yellow peril, and model minority throughout Asian American history.

Scholars note that the perpetual foreigner stereotype is prevalent in news media coverage of Asian Americans as well (Egan, 2007; Ono & Pham, 2009; Wu & Lee, 2009). Other stereotypical portrayals include sexual deviance, economic or social threats, and gang-related activities (Mansfield-Richardson, 2000; Oh & Katz, 2009), though a majority of newspaper coverage did not rely on these stereotypes. Significantly, however, the quality of coverage of Asian Americans did not increase with an increase in Asian American population (Oh & Katz, 2009), but rather the number of Asian American journalists employed at news organizations (Wu & Izard, 2008).

Portrayal of Asian Americans in news and entertainment media reinforce the racial order (Kim, 2000; Ono & Pham, 2009). Racialization of groups develop in relation to one another, specifically for the purposes of upholding positions of dominance and subordination. These positions are not binary; Asian Americans are triangulated in relation to white Americans and other minorities of color. The yellow peril, model minority, and perpetual foreigner stereotypes are used to reinforce, at varying times, American (and by proxy, white) interests at the expense of its colored citizens. Hamamoto (1994) makes the observation that portraying Asian Americans as the high

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achieving minority in the face of racism *in the past* allows the United States ability to reinforce its image of an equal society without having to address uncomfortable truths about a structure that privileges white Americans above others. Where convenient, Asian Americans are depicted as model minorities in media because of their role in reinforcing current images of the United States as an equal society, as opposed historically highlighting Asians as foreign economic threats impinging on the United States.

There have been several suggested remedies to the historically marginalizing depictions of Asian Americans in entertainment and news media. One is using media literacy and combating stereotypes with contrasting portrayals (Ramasubramanian, 2007; Wu & Lee ,2009). Another remedy is to bypass traditional media which privilege white patriarchal structures of ownership. Molina-Guzman (2016) offers a case study of a successful streaming television show, *East Los High*, which utilized transmedia content production and features all Latina/Latino production staff, writing staff, and cast, and integrated the show's audience in its subsequent seasons.

Pertinent to the current study is how Asian Americans ourselves attempt to counter stereotypical portrayals which reinforce existing racial dynamics which reinforce white supremacy. As is established later in this chapter, social media can be used to create a space for counter discourses which challenge dominant stereotypical portrayals by traditional media institutions.

Asian American interracial tension and coalition building

The mutually constitutive nature of racial formation means that racial groups are at times at odds with one another, and at other times form coalitions to accomplish a common goal. The following section outlines the history of both interracial tensions and solidarity between Asian Americans and other communities of color.

After World War II, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and its leaders urged Japanese Americans to recognize their minority status in order to secure their civil rights. At the same time, Mexican Americans, also in self-interest, took the opposite approach. Mexican American leaders advocated against the existence of a Mexican race and sought to establish themselves as white, knowing the civil ramifications of being labeled nonwhite (Robinson, 2012).

The impulse of a minority group to become white or to attain the benefits of whiteness highlights an understanding of the racial hierarchy that existed from the Reconstruction era to the civil rights era, and still exists today. Kim (1999) offers an indictment of the Asian American quest for prosperity in this way: "If the Black struggle for advancement has historically rested upon appeals to racial equality, the Asian American struggle has at times rested upon appeals to be considered White (and to be granted the myriad privileges bundled with Whiteness)" (p. 112).

This desire to attain the status and privileges associated with white Americans may explain Asian Americans' attitudes towards whites and other races. Asian Americans tend to be more positive about their relations with white Americans than they are about their relations with Hispanic and African Americans (Pew Research Center,

2013). This may be connected to the model minority stereotype. Although the model minority is the dominant stereotype today, Asian Americans share a history with African American laborers. The arrival of Chinese migrant workers in the United States coincided with the abolishment of slavery. In the south, Chinese laborers, or 'coolies,' were the solution to the need for cheap labor and were used to depress wages for newly emancipated African American workers. As cited in Okihiro (1994), Arkansas Reconstruction Governor Powell Clayton observed, "Undoubtedly the underlying motive for this effort to bring in Chinese laborers was to punish the negro for having abandoned the control of his old master, and to regulate the conditions of his employment and the scale of wages to be paid him" (p. 45).

That certain ethnic groups within the Asian American race achieved high socioeconomic statuses in a short period of time changed the dynamic between races. Yet what has remained consistent is a system that reinforces a racial order in which white Americans are at the top. As established in the prior section, the model minority stereotype was mutually constitutive with perceptions of other minorities' inability or unwillingness to advance in socioeconomic standing. This created a tension between the two groups which ultimately reinforces a system which favors white Americans. This section briefly outlines interracial conflict through two contemporary events between Korean Americans and African Americans, and also highlight historical instances of interracial solidarity between Asian Americans and other people of color.

African American and Korean American conflict

On March 3, 1991, after a high-speed car chase, police officers cornered and severely beat Rodney King. The officers were charged with assault and use of excessive force in subduing King. The trial of the officers took place the following April in the predominantly white area of Ventura, CA, 40 miles from downtown Los Angeles and home to the four defendants. Of the 12 jurors, one was Asian, one Latino, and none were African American (Mydans, 1993; Sastry & Grigsby Bates, 2017). The verdict, which acquitted several white officers of assault by force with a deadly weapon, incited racial riots in the Los Angeles area in 1992, in which over 60 people were killed and numerous businesses were looted and razed.

The optics of the trial appear to pit white American police officers and a white supremacist system against the African American communities. However, Korean Americans were a strong third group present in the series of events. Korean Americans conducted business in largely African American neighborhoods. During the course of the riots, an estimated 2,000 Korean-owned businesses were damaged or destroyed, totaling approximately $400 million in losses (Banks, 2012).

The predominance of Korean owned businesses in African American neighborhoods stoked resentment among African Americans due to perceived prejudice against the very clientele that the Korean businesses were serving. The issue culminated on March 16, 1991, two weeks after King's beating, when a 15-year-old African American teenage girl named Latasha Harlins was shot and killed by the Korean American woman who claimed she thought the girl was stealing from her store.

A year earlier in January of 1990, a Haitian immigrant woman accused a manager at the Red Apple, a Korean American owned grocery store in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn, of assaulting her when she went to the store to buy some goods. The manager claimed the woman refused to pay full price for some produce and threw the produce and spat at a cashier, and insisted physical restraint was the extent of any altercation. The event led to a sixteen-month long boycott of the store, as well as other Korean owned businesses, in the neighborhood by the African American community.

Similar to the Los Angeles race riots, Korean American business owners were not scapegoats or victims of the boycotts, but rather "historical agents actively negotiating the distinct opportunities and constraints presented within the American racial order" (Kim, 2000, p. 11). Kim makes the case that Korean immigrants were able to set up businesses in predominantly African American neighborhoods because the residents of those neighborhoods lacked the capital themselves to take advantage of those economic opportunities. This is an example of racial power at work through racial order. Kim defines racial power "as the systemic tendency of the racial status quo to reproduce itself" (p. 9). Racial order is synonymous with the racial triangulation concept Kim proposed previously (1999), and deals with the ordering of races along the two planes of superior/inferior and insider/foreigner, which correspond to the relative valorization and civic ostracism planes, respectively.

Racial ordering emphasizes that racial formation positions groups in relation to one another, in order to reproduce the racial status quo. Korean American attempts to

succeed were within the existing racial orders which uphold a structure that privileges white Americans in the racial order.

Coalition building

The turn of the 20th century saw the start of Afro-Asian solidarity. Onishi (2017) offers a brief history of this during periods of American conflict internally and internationally with Asian countries. Onishi identifies a shared 'self-determination' that allowed for such solidarity, which started during the Philippine-American war and continued with antagonisms against Japan in the 1920s, World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. "Historically, the unspeakable scale of violence unleashed against Asians in these wars functioned like a flashpoint, bringing into sharp relief the connection between domestic realities of racism and the destructive and violent consequences of imperial aggression" (p. 343). Widener (2008) similarly makes the observation that the Korean War shaped the dominant framing of the military as universal and integrated, and that this framing was challenged to varying degrees by African Americans at home and abroad.

Solidarity between Asian Americans and other people of color occur through physical proximity and self-identification as oppressed. On an individual level, physical proximity with other minorities develops empathy and solidarity. Two examples are instructive: activists Grace Lee Boggs and Yuri Kochiyama. Both women developed their activism through physical proximity with African Americans. Lee Boggs, a Chinese American woman born in 1915 and raised in a largely white area of New York

City, was inspired by her experiences with the African American community in Chicago – culminating in the 1941 March on Washington – to become an activist for the black community (Lee Boggs, 1998).

Yuri Kochiyama, a Japanese American woman born in 1921, was also largely sheltered from racial discrimination in her youth. Her colorblind experience abruptly changed after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Fujino (2005) emphasizes the importance of Kochiyama's move to Harlem in her evolution as an activist. Although Lee Boggs and Kochiyama had differing philosophies concerning African American self determinism – Lee Boggs believed urban cities as the centers of the black struggle, while Kochiyama advocated for a sovereign black nation in the American South – both devoted their lives to activism for African Americans through direct involvement with black communities in Chicago and in New York.

A second component in Asian American solidarity with other people of color occurs when Asian Americans identify themselves as members of an oppressed group. A few examples are instructive. In 1972, when the Concerned Asian Students at the City College of New York staged a three-day takeover of Goethals Hall to protest the lackluster Asian American curriculum, Black and Puerto Rican students joined the takeover (Fujino, 2005). In 1982, the Concerned Japanese Americans (CJA) issued a newsletter after the 1979 Iranian student led seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran precipitated talks of deportation of Iranian Americans. Another instance of Afro-Asian solidarity was Asians for Mumia, a group co-founded by Yuri Kochiyama in 1995 which advocated for justice for Mumia Abu-Jamal, a former member of the Black Panther

Party and journalist convicted of killing a police officer in 1981. He was initially

sentenced to death and has since been sentenced to life imprisonment without parole. As

cited in Fujino (2005), a brochure published in 1999 by Asians for Mumia outlines the

rationale for support of Abu-Jamal:

> As Asians, we are an oppressed community that has endured and resisted the
>
> attempts to dehumanize us throughout US history… Mumia not only speaks for
>
> the Black community, but marginalized and oppressed people around the globe.
>
> The 'voiceless' of the Asian and Pacific Islander community are found in
>
> abundance in sweatshops, restaurants, farms, and factories… To silence Mumia
>
> is to silence our own voices of resistance (pp. 299-300).

Asian Americans identified as an oppressed minority group when standing in solidarity

with other people of color, and vice versa. The instances above are instructive in the

sense that they offer an alternative reading of the Asian American story and identity to

the dominant discourse of the high achieving model minority.

The racial formation of Asian Americans throughout the past century and a half

is political in nature: the yellow peril, model minority, and perpetual foreigner

stereotypes were used in order to uphold the existing racial dynamics; this is reflected in

popular discourse in news media and also entertainment media. Simultaneously, Asian

ethnic groups themselves sought to establish political power through development of a

coherent identity and formal curriculum of study in the 1960s, which involved interracial partnerships amidst a history of tension.

Theoretical foundation: race and technologies

I use theories from race studies and new media studies to establish a foundation for the dissertation. I use Omi & Winant's (2015) racial formation theory and Kim's (1999, 2000) theory of racial triangulation and conceptualization of the racial order. Racial formation theory helps interpret the oscillation of Asian American stereotypes through history. Racial triangulation and the racial order help specifically contextualize Asian American racialization in relation to other communities of color. These interracial dynamics have played out throughout American history and continue to do so on social media. I use the concept of technological affordances (Hutchby, 2001) as a way to establish the specific characteristics of social media which make it conducive for certain activities. However, I expand beyond the limits of technological affordances by drawing on scholarly work on raced technology by scholars such as Benjamin (2016; 2019) and Brock (2012;2016). These scholars establish racial biases within the design of technology. Paired with the concept of techno-Orientalism (Morley & Robbins, 2002), the aforementioned works make sense Asian American racialization online and the work that solidarity minded Asian Americans do in producing a counterpublic through hashtag activism. I finally argue that Asian Americans are using their race as technology (Chun, 20013; Coleman, 2009) to accomplish their goals of challenging a white supremacist system.

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Racial formation theory

Race is a social phenomenon with real consequences. In this study I use Omi and Winant's (2015) understanding of *racial formation*. Racial formation acknowledges that race is socially constructed and historically embedded. "We define racial formation as *the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed*" (p. 109).

These racial identities are built upon phenotypical characteristics (such as skin color, eye shape, etc.) as markers of racial difference. These differences are reified so race becomes an essential characteristic. Reified racial differences, in turn, have real-life ramifications. This is demonstrated in the history of Asian Americans. Indians (from the subcontinent of India), for example, were initially classified as Caucasian by court decisions in the early 1900s in the United States. These decisions were reversed by the Supreme Court in 1923, and Indians were thereby classified as non-white (Pew Research Center, 2013). The result is that Indians were ineligible for citizenship since only whites were allowed to be American citizens.

Racial formation acknowledges that although race is socially constructed, there are very real political justifications for signification, and corresponding political consequences. Racial meanings are not value neutral; racial difference based on phenotypical characteristics is contextual and imbued with political meanings.

Racial formations occur through a collection of what Omi and Winant term racial projects. Racial projects are the "building blocks of the racial formation process" (Omi

& Winant, 2015, p. 13). These projects occur all the time whenever race is signified as a
marker in constructing societal structures:

> *A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or*
> *explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and*
> *distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines.*
> Racial projects connect what race *means* in a particular discursive or ideological
> practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences
> are racially *organized*, based upon that meaning. Racial projects are attempts
> both to shape the ways in which social structures are racially signified and the
> ways that racial meanings are embedded in social structures (p. 125).

An example of racial projects is the ideological work of connecting high achievements
of Asian ethnic groups, now collectively under the racial category of Asian American,
with sociological factors that contrast them to other minority groups and to white
Americans. Regarding the success of Chinese Americans, the 1966 U.S. News & World
Report article, for instance, stated, "What you find, back of this remarkable group of
Americans, is a story of adversity and prejudice that would shock those now
complaining about the hardships endured by today's Negroes" (U.S. News & World
Report, 1966, p. 6).

This racial project would imply that African American should be able to fight
through adversity to achieve success. If Japanese Americans are celebrated as a

successful minority group who, just two decades before, endured incredible discrimination, then surely African Americans, legally emancipated for a century, can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. Japanese Americans (and other Asian Americans) achieved the American Dream, fulfilling the narrative of rags-to-riches. Petersen compared them to the Horatio Alger heroes and claimed, "there is no parallel to this success story" (p. 21).

The formation of Chinese and Japanese Americans (and later Asian Americans) is done vis-à-vis other racial groups, and build upon interpretations of trends such as those highlighted by popular literature from the 1960s onward. The mutually constitutive nature of race leads me to the following questions: what is the specific nature of the relationship between races? What dynamics exist between white and Asian Americans, and Asian Americans and African Americans?

Racial triangulation theory

Often discourse surrounding interracial relations and conflict are binary. To remedy the false dichotomy of black and white, Bonilla-Silva (2010) proposes a triracial hierarchy system to account for a more stratified and complex understanding of race relations in the United States. Within the Latin Americanization of the United States, Bonilla-Silva proposes "that the emerging triracial system will be comprised of 'whites' at the top, an intermediary group of 'honorary whites' – similar to the coloreds in South Africa during formal apartheid, and a nonwhite group or the 'collective black' at the bottom" (p. 179). Under this thesis the case can be made that Asian Americans serve as

the buffer, or 'honorary whites,' between the whites at the top and the blacks at the bottom.

One criticism of this model by Sue (2009) is that each Latin American country has a specific history and way racial hierarchy manifests, and therefore it is important to differentiate between the mechanisms of hierarchy and the outcome itself. Although a sort of hierarchy might exist, the method by which those in power remain in power may look different. Kim (1999) overcomes this limitation by proposing that a racialized United States exists along more than one plane, and that racialization of groups occurs along more than one dimension and are mutually constitutive. Kim introduces the idea of racial triangulation to fill in information regarding the relationship between whites, African Americans, and Asian Americans. Racial triangulation uses multiple points of reference to locate a particular object. These racial positions are along two different planes: the first is the plane of *relative valorization*, in which Asian Americans are valorized over African Americans on cultural and/or racial grounds by whites, and the second is the plane of *civic ostracism*, in which Asian Americans are conceived as foreigners who are ostracized from civic membership in relation to African Americans by whites. Racial triangulation is the concept contextualized to the United States to describe white, Asian, and African Americans in relation to one another. This is a specific model of the racial order which Kim (2000) defines as the racial status of races in relation to one another, sharing Omi & Winant's concept of the mutually constituted nature of race.

Today Asian Americans are valorized as being superior to African Americans as evidenced by their high socioeconomic achievement. By contrast, Asian Americans may still be conceived of as foreigners whose cultural and historic identity is associated more strongly with the country of ethnic origin. This is contrasted to African Americans who are, despite the blatant historic discrimination, still perhaps begrudgingly considered Americans. This dynamic largely serves to uphold the status quo. "The field of racial positions generally – and the location of Asian Americans specifically – continues to reinforce White racial power, insulating it from minority encroachment or challenge" (Kim, 1999, p. 129).

The prime contemporary example of this triangulation of three races is William Petersen's 1966 New York Times article. Petersen demonstrates these planes in identifying the uniquely foreign ties Japanese Americans had at the time of his writing. He contrasts them to the group who's actually had the most connection with American culture, African Americans. Their superficial connection with any homeland in Africa, it is implied, makes it difficult for them to succeed when rejected by the broader American culture. As stated above, the Japanese achievements were tied to their connection to the culture of their ethnic origin.

Racial formation and racial triangulation help situate Asian Americans within the broader racial order. They provide conceptual tools to understand the fluid nature of racialization, and the different ways Asian Americans can be privileged (relative valorization) and marginalized (civic ostracism) compared to other communities of color, particularly African Americans. These racialized identities are manifested within

an order which privileges whiteness. As Stuart Hall (1996a) observed, identities "emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity" (p. 4). As I will cover in subsequent chapters the white supremacist racial order racializes group identities for the purposes of perpetuating itself. Asian Americans are marked and excluded in unique ways to uphold this system. In the next section I continue to build a foundation using the concepts of technological affordance, racial biases in technology, techno-Orientalism, and race as technology.

Technological affordances, raced technologies, and activism

Foundational to the current study's understanding of new media is the concept of technological affordances. Affordance as a term was popularized by Gibson (1977) to describe the natural environment's properties and substances offered to animals and humans. The natural environment has a multitude of characteristics which animals and humans interact with. These affordances make up a niche, which is a set of environmental features suitable for animals and humans. This concept was applied to information communication technology (ICT) studies and media studies to describe the relationship between technology and humans. The term itself is contested; scholars have debated about objective environments and human interaction with that environment; the agency of the environment versus human and animal actors; and the difference between physical and social environments (Parchoma, 2014).

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This study uses Hutchby's (2001) conception of technological affordances. Affordances for Hutchby is a concept which holds the opposing views of technological determinism and constructionism in tension. In this paradigm technology doesn't determine its own use or the behaviors of humans in society, a view attributed to McLuhan (1964) and Postman (2006), nor is it a *tabula rasa* which humans may appropriate for whatever means they please. Technologies can be understood as artefacts "which may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around and through them" (Hutchby, 2001, p. 444). This means technologies may, by design, have certain limitations and affordances which provide a range of uses and effects. Hutchby terms this the 'constraining' and 'enabling' materiality of technology. Scholars have observed that the affordances of the Internet allow users to generate content by giving them power and a platform (Bruns, 2008; Shirky, 2008; Levinson, 2009). Consumers simultaneously become producers of content as the barriers to production are overcome through access to basic digital media technology.

But a key question must be asked: who is given power and a platform? As Noble (2018) asks after encountering racist search results in Google, "For whom, then, was this the best information, and who decides?" (p. 18). New media platforms allow for a range of uses and effects; they are not value neutral platforms, nor do they determine their own uses. Instead, users and designers are engaged in a dialectic relationship with technology in which they shape and are shaped by it. An important component of new media affordances are how humans interact with them, appropriate them, design them, and

what values they embed in their designs and uses. Van Dijck (2013) poses a series of questions:

> How did individual platforms code and brand specific niches of everyday life? What specific user functions did they develop, and how did users respond to a platform's changing technologies? How are the tactics and mechanisms of individual platforms interrelated? On what ideological or political assumptions do they operate? What social and cultural norms underpin the ecosystem of connective media, how have they changed, and what role did (and still do) users and owners play in this transformation? (p. 22).

These questions scrutinize new media beyond consumer uses and platform affordances. Asking how owners play a role in platform creation and the overall ecosystem of new media interrogates the hidden assumptions and values that owners may code into platforms. For van Dijck, there are hidden algorithmic technological components of the social connectivity that are downplayed in favor of the human connection. For example, Twitter's touted ability to give individuals a voice has led to comparisons to a digital town hall, in which an everyday user's voice is, based on the platform's branding and design (the Twitter homepage reads "Hear what people are talking about" and "Join the Conversation"), given as much weight as any celebrity or expert. However, the reality Twitter's algorithms favor trending topics and hashtags and Twitter users who tweet more and have larger follower counts. "Twitter's ambition to be an echo chamber of

serendipitous chatter thus finds itself at odds with the implicit capacity, inscribed in its engine, to allow some users to exert extraordinary influence" (p. 74).

Gillespie (2018) similarly draws attention to the platforms, but the focus is largely on the content moderation practices, which inherently must be done with some sense of logic and underlying values.

> I am not a pornographer or a terrorist, but I am also not a whistleblower, a drag queen, a Muslim, a lactation specialist, a sex educator, or a black antiviolence activist. So while I may experience social media platforms as wide open, international human rights activists don't; they experience them as censored, unreliable, and inhospitable to their efforts (p. 12).

Gillespie acknowledges that although social media may have an incentive to promote themselves as being for everyone, there are values embedded in the purported use of those social media which betray certain cultural privileges. But the logic and values of content moderation is not always clear and their enforcement is not always consistent. For example, Twitter users have pointed out that President Trump has tweeted violent threats against other nation states and therefore has violated Twitter's guidelines and policies. Scrutinizing the role of designers and owners helps unveil hidden biases of the problematic symptoms of new media technology. Downplaying these hidden technological components results in a myopic view of the new media ecosystem in which the default uses are seen as value neutral.

The assumed neutrality of social media platforms belies its inherent whiteness-as-default setting. Although the discourse around the largely text-based Internet of the early 1990s was characterized by the promise of anonymity and democratization, racialization still occurred in online platforms (Nakamura, 2002). Race neutral or postracial discourse hides the underlying biases on the platforms. Benjamin (2016; 2019) offers a myriad of examples of how racial bias is hard coded into technologies in what she calls the New Jim Code. The New Jim Code is the "the employment of new technologies that reflect and reproduce existing inequalities but that are promoted and perceived as more objective or progressive than the discriminatory systems of a previous era" (pp. 5-6). The discourse of technological progress and objectivity gives users the impression that technology is immune from human bias and fallibility. But those biases can manifest themselves in what Benjamin calls glitches. She uses the term glitch not to describe an anomaly in the system, but as symptomatic of a larger problem. For example, she notes that Beauty AI, the world first purported beauty pageant judged by robots, contained the deeply embedded biases of its coders when in their 2016 contest the robot judges favored people with lighter skin; most of the winners of the pageant were white. She also highlighted how the spirometer, a medical device that measures lung capacity, had a built-in correction mechanism for black asbestos workers under the assumption that white lungs had better capacity than black lungs. The result was that African Americans had more difficulty claiming worker's compensation for lung damage. The point to highlight here is that these glitches are indicative of the white

biases that are coded into the design of technology, yet because of the discourse about

technological progress and objectivity, these biases are largely hidden.

Spaces in technology that are not marked racially are by default white spaces.

Brock (2012) makes the observation that Twitter was designed for a mostly white and

technologically proficient user base, but is not marked as such:

> White participation in online activities is rarely understood as constitutive of
> White identity; instead we are trained to understand their online activities as stuff
> 'people' do. Black Twitter confounded this ingrained understanding, even while
> using the same functions and apparatus, by making more apparent through
> external observation and internal interaction how culture shapes online
> discourses (p. 534).

Black Twitter is not regular Twitter (i.e. white Twitter). It is a community made of up a

subset of African American Twitter users who come together around a shared set of

experiences. This community is mediated through what Gates (1983) termed signifyin',

and is a way to express shared worldviews and community as Black Americans (Brock,

2012). Signifyin' is a discursive practice in African American oral traditions, "a genre of

linguistic performance that allows for the communication of multiple levels of meaning

simultaneously, most frequently involving wordplay and misdirection" (Florini, 2014, p.

224).

This discursive practice involves a dialogue in which Twitter users tweet their calls and expect a response from their audiences. This is facilitated through the use of hashtags, which, according to Brock (2012), serve the triple role of sign, signifier, and signified, "marking as it does the concept to be signified, the cultural context within which the tweet should be understood, and the 'call' awaiting a response" (p. 537). Clark (2015) tracks the use of two hashtags, #PaulasBestDishes and #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, to describe the process of Black users' connection to Black Twitter. She proposes that users engage in six steps to connect to the meta-network: self-selection, identification, performance, affirmation, reaffirmation, and vindication. Through these six steps users participate in the hashtags to build and maintain a sense of community. The second hashtag, #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen, served an additional function of an indictment of the complicity of white feminists in the acts of Hugo Schwyzer in denigrating women of color in 2013. "It evoked a venerated form of protest – the threat of bad publicity – all of which drew greater attention and negative press for the silent majority of feminists complicit in the marginalization of feminists of color" (pp. 213-214). While participants in Black Twitter are performatively building community, they may also use the platforms for political purposes.

New media technologies are embedded with values. Racial biases are masked by discourse about technological progress and objectivity. But this does not mean that the biases and intended designs of new media technology must determine their uses. The affordances of new media technology both constrain and enable certain uses. Brock (2012) made the observation that although Twitter was designed for technologically

proficient white user bases, its design and functionality lent itself well to the performance of Black discursive culture. Part of the racialized uses of social media are political, taking advantage of the enabling functions of the platforms for activism purposes.

How are new media suited to activism against forms of marginalization? Benkler (2006) observed two problems with mass media: they either harness their powers for politically propagandistic purposes, or are swayed from thoughtful political discourse and representation by economic incentives. His argument for the Internet as a democratizing force is that individual choice will prevent the tipping of scales in favor of either a multiplicity of incoherent voices or an overconcentration of power in one area of the Internet.

Scholars have pointed out both the promises of amplified freedom and control of new media technology. Shirky's (2008), for example, saw technology largely as a force for organizing people and groups who may not have previously had the resources to do so. On the other hand, Morozov (2012) counters the cyber-utopian view that technology is the answer to democracy – that if we have enough technology, we can solve problems; technology can be coopted by institutions in order to exert control.

Technology has amplified both promises of freedom and of control. On the one hand, traditional institutions are being challenged by individuals and groups organizing with less material resources through social media activism. On the other, resources are continually consolidated into a few large institutions, which can exert their control through surveillance, monopolization, and media messages.

Within this context, elite institutions such as universities, news media, and courts use discursive practices in reinforcing naturalized ideologies. Simultaneously, social media have given individuals a platform to challenge dominant discursive practices in supplementing and reflecting the social practice of activism.

Still, scholars have made arguments generally supporting the effectiveness of social media activism to varying degrees related to race (Clark, 2015; Lavan, 2015; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015; 2016; Kuo, 2017), international politics (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012; Lindgren, 2013), gender studies (Meyer, 2014; Horeck, 2014; Clark, 2014; 2016), and intersectional identities (Jackson, Bailey, & Foucault Welles, 2020). More specifically, social media like Twitter are places where resistant discourses can challenge dominant conceptions and effect change. For example, taking Fraser's (1992) concept of subaltern counterpublics, Jackson & Foucault Welles (2015; 2016) take a cautiously optimistic approach to Twitter's ability to facilitate discourse that challenges mainstream media narratives. The relatively low barriers to participation in new media discourse allow for the presence of multiple publics in a stratified society. These digital publics potentially fulfill Fraser's vision of "parallel discursive arenas where members of the subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interest, and needs" (Fraser, 1992, p. 124). Kuo (2018a) similarly examines how two Twitter hashtags circulate feminist discourse online using Squires' (2002) understanding of enclaves, counterpublics, and satellite publics. Lavan (2015) gives 'Black Twitter' credit for the eventual arrest of George Zimmerman, the man who shot and killed black teenager

Trayvon Martin, and for changing the mind of a literary agent who struck a book deal with a juror in the Martin-Zimmerman trial:

> Black Twitter has become a site of counter-narratives and counter-memory, assembling supplementary information that challenges the dominant narrative propagated in traditional media… Black Twitter challenges these processes by offering alternative media representations— grouped together under hashtags, phrases that act as virtual unifying agents—in real time (p. 57).

This optimism is tempered, however, with the observation that although social media offer an alternative platform to voice dissent, their influence may be limited. Lindgren (2013), for example, states that Twitter acted as a supplement to other social and political forces by studying the first 24 hours of Twitter activity surrounding the protests in Libya in 2011. Additionally, Potts et al (2014) surveyed activists who observed that Twitter was most effective in informational purposes such as 'giving people a place to voice their opinions' and 'discovering information on current campaigns and issues,' and least effective in activities such as 'mobilizing people to attend events' and 'collecting signatures/comments for petitions and initiatives' (p. 69). In other words, Twitter was most effective in augmenting offline, non-digital activities.

The significance of voicing opinions and discovering new discourses should not be underestimated, however. Ideologies are reinforced in part through discursive strategies which become naturalized and therefore deemed to be common sense

(Fairclough, 1995). One of the ways social media can be utilized to challenge dominant ideologies is to offer resistant discourses through the use of hashtags. Hashtagging features primarily on Twitter, though it is used regularly on other platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Hashtags can be used to coordinate co-watching of television events, for playful expressions and joking, and for emphasis (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). All of these uses are employed to create what Bruns & Burgess term an 'ad hoc public.' In addition, hashtag activism has been used for other purposes such as expressing solidarity (Kuo, 2017), group identity maintenance (Clark, 2015), understanding of social conditions (Kuo, 2018b) and creation of movements.

Another way that hashtags can offer a counterpublic with resistant discourse is through aggregating personal stories and thereby giving Twitter users narrative agency (Clark, 2016; Yang, 2016). Aggregating these stories can give power to marginalized communities who would otherwise lack the counterpublic presence. For example, #WhyIStayed offers a look into why users continued to stay in abusive relationships, creating a counterdiscourse to dominant conceptions that victims have only themselves to blame for inviting abuse and continuing to stay in those relationships. Other prominent examples include the #MeToo movement and #OscarsSoWhite, which address sexual harassment and assault and marginalization of minorities in Hollywood, respectively. Support does not have to come from a first-person perspective. Fischer (2016) and Carter Olson (2016), for instance, offer case studies in which hashtags were used by activists and the larger community to support CeCe McDonald, a transwoman accused of murder (#Free_CeCe) and the young girls kidnapped by Boko Harem in

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Nigeria (#BringBackOurGirls), respectively. In these instances, the activism was carried out on behalf of the victims to give them a voice.

Finally, I'd like to argue that the hashtags themselves can enhance the counterpublic discourse. If the aggregated stories accompanied by hashtags can create a counterpublic, it stands to reason that the hashtags themselves can be political. Although the phrase "me too" doesn't necessarily imply challenges to sexism in society, the movement behind the #MeToo hashtag has created that connotation, whereas #APIs4BlackLives explicitly is a reference to the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the support from Asian and Pacific Islander Americans.

Regardless of how explicitly political hashtags are, they contribute to indexing individual tweets to create a counterpublic to challenge dominant discourses. Although it is not inevitable that social media will lead to positive changes for marginalized communities, activists take advantage of the affordances of new media to offer alternative narratives. In the next section I'll examine how Asian Americans have been racialized online and how they can use new racial projects to combat problematic discourse.

Asian America online: techno-Orientalism and race as technology

Nakamura (2002) observed how racial formation occurs on the Internet. She found early on that, despite promises of democratization and anonymity, racialization happens much in a similar way that it does offline. The process by which Asians and Asian Americans are racialized is techno-Orientalism, which "stresses the notion of new

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technologies used in the service of an old technology, that of creating a vision of Asia that is predictable, anachronistic, and reified as oriental" (pp. 63-64). Techno-Orientalism is a concept that builds upon Edward Said's (1979) concept of Orientalism. Though Said's focus was largely on Arabs and Islam, he highlights that the Orient has included India, Japan, and China and other locales in the Far East. Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (p. 3). The West, or the Occident, interprets the Orient through its own lens and thereby exerts its own agency over the objectified and Otherized Orient. According to Said, the relationship between the West and the Orient "is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (p. 5).

Techno-Orientalist perspectives initially were largely propagated by the West to define the racialized other. William Gibson's Neuromancer and the 1980s Hollywood film Blade Runner are the most often cited instances of techno-Orientalist portrayals of Asia. Morley and Robins (2002), who first coined the term, describe how the West tried to make sense of Japan's technological rise in the 1980s, which violated the Western modernity, Eastern premodernity dichotomy:

The barbarians have now become robots… It seems that the West can never see Japan directly. It is as if the Japanese were always destined to be seen through the fears and the fantasies of Europeans and Americans. Japan is the Orient, containing all the West most lacks and everything it most fears. Against Japanese difference, the West fortifies and defends what it sees as its superior culture and

identity. And so the West's imaginary Japan works to consolidate old

mystifications and stereotypes: 'they' are barbaric and 'we' are civilised; 'they'

are robots while 'we' remain human; and so on (p. 172).

Roh, Huang, and Niu (2015) describe techno-orientalism in another way: "the

phenomenon of imaging Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in

cultural productions and political discourse" (2015, p. 2). Techno-orientalist fiction as a

genre imagines futures in which technology reigns against the backdrop of vaguely

Oriental elements. In this strange dual representation of Asia in Oriental terms and in

futuristic terms, Asia is at the peak of technological advancement. Although techno-

Orientalism as a concept has been used to analyze film and literature (Niu, 2008;

Nishime, 2017; Park, 2018), it is also a lens through which the West perceives Asia in

non-fiction settings. For example, Choe and Kim (2015) draw attention to the fact that

difference in depiction of gaming of the Western subject and Asianized other is a

symptom/manifestation of techno-Orientalism: the Western subject is portrayed as being

able to play video games in a leisurely manner, whereas the Asian male's uncontrollable

game activity has led to death on several occasions. Within the gameplay of StarCraft,

an online multi-player game, the authors remind the reader of the capitalist impulses of

the game and the deaths of Asian video gamers reveals the arbitrary and problematic rift

in the racialization of the white male versus the Asian Other.

That Asians are perceived as technologically adept is no compliment, especially

considering techno-Orientalism's basis of perceiving Asians as the Other. When the

Other is perceived as technologically adept they become a threat and revert to the yellow peril. Nakamura (2009) observed the phenomenon of 'gold farming,' the act of working in the game as cheap labor to attain special items to sell, in the popular MMORPG World of Warcraft. Gold farmers were denigrated and racialized as Chinese and lower status, despite the fact that there is no indication of players' races based on their avatar, and players used them frequently to get powerful and valuable items. This racialization of cheap denigrated labor in an online context mirrored the perception of Chinese laborers as yellow peril mid-19th century and beyond; their machine-like proficiency was exploited, but the threat of their proliferation was mitigated on a national level through the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. In the online context Asians are "constructed as anonymous workers, an undifferentiated pool of skilled (and grateful) labor" (Nakamura, 2002, p. 23). As Roh, Huang, and Niu (2015) observe, techno-Orientalism is "a doubling of Orientalism, a means of constructing and reifying an Occidentalist worldview in a more sophisticated way" (p. 223). In other words, techno-Orientalism is just a new form of Orientalism.

Asian Americans are not immune from the techno-Orientalist racialization. Kido Lopez and Ng (2017), in their assessment of representation of Asian American in media, state

> it is important to acknowledge the dominant (and problematic) discourse around Asian Americans as somehow preternaturally wired. The hypervisibility of what we might call the Asian cyborg has come to stand in stark contrast to the

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invisibility of Asian Americans as represented within mainstream media

narratives… these linkages begin to imply that the speed of technological

innovation in Asia and its adoption by Asian bodies is somehow biological or

innate. Such images of the e-proficient model minority participate in recreating a

kind of high-tech Orientalism where technology and Asian bodies are

inextricably bound (p. 307).

This representation of Asian Americans as technologically proficient has basis in truth in

the United States. English-speaking Asian Americans have higher rates of Internet use,

broadband adoption at home, and smartphone ownership than whites, blacks, and

Hispanics (Pew Research Center, 2015; Perrin, 2016; Nielsen Company, 2019).

An example of techno-Orientalist representation of Asian Americans is the

Nielsen media research firm's annual Asian American Consumer Report. In their 2019

Report they highlight Asian Americans' increasing consumer purchasing power. This

consumer power was directed connected to Asian American technology savvy, which is

coupled with their global perspective. The report found that Asian Americans are more

eager to share their technological opinions than the general public, and describes Asian

Americans as 'tech trendsetters.' The report also states that Asian Americans as

"consumers continue to make gains as tech-enabled, digitally vocal influencers with

immense spending power" (Nielsen Company, 2019, p. 3). In ascribing a global

perspective, the Nielsen report subtly re-represents Asian Americans as perpetual

foreigners. Asian Americans are otherized by their connected to their home countries.

Although purchasing power could be seen as a way to gain what Kido Lopez (2016) terms cultural citizenship, the report still otherizes Asian Americans through highlighting their connections to their home countries (as if Asian Americans don't claim the United States as their home) which betrays an Orientalist perspective. Asian Americans are otherized even as they are lauded for being good citizens of American capitalism.

Asian Americans' proficiencies can be used both for and against them. As Okihiro (1994) observed, the model minority and yellow peril stereotypes are not opposites; they work circularly to reinforce systems of white supremacy. Kido Lopez & Ng (2017) that observe that "[t]he connections between technology and yellow peril lurks behind any discussion of the way that Asian Americans are using technology for political empowerment, community organizing, or identity development" (p. 308).

Orientalism and techno-Orientalism alike are lenses through which the West constitutes the Orient. The West are the subjects who exert their agency in determining their superiority in contrast to the Other, who are both object and abject. By defining the Orient as the other, Orientalism projects a sense of progress, agency, and humanity on the Western self. Said (1979) writes, "my real argument is that Orientalism is – and does not simply represent – a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such as less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (p. 12). Similarly, Morley and Robins (2002) point out that techno-Orientalism once again centers the West as superior. Except in this instance, the undeniable technological progress of Japan does not place it on par with the modern West. Rather, "[t]he association of technology and

Japaneseness now served to reinforce the image of a culture that is cold, impersonal and machine-like, an authoritarian culture lacking emotional connection to the rest of the world" (p. 169). The representations of Asia and Asian Americans are used to prop up the normalcy, the humanity, and the subjectivity of the West, or more specifically in this context, the supremacy of whiteness. In this sense, to use Omi and Winant's terminology, the racial projects can be seen as tools with which reinforce perceptions of Asian Americans as the model minority, perpetual foreigner, yellow peril, and the broader project of techno-Orientalism.

What if I extended the metaphor of racial projects to race more holistically, and tools to technologies? What if racialization can be conceptualized as a method, a technology, by which white supremacist systems are perpetuated? Coleman (2009) conceptualizes technology as the study of technique, or techné. Techné are reproducible skills. As such, technology as a term can signify not just material phenomena, but a mechanism:

> Race as technology tells the tale of the levered mechanism. Imagine a contraption with a spring or a handle that creates movement and diversifies articulation. Not a trap, but rather a trapdoor through which one can scoot off to greener pastures. As an object of history, race has been used as a contraption by one people to subject another. An ideological concept of race such as this carries a very practical purpose. It vividly and violently produces race-based terrorism, systems of apartheid, and demoralizing pain (p. 180).

Racial formations are made up of racial projects. From slavery to Jim Crow, race was used as a method to prop up white supremacist systems in the United States. "In this sense, race may be the 'hammer,' but the question remains: in whose hand does it rest?" (Coleman, 2009, p. 179). It should be noted that although race has historically been used as a tool of repression, race can also be used for non-repressive purposes. Coleman uses the example of a speech given by then democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama in March of 2008 on the heels of the Reverend Jeremiah Wright's controversial statements on the United States to demonstrate how race can be used as a tool. Obama utilized race and the rhetoric of equality to attempt to renegotiate both meanings for the purpose of unity in the United States moving forward.

Chun (2013) also conceptualizes race not in terms of its ontology but its functionality. "Crucially, 'race as technology' shifts the focus from the *what* of race to the *how* of race, from *knowing* race to *doing* race by emphasizing the similarities between race and technology" (p. 38). Chun traces the racist technologies of segregation and eugenics as means of making distinctions in society between whites and blacks. Segregation laws were not the only tools to make distinctions between whites and blacks; eugenic claims of scientific racial superiority were also used as a technique to perpetuate difference and repression.

Racist technologies, however, breach the binary white and black. As Kim (2000) observes, Asian Americans are racialized vis-à-vis white and black Americans along two planes. They are valorized (through the racial project of the model minority stereotype)

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to shame African Americans, and they are also civically ostracized (through the racial project of perpetual foreigner) in relation to other racial and ethnic groups assumed to be American. In addition, employing race in the context of technology means Asians and Asian Americans are racialized (and technologized) as the non-human other in relation to the Western/white self. Chun writes:

> high-tech Orientalism is a process of abjection – a frontier – through which the console cowboy, the properly human subject, is created... The human is constantly created through the jettisoning of the Asian/Asian American other as robotic, as machine-like and not quite human, as not quite lived. And also, I would add, the African American other as primitive, as too human (p. 51).

Asians and Asian Americans as hyper-technologized results in two contrasting racial projects that serve one purpose. In one sense Asian Americans are dehumanized and racialized as perpetual foreigners. On the other hand, Asian Americans are lauded for their high socioeconomic status (SES), technological proficiency, and consumer power. By implication, those with lower socioeconomic status (SES) are bad capitalists and only have themselves to blame. Regardless of whether they are peril or a model, this racialization of Asian Americans (and other racial groups) is a discourse and a tool which augments the current white supremacist and capitalist systems. Conceptualizing racial projects as technologies allows me to examine what race does. More accurately, it helps examine who does what with race. The white supremacist system perpetuates itself

through the use of racial projects, such as those that pitted the model minority against African Americans and Latinx Americans. However, resistant groups can offer counterdiscursive activities using the same tool. Race can be repurposed in the hands of those working toward racial justice and equity.

Summary

The current project examines how Asian Americans express interracial solidarity on Twitter by engaging in hashtag activism. To make sense of race relations, I draw upon theories of racial formation and racial triangulation to demonstrate the contextual nature of race, and how Asian Americans are positioned in the racial order along multiple planes to reinforce an existing white supremacist system. Oftentimes Asian Americans are racialized as the model minority, but this may be changing as of this writing considering the rise of anti-Asian racism in the United States in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I identify several prominent hashtags used on Twitter by Asian Americans and the associated discursive activity in expressing solidarity. I use the concept of technological affordances to establish that social media is conducive to creating counterpublics, but also use scholarship on the racial biases of technological platforms and techno-Orientalism to make sense of how Asian Americans utilize social media. Finally, I use race as technology as the metaphor to describe how solidarity minded Asian Americans use new racial projects to offer alternative discourses to combat the existing racial order.

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In the next chapter I discuss the use of critical discourse studies (CDS), discourse

tracing, and guided interviewing in conducting my research.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter I've established that race is socially constructed and historically specific. Racial formation of a particular group occurs through ascribing meaning to phenotypical differences in relation to other groups. Moreover, the signification of racial difference is political. Asian American as a racial category was both externally imposed and internally constituted. Externally, Asian Americans are ascribed an identity which highlights their ties to places of ethnic origin – and internally the pan-ethnic Asian identity was formed from multi-ethnic coalitions for representation in university curriculum, and to protest racism and war in the 1960s.

Simultaneously, the model minority stereotype was ascribed to Japanese and Chinese Americans first – and then to Asian Americans broadly. This stereotype was used in conjunction with other racial positions of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and white Americans to create what Kim (2000) calls the racial order. This racial order, a system of racial dominance and subordination, is reinforced through racial projects which offer an interpretation of racial identities.

The language of the model minority reifies the picture of Asian Americans as high achieving. In other words, Asian Americans as a high achieving minority becomes an assumption, an accepted truth. In order to examine how language surrounding model minorities reinforces the racial order and the language used by Asian Americans to stand in solidarity with other minorities, this chapter introduces critical discourse studies

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(CDS) as the methodological lens and discourse tracing as the method for the current study. In addition, in order to yield insight into how Asian Americans conceive of their own identity in relation to other people of color, I conducted semi-structured interviews with seventeen participants in the selected hashtags. Finally, I acknowledge my identity as an Asian American interested in interracial solidarity as part of the research, and introduce specifically how I conducted the research.

Critical discourse studies (CDS)

The first research question for the current study is, *what discursive practices do Asian Americans employ in hashtag activism on social media?*

Critical discourse studies (CDS) is conducive to exploring how Asian Americans stand in solidarity with other people of color because it denaturalizes dominant discourse (the model minority) and examines resistant discursive strategies (challenging existing racial orders). Although there is no one set of data collection strategies or theories that are essential to performing CDS, Wodak and Meyer (2015) state that all critical discourse studies as a school are 'problem-oriented.' This distinguishes *critical* discourse studies from discourse studies – CDS aims to examine problems, whether they are social, political, economic, or religious. More specifically, "CDS approaches are characterized by the common interests in deconstructing ideologies and power through systematic and retroductable investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual)" (p. 4).

Wodak and Meyers' framework is helpful in synthesizing CDS as a school of study. All CDS have common ground in understanding of discourse, the critical nature of discursive work, and notions of ideology and power.

Though units of analysis may vary (words, phrases, sentences, or larger textual structures), CDS understands *discourse as connected to social practice* (p. 5). Discourse itself can be seen as social practice. CDS examines language in embedded contexts and in action as opposed to abstracted rules of linguistics or grammar. In other words, discourse is language in practice. It is the actual use of language is highly contextualized situations (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Discourse can also be used in conjunction with, or recontextualize, social practices. Van Dijk (1993) writes that discourse can be used in relation to specifically racist social practices of exclusion and oppression, and that discourse can shape the social cognitions (beliefs) that underlie such practices. He states, "Although discourse is not the only form of racist practice, it nevertheless plays a crucial role in the societal reproduction of the basic mechanisms of most other racist practices" (p. 12). Van Leeuwen (2008) view discourse as the *recontextualization* of social practices. Recontextualization involves taking knowledge that is produced in upper reaches (institutions, organizations with power) and then 'embedded' in lower reaches to achieve desired social practice.

An example of discourse as social practice, or reflecting/reinforcing social practice, is 'do what makes you happy.' Abstracted from its context, this phrase lacks any indicators of qualifiers, limiters, who is speaking the phrase, and if the idea is in

contrast to a competing idea or phrase. If embedded in the context of a university student feeling pressure to select a major that her parents approve the dynamics of power and influence become apparent. The act of using this discourse is social practice which is reflective of a certain set of values and beliefs. Using this discourse can also be paired with social practices of eschewing parental authority, and of discovering autonomy.

CDS is problem-oriented. The problem that CDS concerns itself with are addressing various existing power structures. The work is in uncovering power structures, offering alternative discourse to resist and challenge those structures, and it "enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection" (Wodak and Meyer, 2015, p. 7). It is in this sense that CDS is *critical*. CDS researchers make clear their social, economic, or political motives which differ from the motives of those upholding the status quo. It reflects a hope that the status quo is not inevitable.

CDS does its critical work through analyzing the components of discourse which may reinforce dominant structures. In the university setting, 'do what makes you happy' may be resistant discourse to the dominant discourse of 'getting a good college degree to earn a good living,' which may have been reinforced by a student's family, community, or circumstance (i.e., an international student coming to the United States from a third-world country). 'Going to university to get a good job' may be embedded into attitudes of certain first year students, who may not have considered alternative purposes to university.

Finally, CDS studies uncover hidden ideology and power structures. Ideology consists of sets of values and beliefs. More specific to my purpose of examining racial order, however, ideologies are values and beliefs which reinforce interests of those in power. According to van Dijk (1993), social representation are those representations shared by the members of a group about their own group or another outside group. Ideologies are a type of "social representations shared by a group, namely, those representations that embody its overall interests and goals" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 41).

An additional component to highlight is that ideological representations are opaque. Ideology for CDS is concerned with the "hidden and latent inherent in everyday-beliefs, which often appear disguised as conceptual metaphors and analogies" (Wodak and Meyer, 2015, p. 8). These ideologies are hidden through what Fairclough (1995) terms naturalization. 'Naturalized ideological representations' are representations which are seen are non-ideological common sense.

Bonilla-Silva (2010) offers an example of how naturalization occurs. He states that color-blind racism is the dominant ideology regarding race since the 1960s. Color-blind racism "explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics" (p. 2). In other words, rac*ism* is not the reason for racial inequality. Among the four frames Bonilla-Silva introduces as central to color-blind racism is naturalization of race. "Naturalization is a frame that allows whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences" (p. 28). To convince society that racial difference is a natural occurrence is to hide the sociohistorical contexts of racial

formation and thereby hide any ideological agenda behind the process; racial formation is reified as a phenomenon that is simply a given rather than a political exercise.

Ideology is reinforced through power. Power is social domination of one group over another. CDS is concerned with how discourse upholds and reinforces social domination, and how dominated groups use discourse to resist, undermine, or transform social domination (Wodak & Meyer, 2015, p. 9).

If I determined that students must get a university degree to be successful, I may be making a statement of fact. However, it is equally plausible that I may be making a statement of ideology. Because adults with university degrees earn a higher average income than those with a high school diploma, the dominant ideology is that one must get a university degree in order to succeed. Unveiling this naturalized discourse entails examining who stands to benefit from reinforcing this ideology. Universities themselves (both non-profit and for profit) may have a vested interest in increasing enrollment at their institutions. CDS also entails challenging the notion that universities may in fact be the best option by offering alternatives (such as trade school or other certifications) and creating discursive practices around those alternatives.

CDS studies discourse in social practice, addresses various problematic power structures, and de-naturalizes common sense ideologies which are embedded through discursive practices by elite actors and institutions.

Discourse tracing

Racial formation is context specific. I've established an historical development of the Asian race from yellow perils to the model minority. The formation of the Asian American identity has changed over the course of the last century and a half.

Changes in discourse, however, can also occur within much shorter periods of time due to changes in events and circumstances. For example, the #MeToo movement, which began in October of 2017, has amplified discourse surrounding sexual assault and harassment in a significant way. The movement has challenged dominant ideologies surrounding workplace equality and existing structures which privilege men; the hashtag itself is social practice in that the phrase is imbued with context specific meaning. Although we may not see the lasting effects of the hashtag for years or decades, tracking the changes in discourse surrounding major events like the Harvey Weinstein scandal may be informative.

CDS is useful for the current study because it scrutinizes dominant discourse on Asian Americans and can uncover counterdiscursive strategies in counterpublics (Fraser, 1992). However, it doesn't necessarily track changes in discourse across time. With the continuously evolving discourses on social media, it is important to consider how discursive activities change, and how those changes may coincide with racialized events such as the shooting of Akai Gurley by Officer Peter Liang. A useful method for the current study to augment CDS is discourse tracing. Discourse tracing examines changes in discourse over time. As a type of discourse analysis discourse tracing examines use of language and social practice, and can also yield insight into critical power relations.

While CDS is a broad school of study, discourse tracing offers specific methodological steps in conducting an examination of how discursive strategies change and evolve. LeGreco and Tracy (2009) state that discourse tracing "enables scholars to critically analyze the power relations associated with change and proceed with a systematic data analysis process" (p. 1517). Changes can be turning points or ruptures on a large organizational level. Wolfe (2016), for example, traced multiple framings of the exit of a large employer from a small rural community and how stakeholder discourse informed subsequent policy actions. Changes can also be smaller and subtle, yet have an impact on discursive practices.

Monitoring changes, whether they be on an organizational level or a micro level, can help yield insight into changes in power dynamics and the relationship between discursive and social practices. For example, the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy regarding sexual orientation in military service was emblematic of a specific ideology regarding sexuality: namely, that it doesn't matter to military service. However, the discursive practices could be perceived as effectively erasing diversity in sexual orientation. The repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' signified of a shift in ideology: it wasn't that sexuality didn't matter in military service, but that LGBTQ persons could indeed openly serve in the military. It would be reductionistic to state that the organizational change in policy affected every level of discourse unidirectionally top down. Tracing the change in discursive activity on multiple levels helps in seeing how changes in discourse happen and the interaction between actors with varying degrees of influence.

Operationalizing discourse tracing involves four distinct phases. The first phase is research design, and involves defining a case to study and reviewing relevant literature. The second is data management, which involves gathering data and ordering it chronologically. This ordering of data makes discourse tracing unique: "Chronological ordering allowed discourse tracers to illustrate which discourses are operating in a given situation. At the same time, this practice also enables researchers to articulate those discourses that are absent, forgotten or hidden" (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1526). Once the data is ordered chronologically, a close reading of data is done for emergent themes and issues, as well as those that are hidden or forgotten.

The third phase is analysis. It involves two tasks. The first is asking structured questions to "'lift out' patterns and arguments from the qualitative data set" (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1532) based on a close reading of the chronologically ordered data. The second is translating raw data into a case study narrative. In this dissertation the structured questions came out of preliminary analysis of the chronologically ordered data. Rather than conducting a close reading of every one of the thousands of tweets before constructing structured questions I traced the spikes in activity and then crafted questions to guide the analysis. An explanation of how I approached this is in the Research Design section below. The list of structured questions is in Appendix A. The second task of the analysis section is writing a case study. LeGreco and Tracy state that this involves storytelling. In this dissertation the narrative component of the analysis consisted of highlighting the spikes in hashtag activity which corresponded to ruptures. Tweets in these spikes were then analyzed. The final phase is evaluation, which involves

theoretical and practical implications. Theoretical implications involve 'transferability' or 'parameter setting,' making an evaluation the generalizability of the findings, or how applicable they may be to other problems. The evaluation ought also be useful to participants or practitioners who are involved in solving the problem: "Because discourse tracing is interested in producing practical solutions for managing discourse and providing a window for *generative transformation*, Phase 4 encourages researchers to identify how research findings can be translated into information that can be directly used by study participants" (p. 1537).

There are two advantages of using discourse tracing as a tool. The first advantage is that examining discourse across micro, meso, and macro levels tracks interaction between different actors; discursive practices do not need to be congruent across levels. For example, Asian Americans using #NotYourWedge is an example of micro level discourse which is a resistant social practice to the dominant macro discourse surrounding Asian Americans as a model minority. Asian Americans reject the role as the nearly white, high achieving example for other minorities to emulate; they refuse to act as the 'wedge' between white Americans and minorities.

The second advantage of discourse tracing is that ruptures can reveal complex power dynamics between multiple groups in the racial order. The #BlackLivesMatter movement started in 2013 as a response to police brutality against African Americans. The fallacious race relations discourse in popular media typically pitted police (synonymous with white) against blacks. What happens when an event pits African Americans against a police officer that is not white? This is what happened when officer

Peter Liang, a Chinese American, accidentally shot and killed Akai Gurley, an African American man. The responses to the event were varied throughout the Asian American community and brought out hidden dynamics between Asian Americans and African Americans.

Discourse tracing involves tracking changes in discursive activities across multiple levels of discourse through time. Changes is discourse through time can bring out previously hidden ideologies. "In short, discourse tracing moves beyond the number of utterances, items or classifications present, and moves toward asking *how* and *why* such issues came into being and how various levels of discourse play a role in their creation and transformation over time" (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1522).

Interviewing

The second clarifying research question for the current study is, *how do Asian Americans construct their identities through the discursive practices in hashtag activism?*

The act of using resistant discourse as social practice is reflective of cognitive work that participants do regarding the racial order. In other words, using hashtags such as #Asians4BlackLives, #NotYourWedge, or #JusticeforAkaiGurley is an indication that participants have strong opinions about the racial order and the positionings of Asian Americans vis-à-vis other minorities. The first two hashtags in particular refer specifically to the relationship between Asian Americans and other people of color.

The dominant stereotype of Asian Americans is the model minority. As such, it is an identity that is reinforced by elites. Many Asian Americans may internalize such designations and identify as high achieving minorities as well. Others may eschew the identity in favor of alternative identities. Because the nature of the hashtags mentioned above are challenging dominant discursive practices, their practice may offer a criticism of Asian American identity.

Inferences can be made about cognitive process and the underlying beliefs based on discursive activity. Van Dijk (1993) draws the connection between discourse, systemic racism, and cognitive processes this way

> the reproduction of the system of racism presupposes the reproduction of its social cognitions, for instance, through processes of inference, learning, and sharing within the group. In our theoretical framework these socio-cognitive reproduction processes are essentially implemented by public discourse and communication (p. 27)

In other words, social cognitive processes are reproduced through discursive activities. If this is true for dominant ideologies, they will also be true for resistant ideologies.

However, rather than simply inferring critique of Asian American identity via hashtag activity, I conduct guided interviews with participants who used the hashtags to get at their cognitive processes about Asian American identity formation.

The research questions posed in this dissertation rely on open ended discussion tools. Interview guides are a flexible set of questions that can be asked in different ways to different participants to encourage discussion. These guides are contrasted to interview schedules, lists of questions that are repeated in the same order with the same wording for the purposes of measuring reliability of the research tool in a larger sample (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Tracy, 2013). Hollway and Jefferson (1997) use a biographical-interpretive method developed by German sociologists to elicit narrative answers from participants. Four principle strategies are highlighted: use open ended questions, elicit stories, avoid why questions, and follow up using respondents' ordering and phrasing.

I chose to develop a set of guided interviews questions because the answers I am looking for are more qualitative and open-ended than predetermined. The individual identity formation of an Asian American participant, for instance, may not necessarily mirror the journey of another. I also generally avoided asking questions specifically about Asian American stereotypes such as the model minority or perpetual foreigner so that the participants reflect organically on their reasonings for their discursive activities, and what those practices say about their identity vis-à-vis other racial groups.

In interviews I directly asked about Asian American identity formation as reflected in hashtag activity. Though the interview method developed by Hollway and Jefferson (1997) was designed to elicit narratives by asking indirect questions of participants regarding sensitive or traumatic subjects, I chose to directly ask participants about identity because using hashtags is an active and volitional activity. The

participants have, to some degree, put cognitive work into race relations and Asian American identity. The purpose of the interview was to draw out reflections on participant identity vis-à-vis other racial groups. Using the interview approaches above also gave me the opportunity to ask additional questions based on answers given, which may lead to unanticipated insights about Asian American self-identity.

The interview guide firstly consisted of basic demographic questions. Pertinent demographic data are age, gender, educational attainment, racial demographics of hometown, level of interaction with members of own ethnic/racial group and members of other races, and development of racial and/or ethnic identity. Gender, age, and educational attainment variables were collected in case they offered interesting comparative information. They also served as simple questions participants answered to help ease them into open ended questions. Racial demographics of hometown, level of interaction with different races and ethnicities, and development of racial and/or ethnic identity were asked to yield insight into how participants became race and ethnicity conscious.

I then asked questions related to hashtag activity. The first question was open ended and began with "what made you decide" instead of "why did you decide" to avoid a confrontational or judgmental tone. This open-ended question gave participants free reign in describing their rationale for posting using the hashtags. A second question asked if there are experiences or stories from the participant's life that informed the decision to post the hashtag. This was a close ended question because I did not want to

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assume the existence of some significant experience by asking a leading question. Participants were invited to share those experiences if they had any.

Next, questions regarding self-identity were posed. I asked these sets of questions because participants may not necessarily identify themselves as Asian American. In fact, the Pew Research Center's "The Rise of Asian Americans" report (2013) found that only 19% of Asian Americans most often describe themselves as Asian American. A majority (62%) most often describe themselves by their country of origin, or ethnicity (Chinese American, Japanese, etc.). In addition, a question regarding common stereotypes of the participant's racial or ethnic identity was posed in an open-ended manner so as not to lead them into specifically discussing the model minority. Because racial identity is mutually constitutive with other racial groups, participants were asked how they see themselves in relation to other racial groups. A complete list of in-depth interview guide questions for all participants can be found in Appendix B.

In summary, the dissertation studies how Asian American activists express solidarity with other communities of color through Twitter. Studying the expression of solidarity on Twitter involves a study of the language that Asian Americans use. Critical discourse studies (CDS) is conducive to answering this question because Asian American expression of solidarity involves interrogating the existing racial order and dominant stereotypes about Asian Americans in the present, particularly as the model minority. How do Asian Americans navigate their racialization and the racialization of other minority groups – including but not limited to African Americans and Latinx Americans? Discourse tracing allows me to trace changes in the discursive strategies on

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Twitter in response to online and offline events. Finally, racial formation is mutually constitutive, so Asian American expression of solidarity with other racial minority groups will involve attempts to reconfigure their understanding of their place in the racial order. In other words, how do Asian Americans construct their racial identities as reflected online activism? The most direct way to answer this is to conduct guided interviews with Twitter users who engage with at least one of the hashtags.

Reflexivity

In critical qualitative research, self-reflection is an important process for the researcher and the study. Reflexivity in qualitative research involves "consideration of the researcher's self in the process of research design, data collection, and representation" (Ellingson, 2009, p. 12). Similarly, "[n]aming oneself 'critical' only implies specific ethical standards: an intention to make one's position, research interests and values explicit and their criteria as transparent as possible" (Wodak & Meyer, 2015, p. 7).

As an Asian American I am interested in racial inequality research, so I have a vested interest in not only observing solidarity in discursive practices, but in actually uncovering both problematic discourse which may further perpetuate systems of racial inequality and resistant discourse which challenges dominant stereotypes. My study is problem oriented.

Interviewing requires interaction with participants in the research study. Because the nature of the study is critical, my role as researcher and my racial identity are

relevant to the interview process. Being Asian American helped in establishing rapport with participants, as one respondent explicitly expressed with me. I am interested in participant responses because I want to better understand my own identity as an Asian American, an immigrant, a Korean American, a model minority, and American.

I mostly identified as a Korean American as a child and youth because my community consisted mostly of other Korean Americans. For example, I was heavily involved in the youth group at my Korean immigrant church. I began identifying more frequently as Asian American when I went to college and joined a pan-Asian fellowship group and developed friendships with fellow Asian Americans. It was also at college that I started becoming conscious of racial inequality. I learned about Vincent Chin, the Chinese American man beaten to death by white auto workers who mistook him for Japanese, from the African American director of the Office of Multicultural Development, Rodney Sisco. For a vast majority of my life, I fit the model minority stereotype: I was in National Honors Society in high school, graduated with an International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, and I am very highly educated with two master's degrees, and by myself made more than the median household income of those living in the Bryan-College Station metropolitan area in 2017 (Forbes, 2017).

As an immigrant who fits the model minority stereotype, I want to know how the externally imposed dominant discourse of the model minority is co-constitutive with discourse about other racial minority groups, and the effect of the dynamic between the two.

Through the course of the project I refer to Asian Americans regularly. When referring to specific participants or the group of hashtag users or interviewees collectively I use third person pronouns where appropriate. However, when the context refers to interracial solidarity minded Asian Americans I use the first-person plural pronoun to include myself. I chose to include myself when reference because I am part of the group that is being referenced despite not specifically participating in the three hashtags. I also use the first-person plural pronoun when reference is made generally to Asian Americans.

Research design

The study examined discursive practices surrounding three different hashtags: #Asians4BlackLives, #JusticeforAkaiGurley, and #NotYourWedge.

#Asians4BlackLives developed as a response to the #BlackLivesMatter movement, created by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in July 2013. #BlackLivesMatter is broadly an activist movement to combat systemic racism, specifically prompted by several high-profile cases of African Americans being killed by police officers. Early uses #Asians4BlackLives occurred in December 2014 during a series of protests and shutdown of the Oakland Police Department in California following a grand jury's decision not to indict police officer Darren Wilson in the shooting of Michael Brown. In addition to being a hashtag, #Asians4BlackLives is a collection of independent organizations across the United States expressing Asian American solidarity with the BlackLivesMatter movement. The very act of creating

hashtags specifically for Asian Americans is significant. It implies that Asian American solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement requires a specific acknowledgment of Asian American identity in relation to black identity.

#JusticeforAkaiGurley developed after the fatal shooting of an African American man, Akai Gurley, by an Asian American police officer, Peter Liang, in November 2014. During a routine patrol, Liang testified that he accidentally fired his gun in an unlit stairwell and struck Gurley, killing him. On April 19, 2016, Liang was sentenced to five years' probation and 800 hours of community service with no jail time. The judge in the case, Danny Chun, downgraded Liang's conviction from manslaughter to criminally negligent homicide (Saul, Fasick, & Sheehy, 2016).

The different types of responses by Asian American communities demonstrated the complex interaction between racial groups. Proponents for justice for Gurley stated that they wanted a fair trial for Liang, regardless of his race. Others demanded justice for Gurley by acknowledging and then eschewing racial dynamics which favor Asian Americans over African Americans. In other words, it is especially because Asian Americans, as the model minority, have been given the benefit of the doubt that we ought to be held accountable when we commit an injustice on this scale.

Proponents for Liang advocated to clear him of charges because of intra-ethnic solidarity; Chinese Americans (or Asian Americans) ought to look out for one another. And yet another set of proponents for Liang were afraid that he will be convicted because he is not white; that he will be scapegoated to appease protestors. From this

perspective, the focus is taken away from the injustice against Gurley to the injustice against Liang by a system which privileges whiteness.

It should be noted that #JusticeforAkaiGurley is the only hashtag that isn't specifically for use by or hailing Asian Americans. In other words, nothing about the hashtag indicates that those who use it are Asian American proponents of justice for Gurley, or calling Asian Americans to such activities. The hashtag itself calls for justice for Gurley without reference to a person's racial or ethnic identity, and therefore can operate as a hashtag for many different Twitter communities. However, this hashtag was included because an Asian American advocacy organization, the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV), used the hashtag to draw attention to their vigil in front of One Police Plaza in New York City with Gurley's family in March of 2015. CAAAV subsequently started a selfie campaign that encouraged Asian Americans to use #JusticeforAkaiGurley to express visual support for justice for Gurley. Their use of the hashtag, coupled with the on-the-ground activities with a member of Gurley's family (his aunt), made it an important hashtag to examine Asian American interracial solidarity discourse.

#NotYourWedge developed in the summer of 2017 for advocates of affirmative action. Although nothing about this particular hashtag indicated that it was specifically an Asian American hashtag, it was used almost exclusively by and for Asian Americans during the period. In 2008, Abigail Fisher was denied admission to the University of Texas at Austin. Fisher, a white applicant, subsequently filed a lawsuit alleging that the denial of her admission was because of racial discrimination against her in favor of

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racial minorities. In 2016, the Supreme Court decided on the *Fisher vs. University of Texas* case, and ultimately upheld a lower court ruling favoring the University of Texas. Advocates celebrated this as a victory for affirmative action. Asian Americans in particular were in the crossfires of this debate. In the slip opinion summary of the 2013 Supreme Court ruling, Justice Thomas argued that whites and Asians are "injured" in being denied admission because of their race. He made an accompanying argument that Hispanic and black students who are granted admission over more qualified white and Asian students are being done a disservice as well because they will underperform compared to their white and Asian peers (*Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin*, 2013). Although Justice Thomas does not directly use the term model minority, grouping Asian Americans with white Americans as high achievers discursively creates a wedge, with white and Asian Americans on one side, and Hispanic and African Americans on the other. In this way, the model minority stereotype could be used to dismantle the need for affirmative action policies, as Asian Americans are evidence of achieving academic success without the need for preferential policies.

Asian Americans directly entered into the controversy surrounding college admissions several years later. In August 2017, it was reported by *The New York Times* that Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA), an organization advocating for the abolishment of racial preferences in college admissions, filed a lawsuit on behalf of Asian American students against Harvard University in 2014. The lawsuit alleged discrimination against Asian Americans in admission processes. The suit claims that the number of Asian American applicants ultimately admitted was lower than it should have

been because of discriminatory practices of applying higher standards to those applicants

in order to maintain a more balanced racial makeup of its incoming class. In October of

2019, Judge Allison Burroughs ruled in favor of Harvard University against the claims

of SFFA that the university had discriminated against Asian Americans.

These series of lawsuits prompted debates about affirmative action. In this case,

Asian Americans as the upstanding model minority are on the opposite side of the

affirmative action debate than a minority group traditionally would be placed; they were

the alleged victims of discrimination in favor of *other* racial groups. In response to the

news media coverage of the lawsuit, on August 9, 2017 Asian American scholars and

activists organized a Twitter town hall on affirmative action using #NotYourWedge.

Discursive practices interact across micro, meso, and macro levels. As such,

while the primary data collected to analyze discourse were tweets with the three hashtags

for select periods of time, in the process I also collected blogposts, news articles, press

release statements, and court opinions. This is because the Twitter discourse was

informed by these other texts. Many tweets directly linked to blogposts or press releases,

for example. These texts were often written concurrently with the hashtag activities in

response to the same events which precipitated spikes in hashtag activity. Some,

however, were written prior to the hashtags such as two Supreme Court cases from 1978

and 2003. These were referenced in hashtag activities and were therefore collected

because they informed the discourse. Studying the discourse in some of these other texts

were instructive in providing additional context and source material for the discursive

strategies employed on Twitter.

On the micro level, individual tweets using the hashtags was collected. Meso level discourse includes posts using those hashtags from opinion leaders. These opinion leaders are blogs or groups which exert influence on the community. For example, the Reappropriate blog and the person who runs it are considered authoritative sources of discourse on Asian American interracial coalition building based on studying tweets. I also make the argument that hashtags themselves can be considered meso discourse. Macro level discourse consists of the broader narratives and ideologies which are hidden in organizations with the highest level of influence: courts and news media. While the court documents and news media articles themselves are on the meso level, the enduring narratives that are naturalized by influential documents are macro level discourses. It should be noted that these statements are collected for the purposes of establishing dominant discourse surrounding issues of police violence and affirmative action.

Social media posts using each of the hashtags was collected through a third-party data scraping service for the entirety of their use until the end of the collection period for this project. I identified the first and last known uses of each of the hashtags and requested all of the tweets within that time frame from the third-party data scraping service. If the hashtag was still in use I requested inclusion of the most recent tweets. The data was requested in Summer of 2019, and I augmented that data starting Summer of 2019 by using TAGS, a tool that collects Twitter data on a daily basis which can collect tweets that are up to several days old. This is how I traced the activity around #NotYourWedge during the court rulings on SFFA v. Harvard in October of 2019. All data collection ended in March of 2020 to coincide with data analysis for the project.

Data were collected up to this time in case of any additional spikes in the hashtag. Data on #Asians4BlackLives were collected from its first use in December of 2014 until March of 2020. The hashtag last featured prominently in 2016 but is still actively used from time to time so data were collected until the end of the collection period for the project. Data on #JusticeForAkaiGurley were collected from its first use in November of 2014 until its last use in June of 2019. Data on #NotYourWedge were collected from its first use in May of 2015 until March of 2020. Though the hashtag featured most prominently in August of 2017, it is still being used so data were collected until the end of the collection period for the project.

Once the data were collected I identified the ruptures in events which would indicate where important discursive strategies occurred and where these strategies might have changed. To do this I mapped out the frequency of tweets across time using the histogram graph tool of my spreadsheet software. This helped to visualize when spikes in hashtag use occurred. I then examined these tweets to see if there were any events which constituted ruptures. Nearly all the spikes corresponded with online or offline ruptures.[1] The list of structuring questions for analysis can be found in Appendix A.

I traced discursive practices surrounding #Asians4BlackLives following key events which precipitated strong responses by BlackLivesMatter activists such as the

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[1] One example of a spike which did not constitute a relevant rupture occurred in the Fall of 2016 in which one particular Twitter user tweeted over 60 times pairing #Asians4BlackLives with other hashtags (#UniteBlue, #StrongerTogether, and #WomenEmpowerment) to promote voting Democrat in the 2016 elections. This spamming of the hashtag did not constitute a rupture in events online or offline which contributed to changes in discursive strategies by Asian American activists. As such it was excluded from the analysis.

deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. I traced discursive practices surrounding #JusticeforAkaiGurley across key events such as before and after Peter Liang's indictment in February of 2015. Finally, I traced discourse practices surrounding #NotYourWedge after the lawsuit brought against Harvard University was spotlighted by news media (notably the New York Times) in August 2017, and again after the trial in October 2018 and the ruling in October 2019.

As of March 25, 2020, I have collected 12,136 total tweets using #Asians4BlackLives, 3901 total tweets using #JusticeForAkaiGurley, and 3980 total tweets using #NotYourWedge. Rather than analyze all of the tweets, I filtered out retweets with no comments because they did not contribute additional discourse. I then created histograms of the remaining tweets and identified spikes in Twitter activity and select those spikes to analyze. The spikes corresponded with important events which occurred both online and offline.

News articles and court documents were collected based on their relevance to the hashtags. For example, the New York Times originally reported on the Harvard discrimination lawsuit and therefore placed a spotlight on the issue nationally. The articles published during that time frame by NYTimes were collected to analyze discursive practice of elite institutions on the matter of affirmative action and Asian Americans.

I interviewed participants who were active in using one or more of the hashtags above. Participants were solicited through snowball sampling by reaching out to personal networks through social media and by contacting Twitter users who

participated in the hashtags. I reached out to Twitter users who most prominently posted using the hashtags by total number of posts and a minimum of 5 tweets using at least one hashtag. In total I've conducted seventeen interviews. In the recruitment email I wrote that the criteria for participating in the study are that the prospective interviewee be at least 18 years of age, Asian American/mixed-race Asian American, and have been active using the hashtags. I ascribed an Asian American identity to the interviewees for recruiting purposes. The question of racial and self-identity was left open during the interview to answer my third research question, how do Asian Americans construct their identities through the discursive practices in hashtag activism around interracial coalition building? Ten of the participants identified as female, six as male, and one as non-binary. A majority of the interviewees grew up in areas with high concentration of Asian Americans such as California, New York, or New Jersey. The interviewees' ages ranged from mid-twenties to early fifties at the time of the interview. All interviewees had at least some college education, and a majority had advanced educational degrees.

The criteria used for determining who is considered an activist for this study are users who either self-identify as activists or engage in activism work on social media (Potts et al, 2014). In this study I use Kido Lopez's (2016) understanding that activism begins with identification of a social problem and engagement of any number of activities to bring about social change. In the tweets I analyzed users engage in discursive work, sometimes in conjunction with other online or offline campaigns and protests, to bring about their intended change. As all interviewees participated in the hashtags, all fulfilled the criteria of activists. As will be evident, however, not all

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interviewees self-identified as activists. Per the IRB approval for the study, participant identities are anonymized through the use of pseudonyms.

In summary, the current study used critical discourse analysis and discourse tracing to examine how Asian Americans stand in solidarity with other people of color in hashtag activism on Twitter across multiple events. Tweets were collected targeting key time periods across events which precipitate the hashtags, specifically analyzing the discursive practices surrounding the hashtags to yield insight into the *how* of combating dominant discourse which reinforce racial order. In addition, guided interviews were conducted with Asian American activists to examine how their activities are a reflection of a resistant construction of their identities.

CHAPTER III

DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN #ASIANS4BLACKLIVES AND

#JUSTICEFORAKAIGURLEY

In this chapter and in Chapter 4 I report the findings of the critical discourse

analysis across time for the three hashtags selected for analysis: #Asians4BlackLives,

#JusticeForAkaiGurley, and #NotYourWedge. These analyses answer my second

research question, what discursive practices do Asian Americans employ in hashtag

activism on Twitter around interracial coalition building?

The critical discourse analysis conducted across time is conducive to answering

this question because the activities around these hashtags problematize various issues

related to the racial order and interracial relationships. In doing so they reveal and

challenge existing dominant discourse through hashtag activity. Tracking the change in

discourse across time gives me a picture of how participants respond to real time events

both online and offline.

I've taken the Twitter data set for each hashtag and created a histogram graph to

visualize the spikes in tweets across time. This allowed me to see when tweets using

specific hashtags spiked, and then analyzes the discourse during those spikes and the

events which precipitated those tweets. To constitute a spike, I decided that there needs

to be a higher than usual number of tweets within a given time period as visualized by

the histogram. In these findings I make a distinction between major spikes and minor

spikes. Major spikes are heavy Twitter activity as measured by overall number. Major

spikes consist of over one hundred tweets within a given time frame. These timeframes range from two days to over three months. The lowest tweets per day average for the major spikes is 7.2 and the highest is 575 which was the #NotYourWedge town hall event that constituted a one-day spike on August 8, 2017. Minor spikes consist of less than one hundred tweets but are still concentrated Twitter activity as visually measured by the histogram. The largest minor spike consisted of 54 tweets and the smallest consisted of 31. The lowest tweets per day average was 2.4 and the highest 36. Although 2.4 tweets per day is low rate, this activity was concentrated when compared to the activity across the rest of #NotYourWedge and also corresponded with an external event, the publication of new information on the SFFA v. Harvard case by mainstream news organizations.

Within each spike I decided to analyze original tweets, retweets with comments, and replies to tweets. I chose not to analyze retweets without comments. This is because the retweets without comments do not add any additional discourse to the conversation. While they will give an indication of how popular a particular tweet is, the main concern of the current study is the discursive practices and not necessarily the volume. In addition to the tweets, I collected and analyzed other materials referenced in the tweets, including newspaper articles, official statements from influential organizations, blogposts, press releases, and legal documents.

In this chapter I focus on the analysis of two hashtags, #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley. These hashtags were selected for analysis because they featured prominent discursive activity around interracial solidarity by Asian Americans activists,

scholars, and organizations. #Asians4BlackLives was in response to several different high-profile cases of African American victims of police violence. #JusticeForAkaiGurley centered around the shooting death of Akai Gurley and the subsequent indictment, conviction, and sentencing of Office Peter Liang.

I argue that the Asian American activists use discursive strategies to redefine Asian American identity and positionality in the racial order (Kim, 2000). Asian American activists do this through the act of building alternative racial projects (Omi & Winant, 2015) to create different racial formations. These alternative racial projects, though, are provisional and liminal. The racial projects consist of participation in hashtag activism and the employment of counterdiscursive strategies, which include acknowledging anti-blackness in Asian American communities and calling for accountability for all police officers who commit crimes. As subjects of a white supremacist system, Asian American activists are creating a counterpublic with alternative interpretations of their racialization. They do this through using their race as technology. Coleman (2009) conceptualizes technology as a mechanism, a way to accomplish a goal. She applies this concept of technology to race. Race is used by a white supremacist system to maintain the status quo. Racialization of Asian Americans as a model minority are a means to an end. Asian American activists wield their race as technology to create racial projects which combat the white supremacist system.

The analysis in this chapter covers Twitter activity using the hashtags from November 2014 to July 2016, while Chapter 4 covers #NotYourWedge activity from August 2017 to October 2019. Activities in #Asians4BlackLives and

#JusticeForAkaiGurley overlap with one another at a couple of points in time and coincide with several important events. Data collected and analyzed in this chapter include the tweets using the two hashtags, but also press releases, blog posts, articles, and other online documents which are referenced in the tweets.

In this chapter I first give an overview of the spikes which coincide with what LeGreco and Tracy (2009) term 'ruptures' across time. I then introduce four discursive strategies that recur in the next chapter. First, some of the discursive strategies Asian Americans use change over time in response to ruptures. Specifically, Asian American complicity in anti-blackness becomes more apparent following ruptures in the Peter Liang-Akai Gurley fatal shooting incident. Second, participants refer to a white supremacist racial order which perpetuates itself through racial oppression. They observe that this white supremacist racial order is sanctioned and carried out by the state and is naturalized. Third, participants identify complicity in the racial order in the form of anti-blackness and pro-whiteness, and thereby redefine Asian American position in the racial order in provisional and liminal ways. Fourth, in redefining our racial order Asian Americans also redefine our identities through the racial projects of Twitter discourse (Omi & Winant, 2015). In the last section I argue that participation in these hashtags is an example of using race as technology (Coleman, 2009; Chun, 2013) within a counterpublic space on Twitter.

#Asians4BlackLives

On December 15, 2014, an Asian activist group calling themselves #Asians4BlackLives joined the groups #BlackLivesMatter, Blackout Collective, and #BlackBrunch in shutting down the Oakland Police Department (OPD). This was the first use of the #Asians4BlackLives hashtag. The activist group #Asians4BlackLives stated their intention was to put "our bodies on the line in response to a national call to shut down institutions that perpetuate the war on Black people" (#Asians4BlackLives, 2014). Asian protestors blockaded the doors to the building and remained there. The positioning offered a symbolic and literal gesture of Asian Americans putting their physical bodies on the line to express solidarity with black victims. The OPD shutdown occurred after the high-profile deaths of African American males Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Akai Gurley, and the grand jury acquittal of Officer Darren Wilson who shot and killed Michael Brown.

Subsequently, the hashtag was used in response to several other events. Overall there were four major spikes in activity using #Asians4BlackLives. The first was the OPD shutdown and BART protest, which were the start of the #Asians4BlackLives movement. The second was the #Asians4BlackLives Lunar New York event where activists passed out envelopes of well wishes with messages of Asian-Black solidarity. The third was a live tweeted Google hangout organized by 18 Million Rising after Peter Liang's conviction of killing Akai Gurley. The final spike happened after the deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. There were also two minor spikes in activity: one coinciding with protests outside the house of Ed Lee, mayor of San Francisco January 17

to January 19, 2016, and protests outside of the Sing Tao newspaper headquarters May 18, 2016. A visual representation of the spikes is in Figure 1: #Asians4BlackLives Tweets, Replies, and Retweets With Comments.

Spike 1: OPD shutdown and BART protest

Nearly 700 tweets were made between December 15, 2014 and January 24, 2015. The tweets largely overlapped with various protests and rallies, but about half of the tweets in this spike were on the day of the OPD shutdown. The goal of the OPD shutdown protestors was to shut the Oakland police department down starting at 7:30am for the duration of four hours and 28 minutes; four hours for the amount of time Michael Brown lay in the street after being fatally shot, and 28 to represent that every 28 hours a black person is killed by police, security, or vigilantes. According to an interview I conducted with Sarah, a respondent familiar with the #Asian4BlackLives Oakland group, Asian Americans were physically centered in the protest as a way to make a statement that black protestors should not have to put themselves at physical risk in barring the doors to the police department because they are physically targeted on a regular basis. Protestors held a banner that read, "End the war on black people. #Asians4BlackLives."

Also concurrent with the first spike as the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) protest. On November 28, 2014, fourteen Black Lives Matter protestors, including co-founder Alicia Garza, chained or duct taped themselves together on the platform of the West Oakland station of the BART system. They became known as the Black Friday 14.

Figure 1

#Asians4BlackLives Tweets, Replies, and Retweets With Comments
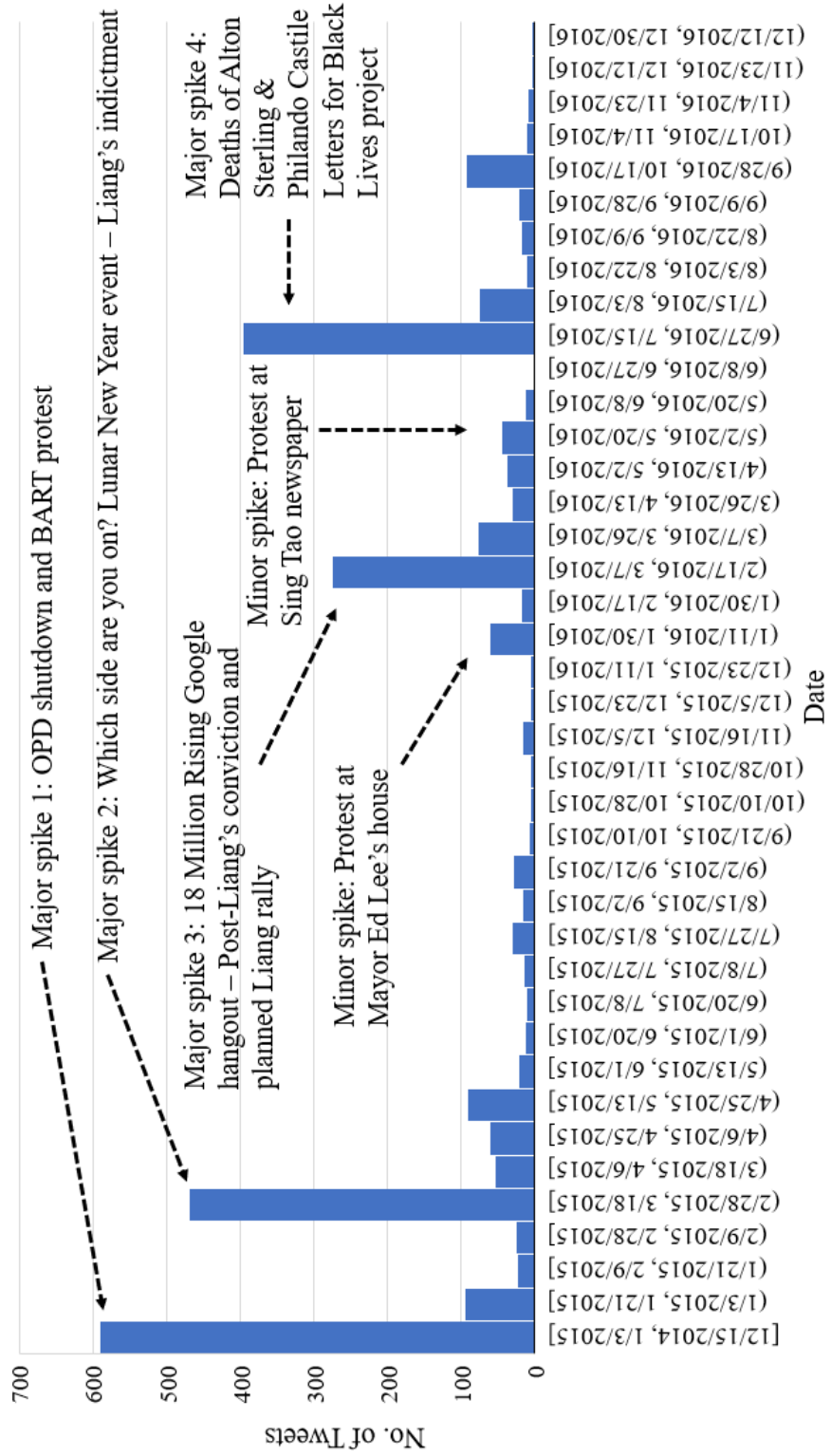
Their goal was to shut down the railway during Black Friday for four hours to represent the amount of time Michael Brown's body lay in the street after his fatal shooting by Officer Darren Wilson (Fernandez & Smith, 2014).

#Asians4BlackLives statements of solidarity

A total of about 230 tweets occurred in the 4 hours and 28 minutes of the shutdown. Many tweets consisted of live descriptions of the event unfolding; several users consistently provided updates on the shutdown, including descriptions of when protestors were arrested and songs or spoken statements from participants. For example, one participant tweeted, "@mrdaveyd check out @juliacarriew for live on the ground reporting for #Asians4Blacklives #ShutdownOPD #EndTheWar" (Wang, 2014). In addition to the description of the events, often repeated language in the tweets during this spike were "this is what solidarity looks like," "End the war on black people," and Asian Americans putting our bodies on the line because we have historically been used to prop up anti-black racism. All of this language is directly from #Asians4BlackLives in Oakland, whose official statement on the OPD shutdown was frequently linked to in these tweets:

> We stand on the doorstep of the Oakland Police Department today as a group of Asians putting our bodies on the line in response to a national call to shut down institutions that perpetrate the war on Black people… As Asians, we recognize the ways in which we've been used historically to prop up the anti-Black racism

that allows this violence to occur… Many of our Asian brothers and sisters

around the country have made powerful statements in support of ending the war

on Black people and shown up to protests. We hope that Asian communities will

join us in reflecting on and continuing to practice an intentional Black-Asian

solidarity (#Asians4BlackLives, 2014, "#Asians4BlackLives Statement on OPD

Action" section).

The statement defines solidarity as both powerful statements calling for the end of the

war on black people and showing up to protest with them.

Lawsuit against BART protestors

From January 6 to 22, around thirty tweets were made using #Asians4BlackLives

in support of the Black Friday 14. Most of these tweets and accompanying photos appear

to be from an #Asians4BlackLives organizing meeting in Oakland on January 7. The

tweets were accompanied by photos of Asian Americans holding signs with various

hashtags and phrases including #dropthecharges, Black Power Matters, Black Resistance

Matters, #notonedime, #Asians4BlackLives, #BlackLivesMatter, and #BlackFriday14.

Many of these hashtags also appeared in the text of the tweets. In addition, several

photos featured Asian Americans also raising their fists in homage to the Black Power

symbol.

Using the additional hashtags #BlackLivesMatter and #BlackFriday14 increased

the reach of the statements of solidarity to other Twitter users who might have been

following those hashtags. In addition, the tweets also called on @SFBART, the official

BART twitter handle, to drop the charges against the Black Friday 14, further attempting

to elevate the message of solidarity by Asian Americans with the Black Lives Matter

movement. For example, ".@SFBART, drop the charges against the #BlackFriday14!

#not1dime #BlackLivesMatter #Asians4BlackLives" (Chatterjee, 2015). These tweets of

solidarity with the Black Friday 14 consisted largely of photos and hashtags. Similar to

the discourse during the OPD Shutdown, discourse regarding Asian-Black solidarity,

politics, and positionality were absent.

Spike 2: Which side are you on? The Lunar New Year event

A second major spike in activity occurred between March 7 and March 10, 2015 for a

total of 416 tweets, with steady activity from then until May 28 totaling 279 tweets. On

March 7, #Asians4BlackLives members went out to San Francisco's Chinatown during

the annual Lunar New Year Parade and passed out red envelopes with special messages

of new year blessings and call to solidarity with the African American community. The

envelopes contained cards which read,

> As Asian Americans, we enjoy many rights that were fought for and won by
>
> Black liberation movements. Today, we too have the power to stand on the side
>
> of justice. We can create harmony by building strong relationships between
>
> Black and Asian communities and standing together for Black Lives. Which side
>
> are you on? (Wong, 2015)

In a press release on the day of the Lunar New Year Parade, #Asians4BlackLives called for the Asian American communities "to join us in challenging anti-black racism by talking with your family and co-workers or supporting organized direct actions to call for an end to the war on Black people" (#Asians4BlackLives, 2015).

Concurrent with the Lunar New Year event was an article published in Salon by writer Julia Carrie Wong. Wong's article heavily informed the discourse of solidarity at this point in time. Nearly a third of the tweets between March 7 and 10 and a total of 196 tweets over the span of the spike linked to the Salon magazine article. The high volume of linking to this particular article, coupled with earlier endorsements by protestors to follow Wong's Twitter during the OPD Shutdown, indicate an endorsement of how Wong framed the #Asians4BlackLives message.

Wong described Asian American culpability in systems of oppression of African Americans through history in her March 8 article: "in turning from protests against police brutality to outreach at the Chinese New Year parade, #Asians4BlackLives is refocusing its energies on confronting the ongoing existence of anti-black prejudice within many Asian immigrant communities" (Wong, 2015, para. 5). Wong's emphasis on anti-black prejudice is a change in the discourse on Asian Americans' role in the racial order from passivity to active complicity.

From mid-March to the end of May there was steady use of #Asians4BlackLives around several events. Some references were made to the events and campaigns that the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) organized, who feature more

prominently in the #JusticeForAkaiGurley section. In addition, on April 20 and May 5, two gatherings occurred to protest the sale of public land on East 12th Street in Oakland to build luxury condos which would result in gentrification of the neighborhood and push out African, Latinx, and Asian American residents.

Another event around which #Asians4BlackLives users rallied were the protests after the death of Freddie Gray on April 19. Protests began on April 18 and lasted for two weeks. #Asians4BlackLives was used to express solidarity and included other hashtags #BlackLivesMatter, #BaltimoreUprising and #BlackSpring, photos from protests over the course of several days, an image that read "Koreans stand with Baltimore" in both English and Korean, and general expressions of solidarity such as this one: "Join @18MR in supporting #BaltimoreUprising #Asians4BlackLives… via @pakouher #aapi" (Kamisugi, 2015). None of these activities featured as prominently as the Lunar New Year event and the call to examine anti-black racism within the Asian American community. However, they are an indication of the wide use of #Asians4BlackLives across the United States to chronicle on-the-ground expressions of solidarity.

Spike 3: 18 Million Rising Google Hangout

On February 19, 2016, 18 Million Rising (18MR), an Asian American advocacy organization, hosted a live Google Hangout panel discussion titled "Mutual Accountability, Mutual Liberation: A Conversation on #Asians4BlackLives" in response to the Peter Liang conviction a week earlier, and one day before a planned pro-Liang

rally in Cadman Plaza in Brooklyn. The moderator of the discussion, Dr. Diane Wong, stated that the goal of the hangout was to "reframe and re-center the conversation. Today we hope to have an open and honest dialogue about police violence, interracial solidarity, organizing, and what Asians4BlackLives look like in practice on the ground in New York City and beyond" (18 Million Rising, 2016).

Users live-tweeted 82 times during the course of the hangout. Live tweeters picked up on two themes discussed during the hangout around Asian-Black solidarity: structural racism against African Americans, and anti-blackness and pro-whiteness in Asian American communities. These two themes accounted for about a third of the Twitter activity during the time. Here is an example of comments about structural and state sponsored racism: "'We want blackness to be decriminalized in America. That's what liberation looks like.' Fresco @BlackYouthProj #Asians4BlackLives" (Jaime-Jin [cooking emoji], 2016). State sponsored oppression affects all people of color who are on the ladder of a racist hierarchy and as such there need to be systemic changes.

Anti-blackness and pro-whiteness among Asian American communities was also highlighted, as demonstrated by the following tweet: "How does class & desire to access whiteness/colorism shape API support 4 Peter Liang, derailing of #Justice4AkaiGurley #Asians4BlackLives" (Kim, 2016). This discourse equates the attitudes of pro-Liang supporters with anti-blackness and pro-whiteness, and active participation in a structural system that continues to oppress not just African Americans, but also Asian Americans. Advocating for systemic change means to fight for justice for Gurley and other victims of state sponsored violence.

Spike 4: The deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile and Letters for Black Lives

On July 5, 2016, Alton Sterling, a black man, was shot and killed by two white police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Baton Rouge police officers were notified that a man was threatening someone with a gun outside a store. Sterling was selling DVDs outside the store and was confronted by the officers, one of whom shot and killed Sterling within 90 seconds of approaching him (Chavez, 2018). The very next day, Philando Castile, a black man, was shot and killed by a Latino police officer in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. Jeronimo Yanez, the police officer, pulled Castile over because of a brake light problem. Castile informed Yanez that he had a firearm on him. Five seconds after Castile says he is not pulling his firearm out, Yanez fired seven shots into the car (DeLong & Braunger, 2017). Neither of the police officers who shot and killed Sterling were charged with wrongdoing. The Latino officer, Jeronimo Yanez, was charged with manslaughter of Castile but was later acquitted. Twitter activity spiked between July 6 and 12, with approximately 365 tweets during this time.

Though the theme of anti-blackness in Asian American communities was still represented, what featured prominently were tweets of general solidarity which accounted for over a third of the total tweets in this spike. Some tweets consisted only of collections of hashtags like this example: "#Asians4BlackLives #AltonSterling #PhilandoCastile #BlackLivesMatter #NoJusticeNoPeace #StopKillingInnocentPeople" (T.Anh.T, 2016). Other tweets were accompanied by direct messages of solidarity through text and images. One participant tweeted, "#AAPI 'Standing in solidarity, this

group is now saying in unison: #BlackLivesMatter.' #Asians4BlackLives" (Cordova,

2016). About a dozen or so of these solidarity tweets were accompanied by images of

Asian Americans holding a banner which read, "#Asians4BlackLives. End the War on

Black People," the same statement used during the OPD shutdown a year and a half

earlier.

On July 7, 2016, a group called Letters for Black Lives started a crowdsourced

letter project in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Around 55 of the tweets in

the spike included links or references to this open letter. The purpose was to create a

resource for solidarity minded Asian Americans to circulate to their older, immigrant

family members. The google doc where the letter is housed stated the primary goal of

the letter was to call for 1st and 2nd generation Asian American immigrants to empathize

and understand #Asians4BlackLives and by extension Black Lives Matter

(LettersforBlackLives, n.d.). Direct action on the part of elders was not emphasized. The

letter had over 200 contributors and was translated into over 30 languages. A dramatized

reading of the English version of the letter was filmed and uploaded onto YouTube on

July 11.

The letter expresses support for the Black Lives Matter movement and offers a

gentle indictment of anti-blackness in Asian American communities by observing how

Asian Americans have the impulse to distance ourselves from African American victims,

whom the media paint as deserving of being shot (LettersforBlackLives, n.d.b). The

letter was shared using #Asians4BlackLives and was often paired with

#BlackLivesMatter. This functioned to express solidarity with African Americans. It

also was used to promote and crowdsource labor in crafting an open letter of support written to the families of solidarity minded Asian Americans.

Minor spikes: Protest at Mayor Lee's house and at Sing Tao newspapers

On January 17, 2016, Asian American activists demonstrated in front of San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee's house. There were 55 tweets between January 17 and 19 on the protests. Based on photos that accompanied the tweets, the protests called for the termination of the police officers involved in the deaths of Mario Woods, Amilcar Lopez and Alex Nieto, who were all victims of police violence in San Francisco from 2014 to 2015, and Greg Suhr, the Police Chief of the San Francisco Police Department during these killings. Mario Woods was shot and killed after police said he would not drop the knife he was holding ("Newly-released video of SFPD," 2018). Amilcar Lopez was shot and killed after police responded to a 911 report of a man chasing another man with a knife ("SFPD Officers Cleared in Shooting," 2017). Alex Nieto was shot and killed by police for allegedly pointing a taser at them (Solnit, 2016). The protests also called for reallocating financial resources to affordable housing for black and brown people. The tweets mostly consisted of hashtags and photos of the protests, with several using the language of staging an intervention such as this one from the #Asians4BlackLives Twitter handle: "#Asians4BlackLives at @MajorEdLee's house 2 stage an intervention&call on him to demonstrate that #BlackLivesMatter #WakeUpEdLee #ReclaimMLK" (#Asians4BlackLives, 2016).

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On May 18, 2016, Asians4BlackLivesNYC and other Asian American activists protested outside of the Sing Tao, a Chinese language newspaper. A total of 40 tweets referred to the protest from May 17 to May 20. Photos accompanying the tweets showed images of Sing Tao newspapers folded into doves with the names of people killed by police, including Mike Brown, Sandra Bland, and Akai Gurley. They also showed Asian American protestors holding a large banner in English and Chinese, the English reading "Listen Sing Tao, Black Lives Matter." Sing Tao's newspapers were also written over with accompanying tweet content such as this one: "This is what our media could look like, we need to call in our folks and hold them accountable #Asians4BlackLives" (Wong, 2016). The headlines taped over the Sing Tao newspaper are in both Chinese and English. The English headlines read "Our fight for justice as Asian Americans is tied to the struggles of Black communities," "Let's support one another," "NYPD patrols Asian and black communities to protect the wealthy status quo," "Long history of resistance, solidarity, for Asians in U.S."

#JusticeForAkaiGurley

On November 20, 2014, Akai Gurley was shot by Peter Liang in an unlit stairway during a routine patrol in a housing project in New York City. #JusticeForAkaiGurley appeared the next day on Twitter. This hashtag is unique in the sense that it is the only hashtag examined that isn't specifically for use by Asian Americans; no meaning is ascribed to it that hails any specific racial group to participate. However, it became a significant hashtag to examine the discourse of Asian American

activists because of its prominent use by Asian Americans – the first being led by the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) in March of 2015, several months after Gurley's death and the start of the hashtag. There were a total of three spikes in Asian American use of the hashtag which corresponded with several different events, two major and one minor as shown in Figure 2: #JusticeForAkaiGurley Tweets, Replies, and Retweets With Comments. The first major spiked corresponded with a vigil that CAAAV organized in Brooklyn in March of 2015 to express support for Akai Gurley and his family from the Asian American community. The second major spike coincided with several events: CAAV's selfie campaign in which Asian Americans took photos of themselves with hashtags expressing solidarity, an influential written article by writer and activist Soya Jung, and an open letter published by CAAAV. The last spike, a minor one, occurred after Peter Liang's conviction of manslaughter committed against Akai Gurley.

Spike 1: CAAAV's vigil

On March 15, 2015, CAAAV organized a noon vigil in front of One Police Plaza demanding justice for Akai Gurley. Among those accompanying CAAAV and other Asian American activists was Hertencia Petersen, Gurley's aunt. CAAAV and other Asian Americans live tweeted the event and created a spike of 123 tweets from March 15 to March 17. This spike was the second densest concentration of tweets since the creation of the hashtag within a three-day span – the densest was 142 tweets from February 24 to February 26, 2016.

Figure 2

#JusticeForAkaiGurley Tweets, Replies, and Retweets With Comments
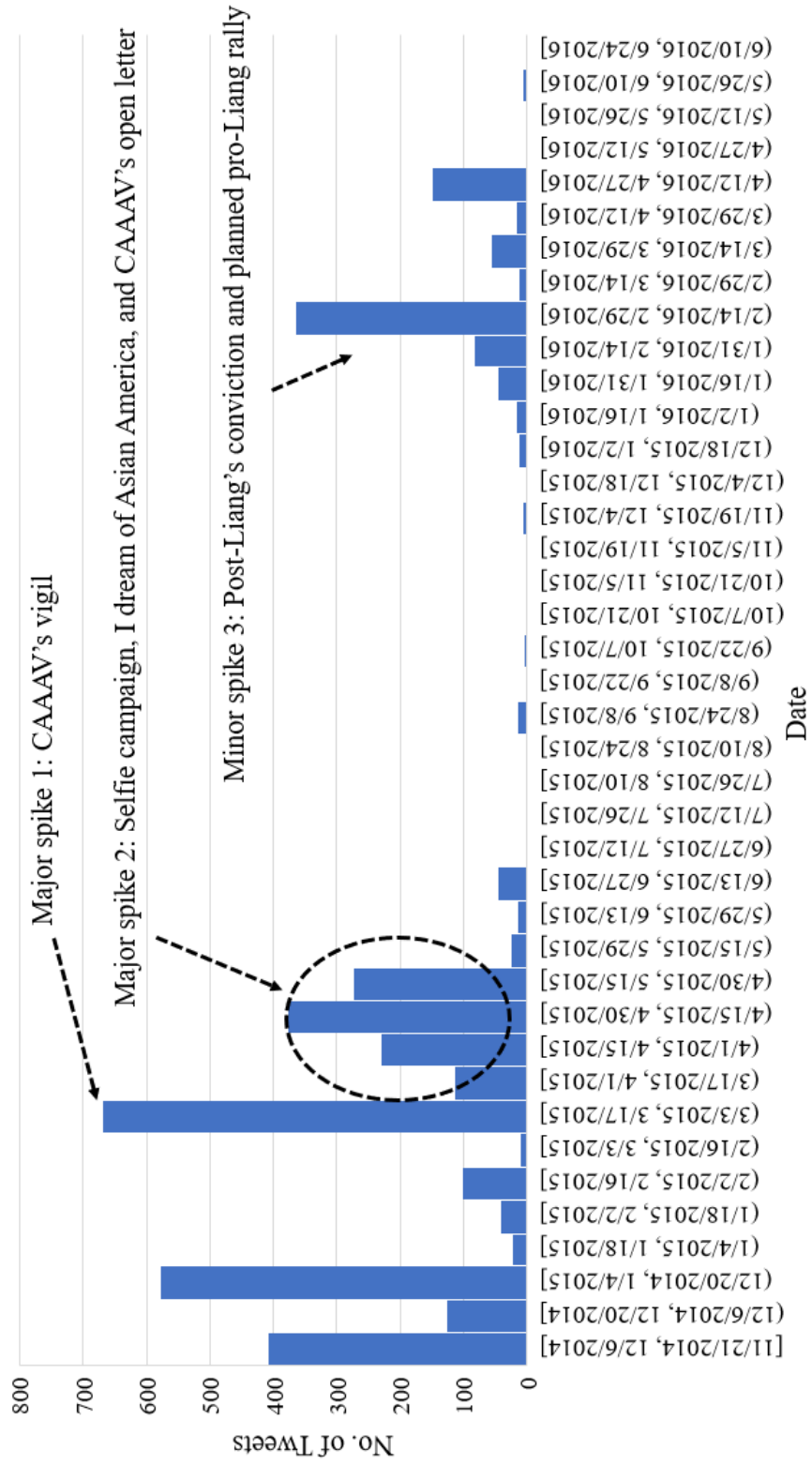
The central message as articulated by live tweeters of the event was that all cops should be held accountable. The call was not just for Peter Liang to be convicted of the killing of Akai Gurley, but was an indictment of an entire police system that privileged officers, mostly white, who killed African Americans. For example, CAAAV tweeted, "We demand accountability from all officers no matter their race #JusticeforAkaiGurley #BlackLivesMatter" (CAAAV, 2015). Images of the event tweeted by participants show a large white banner with text in both Chinese and English that also read, "Accountability of all officers."

Tweeters identified Asian American support for the African American community in New York City. Several Asian Americans specifically self-identified their racial or ethnic identity in their tweets of support for justice for Gurley, like writer and activist Soya Jung who tweeted, "I'm Asian American and I support #JusticeforAkaiGurley, b/c ALL police should be held accountable. #BlackLivesMatter" (Jung, 2015). These tweeters self identify as Asian in support of justice for Gurley, some while calling for accountability for Liang and for all police officers. They would rather be on the side of justice than to look out for the interests of the Asian American community. This conception of justice and accountability is juxtaposed to the pro-Liang conception of justice and fairness and Liang receiving the privileges afforded with whiteness.

In addition, users combined the #JusticeForAkaiGurley hashtag with other content to demonstrate interracial solidarity, including additional hashtags such as #Asians4BlackLives and #APIs4BlackLives, and tagging the Twitter handle

@Asians4BlkLives. A few also coupled these hashtags with #blacklivesmatter, increasing the reach of the message of Asian Black solidarity. Finally, a couple tweeters quoted a vigil speaker who referenced black support for Kang Wong, an elderly Chinese man who was beaten by police officer when he was caught jaywalking in January of 2014 in New York, implying the need for Asian Americans to stand with African American communities.

Spike 2: Selfie campaign, I dream of Asian America, and CAAAV's open letter

The second spike in activity was precipitated by several overlapping events in April of 2015: CAAAV's selfie campaign, the sharing of an article titled "I dream of Asian America" by writer and activist Soya Jung, and the sharing of an open letter created by CAAAV and signed by over fifty AAPI groups in support of justice for Gurley.

On April 2015, CAAAV initiated a call for Asian Americans to participate in the #JusticeForAkaiGurley selfie campaign. In it, CAAAV identified that news media have controlled the narrative of the event in a way that is not representative of the support for Gurley from Asian American communities. CAAAV then calls for Asian Americans to express their support: "RIGHT NOW, it is critical for Asian American communities, especially Chinese, South & Southehast [*sic*] Asians, to move our communities in support of Black-led organizing against police brutality. We believe a strong turnout will send a powerful message" (Seeding Change, 2015, para. 3). Specifically, CAAAV chose to take advantage of the affordances of new media by calling for participation in a selfie

hashtag campaign. They encouraged users to take a photo holding a sign with the hashtags #JusticeforAkaiGurley, #holdALLcopsaccountable, and #BlackLivesMatter, and current location to show national support. Then they ask users write a short paragraph of support and share this selfie on social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram – and send the photo and paragraph to CAAAV.

CAAAV and other users posted their selfies on Twitter, but users also shared them via Facebook and Instagram; CAAAV provided links to their collection of selfies on their Facebook page, so selfies were collected from both Twitter and Facebook. A total of about 70 selfie posts were collected, though this was not exhaustive as I was not able to collect many from Instagram. Most of the users posted selfies holding signs and showing their faces with the aforementioned hashtags. The selfie campaign thus largely reproduced the discourse of holding all cops accountable. The selfie acted to visually identify the supporters as Asian American.

On April 6, 2015, writer and activist Soya Jung wrote a piece entitled, "I dream of Asian America" which was tweeted over 30 times in the course of the month of April. First, Jung couches the Liang-Gurley incident within the broader history of anti-blackness as demonstrated in the 1965 Watts rebellion, the 1992 Los Angeles riots, and Ferguson in 2014:

This is nothing new, and it affects all of us in different ways. It is an ongoing challenge in the United States to understand the deeply racist origins of

American policing, and to work diligently to hold the police as a public

institution accountable (Jung, 2016, "2. Anti-Blackness" section, para. 1).

Second, given this history of anti-blackness, Jung asks how Asian Americans will

respond given our ethnic, political, and economic diversity. She poignantly poses the

question, "With whom will we align ourselves, and for what?" The alternative to

solidarity with Gurley and the black community is to "go it alone and get what we can as

the pattern of the past three generations continues to play out." In other words, the

alternative is being insular. It is using anti-blackness as a tool to perpetuate model

minority behavior.

On April 15, 2015, Tweeters began posting calls to sign CAAAV's open letter

for Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) to support justice for Gurley. Over 35

tweets referenced the letter from April into early May. "We stand with Akai Gurley's

family and all those who have lost loved ones to police violence" (Angry Asian Man,

2015, para. 9). Consistent with the discursive strategies during the vigil in March 2015

and the selfie campaign, the open letter identifies need for accountability for police

officers. Accountability for all officers is not an acontextual, race-blind truth to aspire to;

rather, it is needed because of the unjust killings of African Americans, and Asian

Americans are in a position to demand that accountability.

In addition, the letter expresses Asian American solidarity with Gurley based on

historic partnerships and based on empathy. It reads, "[o]ur history shows us that when

Asian communities work together in solidarity with Black communities, we all benefit.

We also recognize that the Asian community in the US has historically benefited from Black-led movements for racial and economic justice." The open letter also contains an appeal to empathy for the African American community based on the experiences of some within the Asian American community: "This should be unacceptable to all of us, especially as many of our own community members, from South Asians post-9/11 to Southeast Asian Communities, are also targeted by police departments across the country."

One more minor spike occurred around the pre-trial hearing for Liang on May 14. Forty-nine tweets were made between May 11 and May 14. The tweets were coordinated by CAAAV and other Twitter users encouraging supporters to join them physically at the Brooklyn Supreme Criminal Court to demand justice for Gurley. In this case, most of the tweets either promoted the event (there were 17 tweets leading up to the event) or were accompanied by photos from the event with little additional discursive activity beyond descriptions of the rally. For example, one participant tweeted, "#AkaiGurley rally outside #Brooklyn courthouse as #nypd officer #peterliang trial begins today #JusticeForAkaiGurley" (Jeske, 2015). In addition, references to Asian American solidarity did not feature prominently. For example, only four hashtags were used in conjunction with #JusticeForAkaiGurley to signal Asian American support (#Asians4BlackLives twice, and #apis, #asians, and #asianamericans once each). The spike here doesn't offer any additional insight into the ways Asian Americans expressed solidarity with Akai Gurley and the African American community; it serves as a

microcosm for the broader discursive strategies employed by CAAAV and other activists.

<p align="center">*Spike 3: Post-Liang's conviction*</p>

Liang was convicted of manslaughter on February 11, 2016 and then sentenced on April 19, 2016 to five years' probation and 800 hours of community service with no prison time. There was a minor spike in the #JusticeForAkaiGurley hashtag activity post-Liang's conviction: there were around 46 tweets citing various sources in response to the conviction.[2]

After Liang's conviction, a nationwide protest was planned in over 30 cities for February 20, 2016 (Justice For Peter Liang, n.d.). Thousands of protestors rallied in Cadman Plaza in Brooklyn, New York. A whitehouse.gov petition had 124,000 signatures demanding that Liang's indictment be withdrawn. Reports were of protestors

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[2] I must make an important note on my analysis of this section. I encountered a little difficulty with isolating Asian American activity during this time on Twitter. #JusticeForAkaiGurley was used by many people of different races to respond to the events. The conviction and sentencing of Liang wasn't a specifically Asian American event, and as such people of many different races and ethnicities responded. Once I collected all the tweets around #JusticeForAkaiGurley, I sifted through the user profiles on Twitter and used a combination of a few criteria, phenotypic appearance, name, and self-identification as an Asian American individual or organization, to determine Asian American activity on Twitter. These were lifted from the overall activity and analyzed. If race or ethnicity of the user was undetermined, I left the tweet out. I did not make any further distinction in their identities (desi, filipinx for example) because the topic was regarding a broadly Asian American incident.

There are limitations to this method of isolating tweets. For one, as race is socially constructed, it can be difficult to be certain of a person's race based purely on their phenotypic characteristics or last name. Second, determining someone's race or ethnicity based on observations can impose external assumptions about the Twitter user. For example, a user may be of Asian descent but may choose not to identify as Asian American. Finally, there is a danger of underreporting if a Twitter user does not disclose their racial identity in their bio, handle, name, or through any photographs. Selecting those who are explicit about their racialized identities may not be representative of the discourse of Asian American users on Twitter.

chanting 'Don't be a scapegoat,' 'justice for Peter Liang,' and 'No scapegoat!' (Fuchs, 2016, Illustre, 2016). Justice for Peter Liang, a network of pro-Liang Asian Americans, claimed that over 100,000 Chinese Americans in over 30 major cities in the United States and Canada rallied for justice for Liang (Justice For Peter Liang, n.d.).

The spike in activity here offered a counterdiscourse to the media's prominent coverage of the pro-Liang advocates, including the rallies. For instance, two *New York Times* articles that give account of Liang's guilty verdict on February 12 mostly highlighted pro-Liang reactions (Nir & Chen, 2016; Rojas, 2016). One article reads, "The officer slumped in his seat after the jury's decision was announced, and those feelings of defeat were mirrored by many in the city's Chinese-American community. In the weeks since then, that sentiment has hardened and spread beyond New York" (Rojas, 2016).

The tweets in this spike linked to a dozen different articles and letters by various Asian American writers, academics, and organizations. Some examples of authors include Annie Tan (2016), writer and activist and niece of Vincent Chin, who is known for being the victim of a high profile murder perpetrated by two white auto workers in the 1980s who mistook him for Japanese, the Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO) (n.d.) and Dr. OiYan Poon (2016), an associate professor of higher education leadership. Each was only shared a handful of times, however, so there were a variety of responses, to the Liang indictment and to the pro-Liang rallies which resulted. Despite the wide variety of sources to which users linked, some common themes in the articles and letters were accountability for all, living within a white supremacist system,

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and the choice between aspiring to whiteness and complicity in an unjust policing system or solidarity with other people of color.

Some of the remaining 30 or so tweets in the spike following Liang conviction repeated the themes covered here so far – accountability for all officers and complicity in white supremacy. Other tweets described the conviction of Liang ("BREAKING: Peter Liang guilty of manslaughter for killing Akai Gurley"), offered support for CAAAV ("@caaav THANK YOU for your stand against injustice"), or consisted of hashtags only ("#JusticeForAkaiGurley #blacklivesmatter #Asians4BlackLives").

The response using #JusticeForAkaiGurley by the Asian American community was sparse after Liang's sentencing on April 19, 2016. There were only 11 tweets between April 19 and 22. This is surprising considering the high level of engagement with the hashtag in the aftermath of Gurley's death, particularly by CAAAV. One explanation for the sparse response may be that CAAAV reported that they received threats and harassment from people who disagreed with their stance (King, 2016) and, according to an interview with one respondent, the staff members had their personal information doxed online and had to work from home the week of Liang's conviction.

Discursive strategies

There are four main discursive strategies employed in the hashtags: discourse change across ruptures, identification of a white supremacist system, liminal and provisional position in the racial order and redefinition of identities through racial projects. My overall thesis is that interracial solidarity discourse redefines Asian

American identity and place in the racial order in liminal and provisional ways. Participants in the counterpublic on the Twittersphere and beyond do this by building alternative racial projects, and use race as a technology to accomplish this goal.

Discourse changes across ruptures

The discursive strategies used by Asian Americans in online activism changed over time. Prior to Peter Liang's indictment in February of 2015 for killing Akai Gurley, the discourse around #Asians4BlackLives acknowledged Asian Americans have been used to prop up anti-black racism as evidenced by the #Asians4BlackLives Oakland group's official statements, but did not emphasize the existence of anti-blackness within our own communities. The difference was between passivity and agency. As was demonstrated in #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley, Asian Americans began naming and owning the presence of anti-blackness in our communities after Liang's indictment. The high profile killing of an African American man by an Asian American police officer precipitated several different discursive strategies aimed at both exonerating and condemning Liang's actions by Asian American communities. Pro-Liang discourse framed Asian Americans as racial scapegoats to placate a community angry at police violence. Instead of calling for charges for all officers who killed African Americans, pro-Liang advocates called for charges against Liang specifically to be dropped. Proponents for justice for Akai Gurley chose to argue for accountability for all officers, including the white officers who were not convicted of killing.

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I argue that it is because of support Liang received by some members of the

Asian American community that Asian Americans concerned with interracial solidarity

needed to acknowledge anti-blackness within our communities. This is evident in the

influential articles written post-Liang's indictment by Julia Carrie Wong and Soya Jung,

referenced in #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley tweets respectively, both

of whom alluded to the racial tensions in the early 1990s which culminated in the race

riots in Los Angeles and subsequent anti-black sentiments in Asian America.

The above demonstrates that discourse is connected to social practice and as such

contextual, as Wodak and Meyer (2015) observed in their framework of critical

discourse studies (CDS). In addition I used discourse tracing to track the practices of

Asian Americans across Twitter through time. Discourse tracing helps "critically analyze

the power relations associated with change and proceed with a systematic data analysis

process" (LeGreco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1517). It helps in understanding how Asian

Americans respond to event changes – what LeGreco and Tracy (2009) term ruptures –

which can range from significant to subtle. The February 2015 indictment of Liang

brought once again to mainstream consciousness the history of tension between Asian

Americans and African Americans, stoked by mainstream media coverage of pro-Liang

advocates. This rupture forced the discourse to change: Asian American communities

needed to acknowledge their anti-blackness in order to express interracial solidarity.

Anti-blackness discourse, however, became less emphasized in

#Asians4BlackLives after the deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile in July of

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2016. One reason for this may be because Asian Americans were not centered in either of these incidents as either perpetrator or victim.

Subordination to a white supremacist system

Second, participants refer to a white supremacist system of racial oppression. Specifically, tweets describe state sponsored killings of people of color. Twitter users also identify news media's role in reinforcing dominant discourse about Asian Americans as the model minority.

References to state sponsored killings of people of color, although not explicitly indicting a white supremacist system, imply a privilege afforded to whites that is not extended to minority communities. For example, Richart, panelist in the 18 Million Rising Google Hangout in #Asians4BlackLives, said though it was two white civilians who killed Vincent Chin in the 1980s, it was the system that failed to produce justice for the murder as the judge did not sentence the killers to any prison time. In this way, Chin has more in common with Gurley as a victim of the state's oppression of people of color. In making this comparison Richart and others draw attention to state sponsored violence against people of color, including Asian Americans. This was picked up in the live tweets. For example, the Reappropriate blog tweeted, "Meejin: 'Justice is making sure ppl's lives – particularly those of Black folks – are not taken any more by the state.' #Asians4BlackLives" (Reappropriate, 2016). In another example, references to images of CAAAV's March 2015 vigil tweeted by participants of #JusticeForAkaiGurley show a large white banner with text in both Chinese and English that also read,

"Accountability of all officers." This was a recurring discursive strategy throughout the timeline analyzed. The phrase itself appears to be a race-blind statement about accountability: no matter what race police officers are, they ought to be held accountable. Although the discourse on its face sounds postracial – the law should apply to everyone regardless of their race – the wider context indicates that it is an indictment of a racialized justice system which privileges whiteness.

Supporters of Liang framed the events in terms of racial scapegoating, racial politics, and fairness. To them, the Asian American community is experiencing racism at the hands of an unjust system. Liang is being scapegoated to placate the African American community and to protect the white police officers (Chang, 2015; Stepansky, 2015). But the call for justice and fairness for Liang doesn't include Gurley, Garner, or Brown; rather, it is an indication of Asian American desire to obtain the privileges afforded to white people. If white police officers are not held accountable, then neither should an Asian American police officer. This is what fairness means to the pro-Liang Asian Americans: choosing to aspire to whiteness and thereby complicity in a white supremacist system.

It is within this context that the discourse of accountability for all officers becomes racialized. To call for accountability for Liang and for all cops who unjustly kill African American civilians is to choose not to aspire to white privilege, but to express solidarity with black Americans. That Asian Americans make this call exposes a racist system; it is an indictment of the system which privileges whiteness. Although white supremacy and white privilege are not specifically named in this spike, the

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inclusion of 'all officers' is a reference to those officers acquitted of the killings, who are white (i.e., Darren Wilson and Daniel Pantaleo). 'Accountability of all officers,' then, not only means that Asian Americans refuse to aspire to white privilege; it means no officers should benefit from an unjust, white supremacist system.

As was established in the prior section, news media coverage has been criticized at several points throughout the data analyzed as reinforcing the white supremacist racial order. CAAAV's selfie campaign statement using #JusticeForAkaiGurley called out mainstream media for focusing on Chinese American calls to drop Liang's indictment. Post-Liang's conviction several articles were shared on Twitter continuing to encourage Asian Americans toward interracial solidarity in light of prominent news media coverage of Liang's conviction, which heavily framed the Asian American community as pro-Liang. One article shared using #Asians4BlackLives was written by Sahra Vang Nguyen (2014), who observed that any news stories that frame Asian Americans as victims of police violence do not fit the mainstream media narrative of Asian Americans as upstanding, upwardly mobile model minorities. By continuing to focus on Asian Americans as model minorities rather than victims of police oppression the media act as conduits in upholding the white supremacist racial order. This is an example of how dominant discourse is perpetuated by influential institutions such as news media.

The white supremacist system serves as the current racial order in the United States and has been so since its inception. The discursive strategies above bring into relief a racist system by unveiling naturalized racial dynamics. Hall (1990) terms these inferential racism, or naturalized representations of events and situations that have

unspoken racist premises and propositions. When pro-Liang supporters want the same

rights as other officers but do not specifically name their whiteness, racism is inferred

but hidden. Similarly, as Nguyen observed above, news media narratives naturalize

Asian Americans as the model minority, and framing Asian Americans as the victims

akin to Akai Gurley – as was done by Richart – interrogates that inferential racism. This

inferential racism acts as a racial project to build racial formations (Omi & Winant,

2015) of groups which ultimately reinforce a white supremacist racial order.

Liminal and provisional position in the racial order

Asian Americans identified our complicity in the current racial order and in

doing so attempted to redefine our position in a provisional and liminal manner in that

order. Asian American complicity in the existing racial order was a recurring discursive

strategy through both hashtags analyzed, though how visible this discourse was shifted

according to time and context. This discursive practice is reflective of Asian Americans'

unique positionality.

Asian American complicity is first demonstrated through the discourse on anti-

blackness and pro-whiteness found in #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley.

Anti-blackness manifests in Asian American communities through a history of violence

and tension. As writer Soya Jung wrote regarding Korean storeowner Soon-Ja Du's

killing of 15-year-old black teenager Latasha Harlins in 1991, "Anti-Blackness

permeates the cases of both Du and Liang, in ways that extend beyond individual

responsibility" (Jung, 2015, Section 2). Related to anti-blackness is pro-whiteness in

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Asian America. The discourse traces the historical tendency of Asian Americans to aspire to whiteness, such as during the 18 Million Rising Google Hangout event when Dr. Poon cited a Supreme Court case in which a Japanese American man argued for naturalized citizenship by claiming he was white. The present corollary to that example were Asian Americans advocating for leniency for Liang because other cops got away will killing black people, in effect attempting to claim the privilege of white police officers. These observations were met with counter examples of historic interracial coalitions and an encouragement to Asian Americans today to choose solidarity with other communities of color over anti-blackness and pro-whiteness.

When #Asians4BlackLives users shared Julia Carrie Wong's Salon article, the headline was tweeted out in the content section along with a link: "'Which side are you on?': #Asians4BlackLives confronts anti-black prejudice in Asian communities." The question, posed by #Asians4BlackLives in their Lunar New Year event in the red envelopes and on their a4bl Tumblr website, is a deliberate reference to the song, "Which Side Are You On?" by Florence Reece on the struggle of union mine workers against mining companies in the 1930s. The song was repurposed during the civil rights movement in the 1960s, and again repurposed with new lyrics during Black Lives Matter protest. During the OPD shutdown, for example, the song was sung by the Black Lives Matter group with the following altered lyrics: "Which side are you on, friends? Which side are you on? Justice for Mike Brown is justice for us all. And we will fight for freedom until justice is won" (Bay Area solidarity Action Team, 2014, 0:00 mark). In an earlier iteration of the song by Len Chandler, Pete Seeger and the Freedom Voice,

recorded and published in 1965, the question is largely posed to fellow African

Americans who may be complicit in black oppression:

Come all you bourgeois black men

With all your excess fat

A few days in the county jail

Will sure get rid of that

Come all you Uncle Tom's [*sic*]

Take that hankie from your head

Forget your fears and shed a tear

For the life of shame you led

Posing this question to the Asian American community challenges them as part

of the struggle against African American oppression. Neither the #Asians4BlackLives

group or Wong necessarily conflate the experiences and identities of Asian Americans

and African Americans; rather, the question challenges Asian Americans to stand on the

side of African Americans. Part of this is challenging the model minority myth, as Wong

observed that "the model minority myth is a tool of racism that uses Asian American

success to disprove the existence of racism against African-Americans" (para 5.). If

Asian Americans are to stand in solidarity with African Americans, they must eschew

their aspirations to climb the ladder of the racial order by leaning into the model minority myth.

These discursive strategies reflect the unique and liminal position that Asian Americans occupy in the racial order. We are simultaneously privileged enough to aspire to whiteness and be interpellated into a system which has benefitted white Americans, and have also historically experienced marginalization and harmful stereotyping. In our liminal positionality in the racial order we have become complicit in perpetuating systemic racism. We have also built coalitions with other people groups to advocate for justice. Asian Americans are presented with a choice; we can fight for advancements for ourselves, or we can advocate for justice for all marginalized communities of color. Yet rebuilding Asian American identity requires alternative racial projects, and Asian Americans have provisionally redefined our position in liminal terms. In other words, solidarity-minded Asian Americans have dismantled the racial projects that uphold white supremacy, and are beginning to build alternative racial projects. Some may be new and others may be ones used in the past. Yet it is evident that racialization from subordinate groups does not occur easily based on the fact that Asian Americans have persisted in being racialized as the model minority despite the history of the yellow power movements in the 1960s, for example.

Redefinition of racial identity through racial projects

Related to redefining our role in the racial order, Asian Americans are also deliberately redefining our own ethnic and racial identities. This is done through the

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racial project of using hashtag activities. As Omi and Winant (2015) observe, racial formation is made up of racial projects. In other words, groups become racialized through building blocks that define the significance of race in an existing social structure. Racial projects are "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meaning, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines" (p. 125). Dominant institutions dictate the racialization of certain groups through racial projects. These racial projects may be distributed through news media, for example, as is evidenced in media coverage of pro-Liang supporters. These racial projects aggregate and racialize Asian Americans broadly as the model minority.

Asian American activists contend with the model minority label throughout both hashtags. Hashtagging can function to maintain a sense of collective identity as Clark (2015) observed. However, hashtag activism can push the boundaries of conventional racializations of groups beyond maintenance to redefinition. Though outside the scope of this project, other hashtags used by Asian American activists to redefine Asian American identities include #NotYourAsianSideKick and #ModelMinorityMutiny which refer to the marginalization of Asian American women in media and black-Asian solidarity respectively (Kido Lopez, 2016; Kuo, 2017, 2018a). Asian Americans have redefined their identities in liminal and provisional ways to build symbolic solidarity with other communities of color. Because the model minority stereotype is used to perpetuate the status quo, Asian Americans must shed that label in order to build interracial solidarity.

I argue that Twitter activity constitutes new racial projects by which Asian American activists attempt to create alternative racializations to those dictated by a white supremacist system. One specific example of an alternative racial project is of the Oakland branch of Asians4Blacks' participation in the Oakland Police Department (OPD) shutdown. In that first spike of activity, #Asians4BlackLives partnered with #BlackLivesMatter, Blackout Collective, and #BlackBrunch to express solidarity. Some tweets were accompanied by images of Asian Americans standing in front of the OPD doors holding a banner which read, "#Asians4BlackLives. End the War on Black People." Sarah, an interviewee familiar with the planning of the event, spoke of the intentional decision to physically center Asian Americans in front of the OPD front doors. "[W]e know that if people are seeing a bunch of Asian faces in the media supporting Black Lives Matter, that that's gonna mean something." It sent a message that runs counter the model minority myth perpetuated by news media organizations. #Asians4BlackLives Oakland published a statement that acknowledged Asian American use in perpetuating racism: "As Asians, we recognize the ways in which we've been used to historically prop up the anti-Black racism that allows this violence to occur." Nadia Khastagir, an OPD shutdown participated, wrote that the "mainstream props us up as the 'Model Minority.' Our communities are being used so that the dominant narrative can remain intact which blames black people for poverty, which in turn justifies police profiling of black people" (Khastagir, 2014, para. 8). By putting their bodies on the line, the protestors and associated Twitter users offered an alternative racial project and challenged existing conceptions of Asian Americans.

Kuo (2018b) describes hashtags as performative of particular affinity towards a community. #Asians4BlackLives, for instance, specifically articulates an affinity and solidarity with black communities. Asian American organizations such as the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) and individuals express the same sentiments by tweeting using #JusticeForAkaiGurley. However, I argue that hashtags can function to build towards different racializations. By organizing and participating in hashtags, Asian Americans are also engaging in racial projects to redefine their own racialization. As racial identities are mutually constituted (Kim, 2000), challenging the racial order entails redefining our roles in it. However, similar to redefining our position in the racial order, Asian American alternative racialization of identity is also in its nascent stages. If we are not the model minority, then who are we? This identification as *not* the model minority also requires new racial projects and racialization to replace the stereotype. As Hall (1996a) notes regarding deconstructive approaches to identity

> there are no other, entirely different concepts with which to replace them, there is nothing to do but to continue to think with them – albeit now in their detotalized or deconstructed forms, and no longer operating within the paradigm in which they were originally generated (p. 1)

I find in my analysis of the discourse that Asian American activists deconstruct the current racializations and are perhaps in the beginning stages of building up alternative

racializations. This means our reconfigured identities remain for the time being liminal and provisional.

Asian America online

In this last section I propose viewing the interracial solidarity activities demonstrated in #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley through the metaphor of race as technology. Race as technology approaches racial projects and racialization as means to ends. Coleman (2009) describes race as a "levered mechanism" (p. 180). In the hands of a white supremacist system race is technology put to use to perpetuate itself. Asian Americans build counterpublics on Twitter through using race as technology. The work of building alternative racial projects by planning online and offline events like the town hall and CAAAV vigil, writing press releases and articles, and participating in hashtags takes advantage of the affordances granted by the social media platform. This work not only redefines Asian American racialization, it puts the Asian American identity to alternative uses to the anti-black, anti-POC purposes of the current racial order.

Race as technology

The different racializations of groups throughout history demonstrate that race is not an inherent set of characteristics. Race is made up of racial projects which determine the significance of racial markers. It has been used historically as a mechanism for oppression. Coleman (2009) describes this by using the metaphor of race as technology;

race was used "as a contraption by one people to subject another" (p. 180). In my research, it is evident that the race contraption is used by one people to subject multiple groups simultaneously. The hashtag participants note that Asians have been used as a tool to prop up anti-black racism for the purposes of upholding a white supremacist racial order. Tweets also referenced written pieces by Asian American authors who specifically emphasize that the model minority myth as a tool is used to debunk claims of oppression of African Americans.

In the hands of white supremacist institutions race is used as technology to perpetuate privileges embedded in those same institutions. However, race can be used as technology by marginalized groups as well. Coleman poses the question, "Can race survive as something other than the remnant of a traumatic history?... Imagine a contraption with a spring or a handle that creates movement and diversifies articulation. Not a trap, but rather a trapdoor through which one can scoot off to greener pastures" (p. 180). Race as a tool can be wielded in dismantling racial inequity.

Asian American activists are not without agency. Their discursive strategies changed following the Liang-Gurley shooting; participants in the hashtags began to consider the anti-blackness that is historically prevalent in Asian American communities. Asian Americans may lean in to the model minority stereotype and thereby choose the racialization that was ascribed to us in the 1960s, choosing complicity in a white supremacist system. In this case, Asian Americans become accomplices in their own racialization as tools for oppression. But those who choose to express solidarity with African American communities engage in racial projects that offer alternative

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interpretations of Asian America. For example, #Asians4BlackLives, in conjunction with #BlackBrunch and the Blackout Collective, decided to center Asian American protestors during the OPD shutdown to offer an alternative visual narrative to the ones distributed by news media of Asian Americans as model minorities and not victims of discrimination. Nguyen's and Khastagir's articles referenced in the sections above criticize mainstream narratives of Asian Americans as model minorities which have the effect of upholding white supremacy and blaming African Americans for their poverty. These protests were augmented with live-tweets of the event using #Asiasn4BlackLives. This hashtag, which was at times coupled in tweets with the better known #BlackLivesMatter, served the function of raising the profile of this interracial project as an alternative representation and interpretation of Asian American identities.

Race is significant in the purpose it serves within a racial order. Chun (2013) explains that race as technology "shifts the focus from the *what* of race to the *how* of race" (p. 38). In other words, race is as race does. From this view, racial projects are built by using race as a tool, and participants repurpose this tool not just to 'scoot off to greener pastures' for ourselves – to use Coleman's phrasing – but to express solidarity with African American communities online. They do this through the act of using hashtags, putting their bodies on the line during the OPD shutdown, participating in a selfie campaign, eschewing the dominant racialization as model minority, acknowledging anti-blackness in our communities, and highlighting past and present marginalization and oppression.

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However, redefining the use of Asian American race as technology is still provisional. Although this repurposing is not new,[3] the dominant discourse of the model minority has prevailed over alternative racializations in the 1960s such as the yellow power movement. What is different is the use of social media as a counterpublic to experiment with alternative racial projects.

Twitter space as counterpublic

As is established in other studies I argue that Asian American activists use Twitter to develop a counterpublic space (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015; 2016; Kuo, 2018a). Parallel to public spaces, counterpublics are where subordinated groups can create and circulate counterdiscourses to provide alternative interpretations of identities and interests (Fraser, 1992). Twitter's architecture is conducive to creating counterpublic spaces (Hutchby, 2001). There is a low barrier to entry because of the high saturation of Internet users particular in the United States, and by default it is a public space for users to tweet and interact with one another. This means that anyone with an Internet connection and a device can sign up and participate. Groups can plan hashtag events and promote those events to gain visibility to create counterpublic spaces, such as how organizers planned #Asians4BlackLives OPD shutdown and Lunar New Year events.

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[3] Kuo (2017), for example, compared AAPI feminist materials that articulated solidarity from old print materials from the 1970s and 1980s to current digital hashtag activism, thereby demonstrating continuity between these movements.

In the case of Asian American interracial coalition building, participants circulate the aforementioned discursive strategies to constitute their complex and liminal identities and thereby combat the dominant discourse of white supremacy. In doing so they created a counterpublic to the narrative of Asian Americans as the model minority. In addition to offering statements for the general public, interracial coalition building by nature also reaches out to other counterpublics. In the case of #Asians4BlackLives, tweets were sometimes accompanied by #BlackLivesMatter and other associated hashtags as a way to promote the movement not just to the public but the BlackLivesMatter activists and their associated partners and community members. The result is symbolic solidarity across counterpublics and increased visibility; #BlackLivesMatter is a prominent hashtag and movement, and #Asians4BlackLives attempts to heightens Twitter users' awareness of an alternative racialization of Asian Americans by pairing the hashtags together.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the findings of a critical discourse analysis across time for two select hashtags, #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley, which exhibited Asian American interracial solidarity activity. I introduced four recurring discursive strategies in the findings. Employing discourse tracing I first found that the strategies used by Asian American activists changed across ruptures. Specifically, Asian American anti-blackness was addressed in both hashtags after Peter Liang's indictment for killing Akai Gurley. Secondly, participants refer to a white supremacist system to

make sense of the injustices perpetrated against Akai Gurley and others in African American communities and Asian American communities. In doing so they uncover the naturalized white supremacist system which sanctioned state violence. Third, in identifying anti-blackness and pro-whiteness in Asian American communities they encourage Asian Americans to stand in solidarity with African Americans. In doing so they attempt to redefine Asian American positionality in the racial order. This redefinition is provisional and liminal. Fourth, standing in solidarity with African Americans is in contrast to the model minority stereotype so participants also redefine Asian American identity in provisional and liminal ways.

These strategies demonstrate that interracial solidarity discourse redefines Asian American positionality and identity in the racial order. These redefinitions occur within the broader context of a white supremacist racial order which dominates conceptions of racial groups through racial projects such as the model minority narrative in news media. I also argue that race is a technology, or a means, by which Asian American activists challenge the white supremacist system. By hashtagging their activities Asian American activists are creating a counterpublic on Twitter through which to amplify these new racial projects. These strategies occur in the next chapter's analysis of discursive activity around #NotYourWedge.

CHAPTER IV

DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES IN #NOTYOURWEDGE

Affirmative action as a term was first used to refer to historical redress for

marginalized communities in 1961. President Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925

which stated that government contracting agencies "will take affirmative action to ensure

that applicants are employed, and that employees are treated during the employment,

without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin" (Exec. Order No. 10,925,

1961, "Part III Subpart A" section). Since then the implementation of affirmative action

in workplaces and higher education has changed due to the interpretation of the spirit of

affirmative action. For example, a 1978 Supreme Court ruling established that racial

quotas for universities were unconstitutional, and subsequent cases solidified the

discourse of diversity as strength as the impetus for continuing implementation of race-

conscious policies in higher education.

The data analyzed in this chapter is a response to one of the most recent

developments in the question of affirmative action. In 2014, Students for Fair

Admissions (SFFA) brought a lawsuit against Harvard University alleging that the

university discriminated against Asian Americans in their admissions process. The

lawsuit is a critique of affirmative action in that the suit alleges that Asian Americans

were victims of affirmative action because less deserving applicants of other racial

groups were admitted. These claims are based on data that indicate that Asian American

students with higher measures such as test scores and grades were denied admission while other applicants of color with lower scores and grades were admitted.

The earliest use of the #NotYourWedge hashtag occurred on May 15, 2015 when the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC) tweeted a link to a joint statement by over 120 Asian American and Pacific Islander organizations in favor of race-conscious admissions in higher education. The logic of using Asian Americans as a wedge is that the model minority is higher achieving than white Americans; therefore, affirmative action policies are no longer necessary or effective. The #NotYourWedge hashtag is used as a statement by Asian Americans, broadly stereotyped as a model minority, who refuse to be used as a wedge between white supremacist systems and those disenfranchised by the systems, notably African Americans, Latinx Americans, and certain ethnic groups of Asian Americans.

In this chapter I find that the discursive strategies employed in #NotYourWedge parallel those used in #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley in the previous chapter. I argue that the strategies redefine Asian American identity and positionality and create a counterpublic on Twitter. These discursive strategies consist of alternative racial projects, which provide provisional and liminal alternatives to the status quo. I also use race as technology to understand how race is used as a tool by both dominant and subordinate groups to offer competing interpretations of their identities and positions in the racial order. Finally, in this chapter I introduce the question of how the #NotYourWedge undermines or reinforces a techno-Orientalist view of Asian Americans based on the content in the major spike.

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Though Twitter activity was collected starting May of 2015 and finished in March of 2020, the analysis covers Twitter activity from the first major spike in August of 2017 to October of 2019 following the ruling on the lawsuit. The data collected in this chapter include the #NotYourWedge tweets, but also legal documents, news articles, and statements from organizations to which the tweets link and refer.

In this chapter I first give an overview of one major spike and two minor spikes in the use of #NotYourWedge as shown in Figure 3: #NotYourWedge Tweets, Replies, and Retweets With Comments. I then consolidate the recurring discourses in these spikes to reiterate the four broader discursive strategies referred to in the previous chapter. First, some of the strategies in support of affirmative action changed in response to influential news media coverage of the SFFA v. Harvard lawsuit. Specifically, Asian American activists first used diversity as strength as impetus for support of affirmative action but they later justified their support for affirmative action based by stating it combats institutional racism. Second, participants name the current racial order a white supremacist system, and described how Asian Americans are used as tools in perpetuating it. Third, participants identify Asian American complicity in this system and redefine our position in the racial order in liminal and provisional ways. Moreover, finally, redefining our position in the racial order also redefines Asian American identity, though this again in done provisionally and in a limited way. In the last section I argue that participation in these hashtags are examples of race as technology to build a counterpublic space on Twitter within a techno-Orientalist worldview.

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Figure 3

#NotYourWedge Tweets, Replies, and Retweets With Comments

Major spike: Twitter town hall following publication of two New York Times articles

Minor spike: AAJC tweets – post-Harvard personality ranking news

Minor spike: Links to amicus brief – post-Harvard personality ranking news

No. of Tweets

Date

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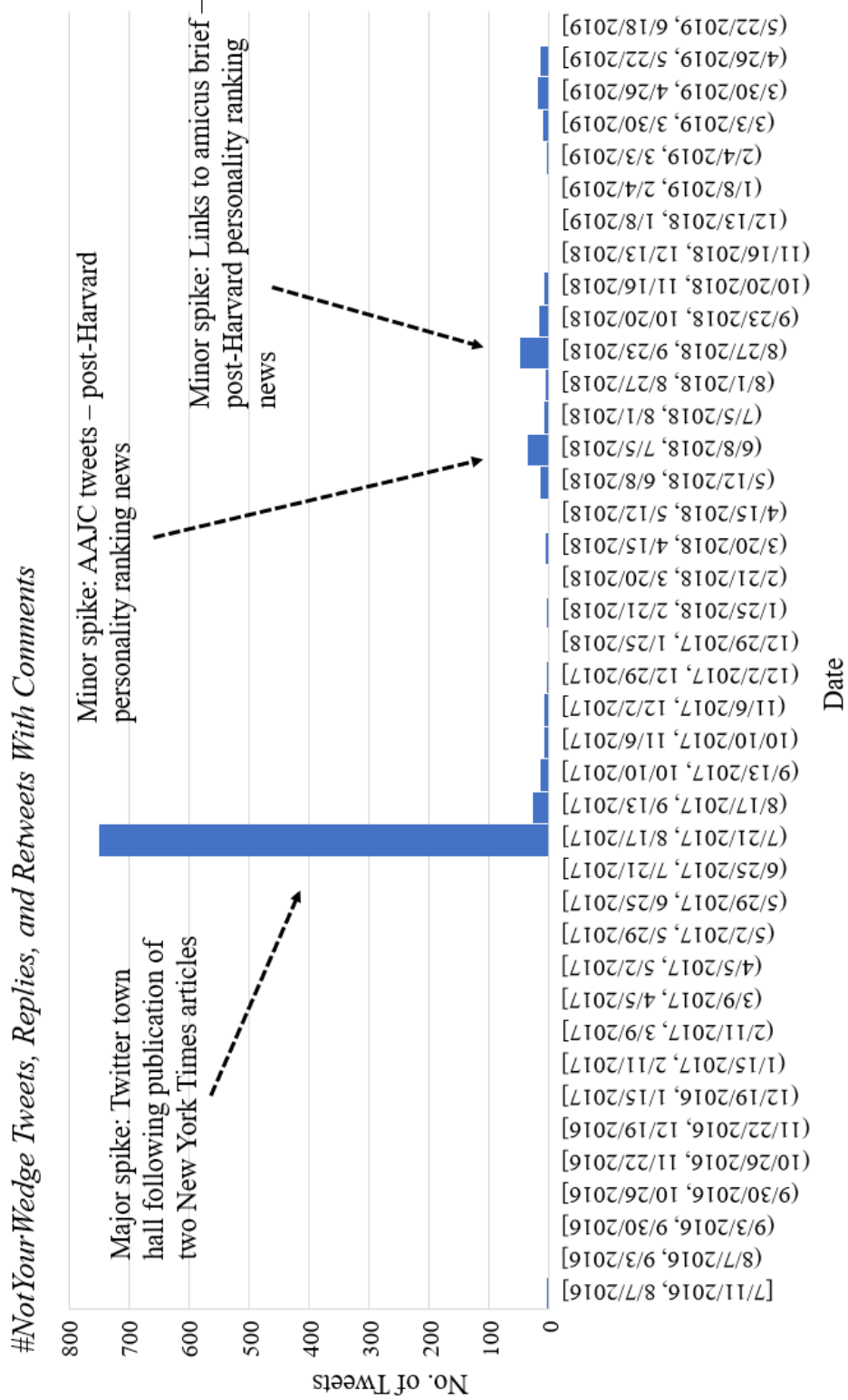
Major spike: Twitter Town Hall

The major spike occurred on August 8, 2017 when several Asian American activists and educators organized a Twitter town hall to discuss affirmative action. The town hall event followed two New York Times articles published several days earlier, one on August 1 and another on August 2. The first article reported the Trump administration's redirection of the Department of Justice's resources to investigate intentionally race-based discrimination in affirmative action policies; the second article profiled the lawsuit brought against Harvard University in 2014 by Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA), led by Edward Blum. The lawsuit claimed that Harvard discriminated against Asian Americans, engaged in racial balancing, did not use race to achieve critical mass, and has not explored race-neutral alternatives in admissions (*Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 2014).

The town hall was a live question and answer session between six Asian American panelists and the broader Twitter public. Organizers promoted the town hall as a way to establish facts about affirmative action to counter misunderstandings in popular discourse both leading up to and during the town hall.

The town hall panelists prepared ten questions regarding affirmative action.[4] The town hall consisted of 592 original tweets, reply tweets, and retweets with comments

[4] The following ten questions were prepared in advanced by the panelists:
1. Does affirmative action discriminate against AAPIs? Is there an "Asian tax?"
2. How does affirmative action benefit AAPI communities?
3. Are the anti-affirmative voices truly representative of all AAPI communities?
4. What are some actual policies that AAPI communities can advocate around affirmative action?
5. In CA the % of Asian Ams in colleges went up bc of Prop 209, how do you explain that?

using the hashtag. An additional 24 tweets were collected from threads where the

#NotYourWedge hashtag was not used; the additional tweets were relevant, however,

because they were threaded with other tweets using #NotYourWedge and therefore was

part of the broader conversation. The total number of tweets analyzed from the town hall

is 616. In addition, court documents and news articles were also collected for analysis as

they became relevant to the town hall discussion either as background knowledge or

because town hall participants directly referenced or provided hyperlinks to these

documents.

     Twitter users in the town hall express solidarity with other communities of color

in four ways: identifying the power of white supremacy and the media, pushing for

disaggregating of data on Asian America, highlighting the benefits of diversity, and

choosing justice over 'just us.'

Dominant discourse: media and white supremacy

     Participants first identified the dominant discourse on affirmative action and

Asian Americans, how the discourse is communicated, and to what end. This dominant

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6. What does it mean for someone to "deserve" to be admitted? What does it mean when AsAms say "their" spots are being taken?
7. Other than Harvard and Ivy Leagues, are Asian Americans less likely to be admitted because of affirmative action?
8. Why do over half of Asian Americans support affirmative action? (this might be significant for my RQs)
9. How do we position AAs better when mainstream media continue to frame AAs as the MAJORITY in universities? via @JennyKorn (did not use #NotYourWedge)
10. What actions can college students take to stand with affirm. action? Any laws/petitions/etc to keep an eye out for?

discourse is that Asian Americans are high achieving and earned that status through our merit; therefore, affirmative action is no longer needed. This discourse uses news media as a conduit to uphold a white supremacist system.

Several town hall participants pointed out that mainstream media amplify anti-affirmative action voices, despite the fact that these voices are in the minority. For example, one user tweeted, "A3: FYI - Over half (65%) of Asian Americans support affirmative action. #NotYourWedge" (Na, 2017). The organizers of the town hall also assume mainstream media bias as evidenced in Question 9: How do we position AAs better when mainstream media continue to frame AAs as the MAJORITY in universities? Although overall anti-affirmative action Asian Americans are in the minority, ethnically Chinese Asian Americans were the only group whose support of affirmation action was under 50% (Asian and Pacific Islander Americana Vote, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, and APPI Data, 2016). Others specifically called out *The New York Times* and Dana Goldstein, a *New York Times* correspondent, for failing to give coverage to pro-affirmative action Asian Americans.

The mainstream media sources identified here use their influence to perpetuate anti-affirmative action discourse using the model minority stereotype, which ultimately served to uphold the white supremacist system. Given the platform that mainstream media give anti-affirmative action advocates, one user poses the question about how many pro-affirmative action voices are needed to combat anti-affirmation action and pro-model minority myths. Users answered by getting to the root of the problem: white supremacy. OiYan Poon, a prominent participant in this hashtag, tweeted that "white

supremacy wants us as their racial mascot (See Sumi Cho's essay) but I'm #NotYourWedge" (Poon, 2017a). Participants redirect the question of racial inequality in higher education to white supremacy. They address two ways this happens. The first is through the use of legacy admissions and other admission policies which benefit white students. Poon again tweeted, "A1: Why higher AsAm scores? Cld be many factors. See prefs for legacies, donors, famous ppl, student athl - all mostly white #NotYourWedge" (Poon, 2017b). Legacy admissions policies privilege the children of alumni of higher education institutions. As such, it has historically meant that white individuals are the prime beneficiaries of legacy admissions, since many primarily white institutions (PWIs) admitted students of color only in the past half century. In addition, preference is given to relatives of donors and student athletes, who are mostly white, giving additional examples of how specific admissions policies continue to favor whiteness. Asian Americans are disadvantaged by legacy admissions as a result.

The second way in which white supremacy perpetuates racial inequality is through using Asian Americans as a wedge between the current system and underrepresented racial minority groups. The white supremacist system uses Asian Americans as a tool to dismantle affirmative action. As several participants note, Asian Americans are complicit in this system as well, acquiescing to the dominant structure of white supremacy by trying to achieve whiteness. One participant put it the following way: "'Merit' should be measured by more than SAT scores and our ability to build up white shit. #NotYourWedge" (Nobuko Wallace, 2017). The logic of SFFA's lawsuit against Harvard University is that Asian Americans must work harder (i.e., have higher

test scores) in order to be considered equal to other racial minorities in the admissions process. Dismantling the affirmative action policies of Harvard will ostensibly establish a meritocratic system of admissions. To be complicit in a skewed meritocratic system is to play into a white supremacist system where the goal is to "build up white shit."

Despite the majority of Asian Americans' support of affirmative action, mainstream media highlighted the voices of a vocal minority of anti-affirmative action groups. Town hall participants assert that this is because anti-affirmative action discourse coming from a minority of Asian Americans helps to perpetuate a white supremacist system, masked as objective and meritocratic.

Disaggregation of data on Asian Americans

Second, participants pushed for the disaggregation of data on Asian Americans. Although the push reveals the continued need for affirmative action, some participants in the town hall problematized the overrepresentation of East Asian American voices in the discourse.

As was established in Chapter 1, the socioeconomic statuses of Asian Americans vary widely. The heterogeneity of Asian Americans is reflected in higher education. There is a disparity in terms of access by ethnic groups and socioeconomic status. Question 2 asks, how does affirmative action benefit AAPI communities? In response users make the case that affirmative action benefits specific groups within the AAPI community. For example, one participant tweeted, "A1-Aff Action aids AAPIs in education and employment. Many AAPIs are INCLUDED in Aff Action programs.

#NotYourWedge (JasonFongWrites, 2017a). Participants claim that certain Asian Americans, who are categorized as underrepresented minorities (URMs), benefit from current affirmative action policies.

Several users cite the specific example of the negative effects of California's Proposition 209 on certain ethnic Asian groups. Proposition 209, passed in 1996, eliminated state and local affirmative action programs in the state of California. In public education, this meant that the University of California (UC) and California State University systems could no longer use race and ethnicity as one of the factors in admission decisions (Legislative Analyst's Office, 1996).

The discourse in the town hall reflects this nuanced understanding of the effects of affirmative action, and pushes for disaggregation of AAPI data. Poon tweeted, "A5: In post-209 CA, SE Asians, NHPI, and low inc AsAm numbers decreased. Look at which AsAms increased #NotYourWedge" (Poon, 2017c). Pointing out the positive benefits of affirmative action on specific subgroups of Asian Americans is a response to the dominant discourse that Asian Americans currently do not need affirmative action that was noted in the previous section. The high profile 2014 SFFA lawsuit against Harvard is indicative of this dominant discourse. It claimed that the reverse was true: affirmative action programs discriminated against Asian Americans. But disaggregating the data on Asian Americans indicates that Southeast Asian Americans (SEAA), Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders still benefit from affirmative action.

The problem of overrepresentation of privileged Asian American groups in popular discourse seems to be reflected in the town hall as well, despite the town hall

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being pro-affirmative action and pro-disaggregation; the participants appear to be mostly East Asian American. This fact was not lost in some users. One tweeted, "Majority of AAPI are S/SE Asian - not East Asian but most voices in AffAction are EAsian #NotYourWedge" (JasonFongWrites, 2017b). Whether this is quantitative true or not, the perception is that East Asian Americans, who are racialized as the model minority, dominate discourse about affirmative action.

I've established above that the town hall pushes for disaggregation of data on Asian Americans to dispel the model minority discourse and make a case for affirmative action. Participants dug a bit more into the question of how to navigate disaggregation of data and intraracial positioning while being supportive of affirmative action. One participant, JennyKorn, a prominent media and intersectional scholar and activist, poses a question of how to get East Asians Americans to support affirmative action: "If disaggregating data encourages SEAsian groups to support AffAction in self-interest, what about East Asians? #NotYourWedge #ActivistAsian" (Jenny Korn ~ Groovy!, 2017a). In other words, if East Asian Americans are already represented on campus, what incentive might they have to continue to support it? Korn then poses another question of whether Asian Americans self-identify in terms of their ethnicity or their race. Korn astutely observed a potential unintended consequence of disaggregated data: identification with ethnic group may create additional hurdles in pan-ethnic solidarity.

Another issue related to disaggregation is the need to be both inclusive of and distinguish Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders. Several participants in the town hall levied criticism for inclusion of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders under the term

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Asian American, while others also criticized the use of the more inclusive terms, Asian

Pacific Islander Americans (APIA) or Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPI), or

pushed to disassociate the groups altogether. One participant tweeted, "There IS a

difference between AsAms and AAPIs. Let's remember to not further marginalize the PI

community and speak for them. #NotYourWedge" (Lam, 2017). To some, AAPI and

APIA are appropriate terms when being intentional about talking about both groups 'side

by side.' Others criticize the use of the term; one user notes that very few Pacific

Islander activists are participating in the town hall and therefore questioned why the term

AAPI was being used, and even labeled Asians as oppressors of Pasifika activists.

Practically, disaggregation of data means bringing different subgroups within

Asian America into relief to get a larger picture of the diverse range of experiences in

higher education, disallowing the experiences and identities of Native Hawaiians, Pacific

Islanders, Southeast Asians, South Asians, and East Asians to be conflated. But the need

for data disaggregation must be balanced with intraracial solidarity and representation.

Diversity benefits all

Third, participants in the town hall employed discourse which was taken from

two landmark Supreme Court case that redefined the purpose of affirmative action:

diversity benefits everyone. While appropriating this discourse, several users discuss the

shortcomings of using this strategy to support affirmative action.

In 1961 President Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925 to take affirmative

action (Exec. Order No. 10,925, 1961). Affirmative action was implemented in the

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policies in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as a remedy for past discrimination by educational entities, or to help overcome the effects of the conditions that resulted in limited opportunity (34 CFR Section 100.3(6)(i)). The original purpose of affirmative action was a correction to the historical inequality in access to education. This is reflected in several tweets in the town hall including the following: "AffAct corrects historical inequality in an education system tht particularly marginalies [*sic*] and affects SE Asians, Islanders #NotYourWedge" (Tran, 2017). However, the point of affirmative action evolved from historical redress to diversity-as-benefit with two landmark Supreme Court cases: the rulings of *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978)* and of *Grutter v. Bollinger (2003).* These rulings set a precedent for understanding affirmative action as a method to encourage diversity in the interest of the state and the students.

The discourse of diversity as a benefit for all is the current impetus for supporting affirmative action, and this is reflected in the town hall conversation. A few tweets specifically mention Supreme Court decisions on the benefits of diversity, including this one: "AAPI groups came out strong to the Supreme Court in support of aff action. In 2003, 2013, 2016. Celebrate our diversity. #NotYourWedge" (Bhargava, 2017). In addition to referencing the Supreme Court decision, participants used the discourse of diversity as benefit for all in answering Question 2, how does affirmative action benefit AAPI communities? The Reappropriate blog answers, "Schools have compelling interest to encourage diversity in all forms: linguistic, cultural, political, academic, racial, etc. #NotYourWedge" (Reappropriate, 2017a). Reappropriate identifies

ways in which diversity purportedly benefits everyone: cognitive development,
academic performance, practical skills in professional settings, and attitudes. This
matters because of the presumed misinformation regarding how affirmative action
benefits Asian Americans.

Despite touting the positive benefits of diversity, the town hall participants also
note the shortcomings of diversity discourse. One user lamented that affirmative action
is no longer about addressing historical disparities while simultaneously using diversity
discourse. Another user is more critical of using the dominant discourse of diversity as
an impetus for upholding affirmative action. He tweeted, "How to defend aff action from
attacks AND envision alternatives that go beyond commodifying diversity for white
consumption? #NotYourWedge" (Tseng-Putterman. 2017). The implication is that white
audiences are the primary beneficiaries of diversity. This centering of white
consumption indicates that higher education is still a white institution which holds
agency over marginalized groups, including racial and ethnic minorities. The user
redirects the question of affirmative action back to historical redress, and questions
whether diversity discourse distracts from the question of reparations. Town hall users
employ critical lenses through which to assess the utility of current pro-affirmative
action discourse.

Town hall participants appropriated the diversity as benefit for all discourse to
make the case for Asian American support of affirmative action. This discourse,
however, is shown to be limited in making institutional redress.

In March of 2019, OiYan Poon, researcher in higher education leadership, presented a TEDx talk at an independently organized TEDx event at Colorado State University titled Racial Choices: Justice or "Just Us?" In the talk, Poon used the pithy phrase to describe the two attitudes Asian Americans historically have had regarding race relations, and reiterates the choice Asian Americans have today. She elaborates:

> are we going to choose just us, which is an investment in problematic racist systems that dehumanize all of us, or are we going to choose justice, which is acting to systemically transform structure and cultures to affirm values of racial equity? Justice is about changing the game (Poon, 2019, 3:05 mark)

This phrase is used a few times throughout the town hall by participants to express support for affirmative action policies and solidarity with other people of color.

'Just us' as described by Poon is Asian American complicity in systems which ultimately hurt everyone. One method through which this mentality is promulgated is framing access to higher education as a limited resource for which people of color need to compete with one another. Question 6 of the town hall is reflective of this attitude of scarcity: what does it mean for someone to "deserve" to be admitted? What does it mean when AsAms say "their" spots are being taken? This question assumes that, in competing with other people of color, Asian Americans have an advantage because they are already more deserving than other applicants. Reappropriate observed that in doing

so, the model minority racialization correspondingly racializes other students of color as well: "When some AsAms say that they are 'more deserving' than others, they are actively delegitimizing other students of color. #NotYourWedge" (Reappropriate, 2017b). By contrast, pursuing justice is working towards changing a system which privileges whiteness to a system which enacts racial equity. On why a majority of Asian Americans support affirmative action (question 8), participants responded that Asian Americans are privy to this tactic of sowing division between communities of color through the notion of educational scarcity. One tweeted, "Because we've seen this football presented far too many times to fall for the 'look at the other PoC taking your stuff' #NotYourWedge" (Franzinger Barrett, 2017). The participants name this diversionary discursive tactic which reinforces the status quo.

Beyond this, there are three discursive sub-strategies participants used in their hashtag activities to encapsulate the spirit of 'justice, not just us': eschewing the model minority label, expressing solidarity through both sympathy and empathy, and remembering the benefits of the black activism.

Participants eschew the model minority label by directly problematizing the stereotype. Jenny Korn writes, "To fight the impression AAs do not support AffAxn, we must dismantle the model minority myth #NoToAntiBlackness #NotYourWedge #ActivistAsian" (Jenny Korn ~ Groovy!, 2017b). Others do not specifically use the term model minority, but refer to the privileged racialization of Asian Americans. Users also point out that conversations around affirmative action and Harvard pertain to a small and privileged group within the Asian American community. Poon observed, "When talking

abt elite admissions we're talking abt most privileged minority among us. neglect

majority of AsAms in higher ed #NotYourWedge" (OiYan Poon, 2017d). Eschewing the

model minority is an important component in expressing solidarity with other people of

color for town hall participants. In addition, participants use both sympathy and empathy

as impetus for solidarity expression. Participants use sympathy in acknowledging the

privileged positions that Asian Americans are in and use language of advocacy and

allyship. On the other hand, there is self-identification on the part of Asian Americans as

an oppressed minority. Because of this oppression Asian Americans must create

solidarity to fight for the benefit of all. These strategies are not mutually exclusive,

however. The tension between these dialectic racial positions is demonstrated by one

user who tweeted, "@AAAJ_LA I also support AffAxn because as a woman and a

minority I have benefitted doubly. #NotYourWedge" (Yeh, 2017a). The user also

tweeted, "I reject idea of pitting individuals over collective good. I don't have to

individually benefit to know why we need AffAxn. #NotYourWedge" (Yeh, 2017c).

Lastly, town hall participants address the anti-black mentality that has

historically pervaded Asian American communities. They connect this to the present

issue of affirmative action by labeling anti-affirmative action voices as anti-black.

Participants also reminded the town hall of the benefits Asian Americans reaped from

black activism in the 1960s. The National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (ACAPA)

tweeted, "Dismantling affirmative action ignores efforts of black activists who fought

for nonwhite Americans. #NotYourWedge" (ACAPA, 2017). Focusing on the interracial

partnership and mutual benefit encourages Asian Americans to express similar

sentiments of solidarity. Pairing this strategy with dismantling the model minority label and using both sympathy and empathy, the town hall participants chose justice over just us.

In sum, identifying the power of white supremacy and news media, pushing for disaggregation of AAPI data, highlighting the benefits of diversity, and choosing justice over 'just us' are four ways Asian Americans expressed solidarity with other communities of color.

Minor spikes: Harvard's personality traits and the amicus brief

Two additional minor spikes in hashtag activity occurred in the Summer of 2018 in response to several media outlets, *The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Guardian*, publishing a follow up story on the SFFA v. Harvard affirmative action case. The news outlets reported that Harvard allegedly rated Asian American applicants consistently lower on personality traits like likeability, courage, and kindness, and rated them higher than any other racial group on grades, test scores, and extracurricular activities (Hartocollis, 2018; Hong and Korn, 2018; Mahdawi, 2018). The discursive activity in these spikes focused on the limitations of standardized testing, the correctional intent of affirmative action, disaggregating data on Asian Americans to combat the model minority stereotype, and exhibited the 'justice, not just us' attitude.

The first spike totaled 31 tweets from June 15, 2018 to June 27, 2018, with nearly two-thirds of those tweets coming from different branches of the Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC), a civil rights advocacy organization. In this spike

two familiar strategies were used: disaggregation of data and 'justice, not just us.' It also

pivots to two new strategies of emphasizing the limits of standardized testing, and

highlighting that affirmative action is meant as a correction for institutional racism.

In most of the tweets, AAJC includes one of two infographics in the content of

the tweet, or a link to a statement on the AAJC Los Angeles website. The first

infographic shows one white and one minority prospective college student with differing

SAT scores and GPA averages. The infographic states that SATs are a poor predictor of

college success and a better predictor of an applicant's race, and that GPAs are not

necessarily objective. The second infographic is accompanied with the following tweet

content: "Race-conscious admissions is better than race-blind admissions. Why? It

accounts for institutional racism. The difference matters. https://t.co/yEiwZowHs8

#AffirmativeAction #NotYourWedge #MoreThanANumber" (Advancing Justice-LA,

2018). The infographic shows several stick figures engage in a couple of activities,

including a foot race. It states that merit is subjective since it is difficult to measure

across achievements in arts, sports and academic achievement and that because of

institutional racism the two people racing may start at different points.

Some tweets linked to a statement issued by AAJC Los Angeles on their website

regarding Asian Americans and affirmative action. The statement describes how Asian

Americans are being used as a wedge: "Today, Asian Americans are being framed as

victims of affirmative action as part of a divide-and-conquer strategy against groups of

color that all suffer the effects of racism" (Asian Americans Advancing Justice Los

Angeles, n.d., para. 1). It dispels the model minority myth by offering a reminder that

Asian Americans were beneficiaries of affirmative action policies in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the present. In making this statement, AAJC directs attention away from discourse about high achieving Asian Americans and the model minority stereotype, and implies the need to disaggregate the data on Asian Americans, repeating discourse employed in the town hall.

Further, they base their support of affirmative action on the 'justice, not just us' attitude:

> We understand the fear that anti-affirmative action groups feel because of the enduring history and current reality of racism in our country, but we believe that they are focusing their energies on the wrong fight… we should be fighting together to end residential segregation, inadequate school funding, and the school-to-prison pipeline to create better access to education for everyone.

The statement reads that we ought instead to fight together with others to create 'better access to education for everyone,' capturing the spirit of justice.

The second spike occurred after an amicus brief was filed on August 30, 2018 in support of the defendant in the SFFA v. Harvard lawsuit. The brief was jointly filed by 531 social scientists and scholars of Asian America and higher education, and was in part a response to the news media reports of the lower personal ratings for Asian Americans; the brief cites Hartocollis's *New York Times* article in addressing the question of personal rating.

This spike extends the counterdiscourse of the limits of numerical measures in college admissions and disaggregates data to demonstrate the diversity within Asian America. Thirty-six tweets over the course of 5 days were posted by some of the scholars named in support of the brief; the tweets were accompanied by a link to a press release by the group Asian American Civil Rights (2018), a collection of over 135 organizations that support affirmative action in higher education. The tweets contained the following content as exemplified by this tweet: "Honored to be part of this historic effort with social science community in Harvard case on race-conscious admissions, 500+ experts in Asian Am studies and Education sign-on to support #SeeMeAsaWholePerson #NotYourWedge #Education4All" (Dra. S.M. Muñoz, 2018).

The amicus brief makes three counterpoints to SFFA's lawsuit. First, it argues that Asian American applicants benefit from Harvard's 'holistic review' process in which many different factors are taken into consideration of admission of applicants, including both academic and non-academic. This disaggregation of data acknowledges the diversity of experiences within Asian America. It next argues against SFFA's overreliance on numerical measures of academic success. Standardized tests, for example, are strongly correlated with parental education and family income. Lastly, SFFA fails to provide evidence of discrimination against Asian Americans and instead relies on myths of an Asian penalty and the model minority stereotype. If higher test scores don't equal admission, SFFA concludes that Asian Americans are not admitted

because of their race. The brief criticizes this conclusion because it relies on stereotypes about Asian Americans as model minorities.

The amicus brief argues is that SFFA relies on limited measures of merit and the model minority stereotype. It extends the counterpoint of the limitation of standardized test scores to include high school grades, and also disaggregates data on Asian Americans to demonstrate how holistic review benefits a diverse group of Asian Americans.

In sum, the two minor spikes offer a response to the news media reports in June of 2018 that Asian Americans were allegedly ranked lower on personality traits in the admissions process. Because the news media made salient Asian Americans' low personality ratings compared to their high academic achievement, AAJC and several hundred scholars of Asian American studies and higher education responded by emphasizing the limits of standardized testing, critiqued the model minority stereotype by drawing attention to the diversity within Asian America, highlighted affirmative action's correction of institutional racism, and expressed a mindset of justice, not just us.

SFFA v. Harvard University verdict

On October 1, 2019, U.S. District Judge Burroughs ruled in favor of Harvard University, concluding that Harvard did not discriminate against Asian Americans in its application process, strengthening the case for continued implementation of affirmative action policies. There were only four tweets by three users with #NotYourWedge which referred to the case in the several days following the ruling, one of them which was

critical of Harvard's affirmative action policies. This is unexpected because I would assume there would be more activity surrounding this ruling considering the heavy activity using the hashtag leading up to the ruling.

Discursive strategies

The findings in my analysis of #NotYourWedge are consistent with those introduced in my analysis of #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley. All four of the discursive strategies introduced in the previous chapter appear here: changes in discourse across ruptures in time, identification of a white supremacist system, redefinitions of both Asian American racial order and racial identity in liminal and provisional ways, and using race as technology by participating in a Twitter counterpublic.

Discourse changes across ruptures

The discursive practices in #NotYourWedge demonstrated how Asian American activists' strategies for building interracial solidarity through support of affirmative action policies were responses to dominant discourse as dictated by institutions of power across time.

The #NotYourWedge town hall was planned in defense of affirmative action after *The New York Times* published stories about the Student for Fair Admission (SFFA) v. Harvard lawsuit. Though the lawsuit was originally filed in 2014, *The New York Times* articles were published in August of 2017, demonstrating the *Times'* clout as

a mainstream media organization. Participants in the town hall defended affirmative action by using the discourse established by two Supreme Court rulings, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978)* and *Grutter v. Bollinger (2003)*, which determined that diversity was in the interest of the state and enriches the education of everyone involved, respectively. This strategy was employed in response to Question 2 posed by the town hall on the benefits of affirmative action for Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) students. Respondents not only highlighted the benefits for AAPI students but for all students through the use of discourse established by another elite institutions, the Supreme Court.

Using the discourse set by an authoritative institution in the United States to combat another dominant discourse on Asian Americans for anti-affirmative action purposes in a process Fairclough (1996; 2016) describes as recontextualization. Diversity as benefit for all is recontextualized from the dominant discourse of Supreme Court rulings to serve as part of the project of eschewing the use of another dominant discourse, the model minority. However, as some in the town hall pointed out, the term itself is limited in the sense that it a reflection of the current manifestation of affirmative action, which has moved away from reparations and other corrections of historical injustices. This discourse was a departure from the originally intention of affirmative action as articulated by President Kennedy to remedy past discrimination.

The strategy shifted about a year later after several influential news organization, including *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, reported that Harvard allegedly ranked Asian American applicants lower on personality scores while they

consistently ranked higher in test scores and grades in the Summer of 2018. The claims of lower personality rankings that the news organizations reported are paired with an emphasis on high marks in seemingly objective measures such as test scores and grades. The implications made by Student for Fair Admissions (SFFA), as reported in the news articles, is that there is intentional discrimination against Asian Americans by the deliberate lower ranking in subjective measures to balance out an applicant's high marks in objective measures. The scandal is obvious; deserving Asian Americans are discriminated by a system which disregards merit. In response, participants tweeted about the limits of standardized education in predicting higher education success and reintroduced the defense of affirmative action as a correction to institutional racism, which more closely resembles the original justification for affirmative action at its inception.

The news stories about Harvard's alleged lower personality ranking of Asian Americans were published June 15, 2018 (Hartocollis, 2018; Hong and Korn, 2018; Mahdawi, 2018). The change in the discursive strategies led by Asian Americans Advancing Justice (AAJC) occurred right after the news reports – June 15 to June 27. Also, the amicus brief document filed by several hundred scholars and researchers and shared to constitute a minor spike in August of 2018 directly cites Hartocollis's *New York Times* article. This indicates that both of these spikes and the associated discursive changes are a direct result of the news reports, which represent a rupture in the discourse on SFFA v. Harvard.

These changes in discursive defense of affirmative action reinforce that discourse is contextual and related to social practice (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). The correction for institutional racism as an impetus for affirmative action is a departure from the justification of achieving diversity as beneficial for all during the town hall a year earlier. It more closely resembles the original intent of affirmative action as historical redress as reported earlier in this chapter. Using diversity as a benefit for all wouldn't satisfactorily address the question of meritocracy. Instead, AAJC and the scholars associate with the amicus brief decided to scrutinize admissions by emphasizing the limits of standardized testing and the intent of affirmative action as a correction for institutional racism.

Participants identify these policies and make the case that dominant discourse about Asian Americans, as buoyed by mainstream media, play into larger macro-discourses about meritocracy, which seeks to dismantle affirmative action and continues to privilege whiteness, which is the next strategy.

Subordination to a white supremacist system

Second, town hall participants uncover how an ostensibly meritocratic system makes opaque a racial order build to privilege whiteness. The lawsuit brought by SFFA against Harvard alleges that Asian Americans must work harder in order to be considered equal to other minority applicants. This criticism of affirmative action appears to be built on a meritocratic foundation: those who work hard or show the aptitude, in this case through test scores and grades, deserve to be admitted over

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applicants who gain favor by virtue of their race. However, as Fairclough (1995) observes, naturalized discourses hide ideologies and guise them as common sense.

Participants identified how discourse on affirmative action favors whiteness by first addressing the admissions policies which privilege white students, such as legacy admissions, donors, and athletic scholarships. These are common-sense policies because they are about family ties to university and athletic incentives for students who want an education. These policies are scrubbed of racial overtones, but participants observe they functionally benefit white applicants, thereby making transparent how racialized these policies are.

Participants observed secondly that white supremacy is enforced by using Asian Americans as a wedge. This is done through the interpellation of Asian Americans as subjects of an unfair admissions system (Althusser, 2004). The white supremacist system hails Asian Americans as victims rather than beneficiaries of affirmative action based on faulty assumptions about Asian American achievements, the same assumptions that racialize Asian Americans as the model minority. In this way Asian Americans are almost white (Wu, 2003; Bonilla-Silva, 2010), provided we can just achieve according to the standards set by the current racial order. Participants, however, highlight the 'divide and conquer' strategy in which a white supremacist system misdirects minority attention to one another through creating the problem of scarcity of spots at universities.

If Asian Americans are interpellated as part of the elite – if they are white approximate as is implied by being centered in the SFFA lawsuit – then they are pitted against African Americans, Latinx Americans, Native Americans, and other minorities.

These minority groups then become the adversaries because they are competing with minorities who are aided by affirmative action. The focus is taken away from race-neutral policies such as legacy admissions and athletic scholarships, and the white supremacist racial order is sustained.

Liminal and provisional position in the racial order

As Kim (2000) notes, racial groups are formed in relation to each other in the racial order. The participants in the town hall provisionally redefine their place in the racial order by expressing solidarity as Asian Americans for other communities of color. This redefinition is liminal because of the unique positionality in which Asian Americans express both sympathy and empathy in their solidarity discourse. It is also provisional because the discourse consists mostly of breaking down the racial order with little building up.

Asian American position in the racial order upholds the positions of other marginalized people of color. The racial project of interpreting Asian American academic success as a result of merit includes the secondary effect of interpreting the low status of Southeast Asian Americans (SEAAs), Latinx Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders as personal failings and cultural deficiencies. In other words, as Asian Americans are racialized as a model minority and relatively 'valorized' (Kim, 1999) other minority groups are comparatively marginalized.

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Asian American complicity in the current racial order was challenged in

#NotYourWedge by a phrase Dr. Poon applied to the question of affirmative action:

justice, not just us. The spirit of the phrase is an encouragement to Asian Americans to

look out for the benefit of all people of color in the context of higher education, not just

Asian Americans. Because Asian Americans were cast as the victims in the SFFA

lawsuit against Harvard University, we as a racial group are interpellated into a system

of meritocracy, albeit a faulty one. To pursue 'justice' as defined by proponents of

affirmative action is not the elimination of unfair affirmative action policies; instead, it is

the support of policies that will benefit all marginalized communities of color.

Asian Americans occupy a unique position within the racial order. We are a

minority but have been racialized to resemble whiteness closely; we achieve the status of

'honorary whites' while never fully achieving whiteness (Tuan, 2003). Yet our

racialization puts us on the side of the privileged in affirmative action as is evidenced by

the SFFA lawsuit. Asian Americans are framed as the victims in a system that favors

undeserving Americans of color. This bifurcation places white and Asian Americans on

one side, and black and brown American on the other.

But expressing solidarity with other communities of color is to choose the side of

black and brown Americans. It is choosing justice over the interest of just us, the Asian

Americans. As Kuo (2018b) notes, hashtag activism is an expression of affinity. But I

argue that in this context it is more than merely an affection. As race is mutually

constituted in the racial order, challenging the status quo specifically as Asian

Americans challenges the racial order. For example, one user tweeted, "AAPIs stand

with other people of color to increase #affirmativeAction, not stop it. #NotYourWedge"

(Dean, 2017). In these messages, activists specifically support affirmative action as

Asian Americans, and use #NotYourWedge to communicate a refusal to be complicit in

a system that marginalizes all communities of color. In doing so, Asian Americans are

redefining their place in the racial order.

However, offering a counterdiscourse to existing racialization and racial order

proves difficult. As was referenced in a prior section in this chapter, participants frame

the model minority stereotype and pro-affirmative action stances as contradictory

positions. But how do Asian Americans express pro-affirmative action discourse within

a mutually constitutive racial system? If Asian Americans spurn the model minority

label, what racial projects will they use to replace it? More to the point, do the

participants see Asian Americans as allies to oppressed racial groups, or are they part of

the oppressed?

The participants don't assume that they have attained a completely privileged

status; Asian Americans still need to fight. However, town hall tweets express a racial

identity and status that is privileged and positionally unique compared to other

communities. On the other hand, tweets also highlight that Asian Americans have

ourselves been oppressed. Because of this, Asian Americans must create an interracial

coalition to fight for the benefit of all.

This liminal state is evident in the 'Justice, not just us' section earlier in this

chapter. There exists both sympathy and empathy as impetus for supporting affirmative

action. This means Asian Americans are fully aware of the contradictory racialization

and experiences we've faced, but are redefining ourselves in the town hall in provisional and liminal terms. In other words, Asian Americans haven't completely decided on how to express solidarity as racialized participants in the question of affirmative action, and as such occupy a unique position between white on one side and black/brown on the other.

Liminal and provisional identity

Related to challenging the racial order is a redefinition of Asian American identity. In redefining Asian American positionality in the racial order through alternative racial projects (Omi & Winant, 2015), our collective identities also become redefined in liminal and provisional ways.

Although as of this writing the racialization of Asian Americans appears to be changing due to ruptures in world events – namely the COVID-19 pandemic – at the time of the hashtag activities from 2014-2019 Asian Americans were still predominantly racialized as the model minority. Asian American racialization can also oscillate between model minority and yellow peril (Okihiro, 1994), which means this 'positive' racialization was not meant to be permanent and was sustained so long as it was convenient in maintaining white supremacy. As we've discussed and as Poon argues, the model minority stereotype itself is harmful for those racialized as such because it is not representative of a diverse array of Asian American experiences.

In stating their refusal to act as a tool for white supremacy, #NotYourWedge participants eschew the model minority label both implicitly by the act of using the

hashtag and explicitly through the content of their tweets. One user, for example,

tweeted, "Stop trying to get Asians to carry out anti-blackness/anti-POC by denying

#AffirmativeAction. Not your model minority and #NotYourWedge" (Nguyễn, 2017). In

addition to explicitly eschewing the model minority label, town hall participants also

pushed for disaggregation of data to demonstrate the diversity within Asian America,

including how Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Hawaiians may also

benefit from affirmative action.[5] These activities are moves toward dismantling current

racializations and building new racial projects, which consist of alternative

representations and interpretations of Asian America. The racial project here is both the

act of using the #NotYourWedge hashtag and the explicit denouncement of the model

minority stereotype.

In engaging in #NotYourWedge, however, a lot of the work done is mostly

dismantling the dominant racialization of Asian Americans as the model minority to

uphold the racial order. But breaking down and building up are two different tasks.

Asian American activists exist in a liminal state. They identify as marginalized by using

empathy discourse as referenced in a prior section of this chapter contrary to the model

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[5] In the town hall several users were critical of the overrepresentation of East Asian voices and underrepresentation of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander voices. They also criticized the lumping together of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders under the Asian American moniker. What is clear is that Native Hawaiian (NH) and Pacific Islander (PI) groups must at least be distinguished from Asian America. How and whether to include NH and PI in conversations about Asian Americans is still a contested issue. For example, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders are considered a different race than Asians in the United States Census. On the other hand, the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) has implemented a program for Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISI). AANAPISIs are higher education institutions whose undergraduate population is at least ten percent Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander (Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, n.d.).

minority or honorary white status. As Hall (1996b) notes, "there is no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself *somewhere* in order to say anything at all. Thus, we cannot do without that sense of our own positioning that is connoted by the term ethnicity" (p. 347). Though Asian American activists change their positionality as part of their discursive strategy of reconfiguring their identities, much of this reconfiguration is concerned with a negative identity – as *not* the model minority. Currently, Asian American activists' redefinition of Asian American identity remains liminal and provisional.

Asian America online

In this section I again frame the hashtag activities as the implementation not just of social media as a platform to create a counterpublic, but also as a means of using race as technology to express interracial solidarity. In addition, I also problematize #NotYourWedge by using the criticisms from within the town hall to make the case that Asian American activists represent techno-Orientalist stereotypes while simultaneously attempting to undermine the stereotype.

Race as technology in a counterpublic

The act of participating in hashtag activism and the discursive strategies to express interracial solidarity are part of a redefinition of Asian American identity and place in the racial order. It is a response to dominant institutions' use of Asian Americans as a method of perpetuating a white supremacist system. The hashtag

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interpellated those who were interested in Asian American perspectives and roles in affirmative action which involved providing alternative discourses to dominant ones. As such the hashtag functions not as a public but as a counterpublic (Fraser, 1992; Squires, 2002).

As discussed in the last chapter, race as technology conceives of race as a tool or a method by which a goal is accomplished (Coleman, 2009; Chun, 2013). Race is as race does. Historically race was used as a mechanism by the oppressor to oppress multiple people groups. But race as a tool can be wielded by marginalized communities as well. As Chun (2013) wrote, "To see race as technology, thus, is always to see double: to see possibilities (reworkings) and domination (eugenics) together" (p. 49).

I argue that race is used as a technology by Asian Americans in both the act of participating in the hashtag and the specific discourse used to redefine positionality and identity. First, #NotYourWedge itself is imbued with a political statement that Asian Americans will not be used as tools for white supremacy and against other people of color. Participants do this by virtue of using the hashtag and naming themselves as Asian American. One user tweeted, "I stand in solidarity with those who face institutional barriers to education and other systems. That's why I support AffAxn. #NotYourWedge" (Yeh, 2017b). The simple act of expressing solidarity as racialized participants and community members is to use that identity as a tool with which to redefine the racial order.

Second, specific discourse is also used as a tool to express solidarity. Eschewing the model minority label, for example, directly articulates the message of redefining our

racialization. It is a refusal to be used as a tool for white supremacy. In using #NotYourWedge Asian Americans are not choosing to wield their racial identities for themselves only; participants point out that this only serves the current racial order. Rather, race as technology is put to work as a method of expressing solidarity with other marginalized communities.

Techno-Orientalism

In the #NotYourWedge town hall several participants problematized the overrepresentation of East Asian voices. One of the minor spikes coincided with the filing of an amicus brief filed by over 500 scholars and researchers. And as of this writing Twitter supports 33 languages, but most of the activity around Asian American hashtag activism is in English. Considering these patterns, it seems solidarity minded Asian Americans on Twitter are represented by members who may fit the model minority stereotype despite their attempts to dismantle that identity. These hashtag activities are also performed within the context of racialization of Asian Americans as technologically proficient (Kido Lopez & Ng, 2017). English-speaking Asian Americans have the highest rate of Internet connectivity, and are represented as technological savvy (Nielsen, 2019).

This techno-Orientalization of Asians and Asian Americans in popular discourse and media at first seem to be buoyed by the hashtag activities. The voices represented in #NotYourWedge who call for disaggregation of an oversimplified picture of Asian Americans and solidarity with other communities of color who also benefit from

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affirmative action ironically appear to fit the mold of a model minority online. However, as Nakamura (2002) pointed out, techno-Orientalism uses new technologies to perpetuate old technologies. It is the use of hyper-connectivity of Asians and Asian Americans to otherize us.

In using race as technology for their own purposes, #NotYourWedge participants are approaching it from an internal, emic perspective to redefine themselves and the racial order. Chun (2013) wonders at the potential of using techno-Orientalism for overcoming exclusion:

can the abject, the Orientalized, the robot-like data-like Asian/Asian American other be a place from which something like insubordination or creativity can arise? To put it slightly differently, can the formulation of Asian as technology, Asians as the future, be turned from something terrifying to something like what Judith Butler calls a future horizon – 'a… horizon… in which the violence of exclusion is perpetually in the process of becoming overcome'? (pp. 53-54).

Solidarity building for Asian Americans online contains tension. On the one hand participants use social media to build new racial projects to overcome the status quo in expressing interracial solidarity. On the other hand, these activities in the hashtag are represented by Asian Americans afforded higher statuses, establishing an education barrier to Asian American interracial counterpublics online.

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Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the findings of a critical discourse analysis for the hashtag #NotYourWedge. I summarized the spikes in the hashtag and synthesized the discourse into four strategies which recur from the previous chapter. First, Asian American activists change their discourse according to ruptures as dictated by influential institutions such as news media. Specifically, impetus for support of affirmative action evolved from the benefits of a diverse student body to redress for institutional racism. Second, participants named a white supremacist system to make sense of the racialization of Asian Americans as the model minority and the opposition to affirmative action. Third and fourth, Asian Americans redefined their place in the racial order and their racializations in limited and provisional ways.

I argue that Asian American activists use these discursive strategies to create a counterpublic with which to express interracial solidarity contrary to the dominant conceptions of Asian Americans. In doing so Asian American activists challenge a white supremacist racial order. Asian American activists use their race as a technology to combat the white supremacist racial order which has used race as technology to perpetuate itself. In challenging the racial order activists redefine Asian American position in that racial order and the Asian American collective identity. However, I also question whether the overrepresentation of educated Asian Americans in this Twitter counterpublic reinforces or ultimately undermines techno-Orientalist perceptions of Asian Americans.

CHAPTER V

GUIDED INTERVIEWS WITH HASHTAG PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter I report the findings of guided interviews with respondents who posted using at least one of the three hashtags. It answers my third research question, how do Asian Americans construct their identities through the discursive practices in hashtag activism around interracial coalition-building? Guided interviews were conducted in order to answer this question because Asian Americans using these hashtags are deliberately engaging in activities that challenge dominant discourse on Asian Americans, including the common racialization of the Asian American identity as the model minority as perpetuated by influential organizations such as mainstream news media. Identity formation and articulation occurs within sociohistorical contexts but also through cognitive processes as reproduced and influenced by discourse. As Stuart Hall (1996a) states, identity is the point of "suturing of the psychic and the discursive in their constitution" (p. 16). Speaking with participants directly gives insight into how they articulate their understanding of their identities and how they relate their identities to expressing interracial solidarity on Twitter.

This chapter focuses on identity formation and its connection to the interracial solidarity work that the interviewees engaged in. I argue that Asian Americans form racial and ethnic identities as part of a resistance strategy to the current racial order of white supremacy, which uses the model minority stereotype as a wedge between Asian Americans and other communities of color. These findings support Omi & Winant's

(2015) definition of racial identity as socially constructed and historically embedded. I also use Kim's (2000) language of the racial order in describing the relationship of racial groups with one another in a system which privileges whiteness. I make sense of the conscientious and political racializations of participants by using the metaphor of race as technology (Coleman, 2009; Chun, 2013). Interview participants are redefining themselves in response to the racialization of Asian Americans as ascribed by a white supremacist system and avowed by Asian Americans seeking to climb the ladder of white supremacy. These redefinitions are mechanisms by which conventional racializations are contested. Finally, I problematize the educational barriers in interracial coalition-building online and the overrepresentation of educationally privileged Asian American activists on Twitter spaces. These educational barriers may undermine the work of combating the model minority stereotype and the racial order.

A total of seventeen semi-structured interviews were conducted with Twitter participants who used at least one of the hashtags examined for the study. Participants were selected for recruitment after the collection of the Twitter data and concurrent with the process of Twitter analysis. I reached out to potential participants based on their proliferation in each of the hashtags as measured by the number of total original tweets, retweets with comments and replies to tweets they made. Retweets without comment were not counted as they did not feature any additional discourse. I organized the list of participants in each hashtag by total number of original tweets, retweets with comments and replies to tweets and reached out to participants starting with the most active in the hashtags. Interview participants tweeted, retweeted with comments or replied to tweets

between six and ninety-four times. A total of fifty-six participants were contacted and seventeen participated in interviews. All seventeen participants completed the interviews and none retracted any portion of their statements or asked for their interview not to be used by the time of the completion of this study.

Participants were recruited through Twitter's and Facebook's direct message functions, emails, through contact sections of participants' professional or personal websites, and through snowball sampling via other study participants. The pre-approved IRB recruitment script was sent out to prospective respondents with the information sheet containing research purposes, contact information, and participant rights. Interviews were conducted between August 2019 and January 2020. All interviews were conducted synchronously. Thirteen of the interviews were conducted through voice calls; four of them were conducted through video chatting services. At the beginning of the interview sessions I asked permission to audio record the interview, and all but one gave consent to record. I took notes in real-time for the one interview that I did not record, and transcribed the audio recordings of the rest of the interviews myself. The interviews yielded about 230 pages of single-spaced content when transcribed. The interviews lasted between forty-eight minutes and an hour and twenty minutes. When the interviews neared the initially quoted time of forty-five minutes I asked the participants if they were okay with continuing the interview.

Ten of the participants identified as female, six identified as male, and one identified as non-binary. A majority of the respondents grew up in areas with high Asian American populations: twelve of the respondents are from either California, New York,

or New Jersey. The age of the respondents ranged from mid-twenties to early fifties at the time of the interview. All but one respondent had at least a bachelor's degree, and the one respondent without a bachelor's degree had some college experience. Thirteen of the respondents had at least an advanced degree (master's, professional) or higher. Thirteen also identified as activists; of the thirteen, four preferred other labels, such as organizer or freedom fighter. The remaining four who did not identify as activists acknowledged participating in some activism related work.[6] Even though these four did not identify as activist, they fit the criteria used in this study because they said they have engaged in activism related work (Potts et al, 2014)

After interviews were conducted and transcribed, I re-read the transcripts and listened to the audio recordings for recurring ideas and concepts. I began this process several interviews in and continued to do so while I conducted my last interview. Though I finished the interview stage of the research due to practical constraints such as project timeline and IRB considerations and not natural saturation, the recurring concepts presented in the findings were representative of a majority of the interviewees' responses. Moreover, because the questions were more open-ended the themes described below rose organically from respondents' own answers. For instance, white supremacy, model minority, colonial and imperialism were all concepts that were explicitly referenced in the original interview questions, and in most of the interviews the

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[6] Those who did not identify as activist gave different reasons. Lily felt uncomfortable with the label because she has a paid job that involves this type of work and does not count that work as activism. Lauren said she does not consider herself an activist because "it's not the main thing I do in my life." Hollie works in administration and considers activists as engaging in "boots on the ground stuff." Finally, Ravi is a lawyer and does not see himself as an activist.

participants brought these concepts up on their own. I approached the analysis of the interviews in an iterative manner (Tracy, 2013). I listened and read through transcripts for recurring answers while collecting additional interviews. I then applied my theoretical foundations to these recurring answers, determined whether they were pertinent to my research questions and then used my theories and research questions to re-read the data to gain additional insight. For example, most of the participants made reference to white supremacy and defined it per my follow up question during the interviews. White supremacy as a system supported my conceptualizations of racial formation and the racial order, a theory and concept I took from Omi & Winant (2015) and Kim (2000) respectively. However, it wasn't enough simply to notice that interviewees all mentioned white supremacy. Revisiting the data I found that interviewees mentioned white supremacy frequently while answering my questions, how do you see your identity in relation to the identity of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and other people of color? And how do you see your identity in relation to the identity of white Americans? This indicated that interviewees understood their racial and ethnic identities within a white supremacist system, which in turn helped make sense of the hashtag activism work as challenging the racial status quo.

In this chapter I report two broad themes from the interviews: complex racial and ethnic identity formation, and the current white supremacist racial order. As will be argued, Asian Americans construct their identities in complex and nuanced ways. This is primarily due to becoming politicized and conscientious through education, mostly during college while taking ethnic studies or Asian American studies courses. Several

participants problematize the divide in interracial coalition-building along education and

class lines. Secondly, when asked about various Asian American and ethnic identities'

relationship to other racial groups, participants identified a white supremacist system

which reinforces the oppression of communities of color. They identified key elements

reinforcing the existing racial inequity and the current racial order of white supremacy:

past colonialist projects and the present model minority stereotype.

Racial and ethnic identity formation

Although I had sought out the participants in the study because they are all Asian

American and engaged in online Twitter discourse, their self-identification markers were

much more nuanced and complicated. In contrast to the need to become one racial group

six decades ago (Espiritu, 1992), the participants today deliberately chose to identify in

complex ways. In this section the participants explain that their racial and ethnic

identities are situational and diverse, political, and formed through education.

Situational and diverse identities

Only three respondents offered their racial and/or ethnic identity with little or no

explanation. Nicole, an early participant in the #Asians4BlackLives hashtags who lives

in the Bay area, identified as Asian and Filipino. Lauren, a graduate student in the social

sciences, identified as Asian or Asian American. Chris, a scientist, used Asian American

or Chinese American interchangeably. Nicole's interview was not recorded so I don't

have a precise record of any follow up questions to how she identified in terms of race

and ethnicity. In Lauren's case I asked if her identification changed according to context and she said no. I asked Chris to clarify if there is a difference to when he uses each term and he answered that he uses Asian American and Chinese American interchangeably. The remaining respondents provided complex and situational answers about their racial and ethnic identities.

Firstly, a few participants said they use different labels for different spaces. For example, two participants, Esther and Vinnie, said that in broader spaces they would use Asian American. In more Asian American or Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) spaces they used their ethnic identities, Chinese American and Filipino, respectively.

Others justified their racial and ethnic identities with an added explanation of the diversity of experiences within the Asian American community. Renu, a lawyer who grew up in New Jersey, identified as an Indian American but not as an Asian American. She explains, "the reason I don't identify primarily as an Asian American is that's just such a large group… and it really flattens the diversity within the group, the economic diversity, the educational diversity within that community." Similarly, Valerie, a teacher who lives in New York City, uses an amalgam of her ethnic and racial identity, Chinese Asian American. She said she does this because the Chinese American experience is a very particular kind of Asian American experience, and Asian American is a broad label that encapsulates many experiences. Hannah, a graduate student living in Southern California, identifies as an Asian American daughter of Cambodian refugees based on the need to represent her Southeast Asian identity in Asian American spaces that often are represented by the experiences of select ethnic groups.

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These justifications for complex self-identification demonstrate the diversity within Asian American communities, but they are approached from different ethnic positionings within Asian America. In the cases of Renu and Valerie, they acknowledge the privilege of the Asian groups to which they belong. Both are approaching their identifications from a position of privilege. Hannah, on the other hand, specifically highlights her Khmer and refugee background because of the erasure of the lived experiences of Southeast Asian Americans.

Within Asian America different groups may be racialized by external forces in different ways through various racial projects, the "building blocks of the racial formation process" (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 13). For example, Abir and Indrajit, both South Asian, talk about how 9/11 affected the racialization of South Asian Americans. Indrajit in particular mentions that South Asians post 9/11 were racialized with another group, Muslim Arabs, into Muslim Arab South Asians (MASA). He shares his experience of this change

> [W]ithin a month after 9/11 I went to my first anti-Afghanistan war, anti-war protest, and I was walking there, and a nice white liberal person was like "Salaam Alaykum," you know, like basically just perceiving me as Muslim, which was totally fine… it's just I'm getting racialized in a different way in that moment, and I've never been specifically racialized as Muslim before, and it was this very interesting moment of like, "okay hang on, people's racial eyes are changing."

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Similarly, Hannah describes how Southeast Asian Americans are racialized, along with black and Latinx communities, as deviant minorities (Yi Borromeo, unpublished dissertation). Hannah explains that the deviant minorities "don't care about education, high teenage pregnancy, involved in gangs, all that kind of stuff." These different racial projects create different political identities that participants must contend with in their own self-identification. As such, participants also articulated political justifications for their self-identification.

Identities as political

The above examples not only draw attention to the diversity of experiences and identities within Asian America and beyond, but they also offer insight into the politics of identity within Asian America. Several participants articulated explicitly political reasons for their identification. One respondent, Michael, a clergyman, elaborated that he will use the label that provides the best political and social solidarity outcome according to the space he is in:

> If I'm in a space that has the capacity or feels like they understand, or I feel like there's a need to be specific about being Filipino American or Chinese American I will claim that… around Black Lives Matter, there's a whole movement around Asians4BlackLives, and that makes sense, I'm not gonna push back and say,

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'well it really should be, I identify as Filipinos4BlackLives…' because that's not

a movement of a good number of people.

Joy, a professor and researcher, first and foremost identifies as Asian American as a

political identity because it builds solidarity. She says she also recently started

identifying with her Hong Kong heritage in light of the recent protests there in 2019 to

maintain their democratic autonomy from China. Another participant, Abir, explicitly

said his identification as a South Asian American is a political choice in order to create

coalitions with other South Asian Americans such as Pakistani Americans and others

from different parts of the subcontinent. He reflects on growing up Bengali and being

exposed to many diverse groups:

I'm forced to see myself as not just Hindu but as Bengali, which then forces me

to see other people as my own, so I then took that lesson and expanded it to

South Asian because I also personally think that, you know, since we're a

minority in this country… creating coalitions among the diaspora is important

cause that creates numbers, and also creates a better kind of politics, and I also

think of myself contextually also as Asian American because, same thing

In all three of the examples above participants demonstrate complex identities in that

they have multiple layers and levels of ethnic and racial identities. Kai Hui, a community

organizer and activist who lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and identifies themself as

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a queer non-binary Asian American, prefers the term Asian American. Shea said "a lot of people don't like that term because it's not specific enough, but I actually really like it because it encourages the idea of solidarity between different groups."

For the respondents above, identities are geared towards building solidarity across groups within Asian America and internationally. They chose labels for explicitly political purposes, sometimes choosing specificity and sometimes opting for broader identities. This process of identification works within given cultural constraints and is a conscious activity. The process is similar to Gatson's (2003) conceptualization of identification as amorphous. In her autoethnographic process of racial identification as multiracial she observes an ongoing process which both confronts cultural options and uses cultural resources. As is demonstrated in the following subsection participants make deliberate political decisions by drawing on experiences but also educational resources. Regardless of whether participants explicitly articulated political reasons for their various racial and ethnic identifications, nearly all participants spoke about specific times in their lives where their identities became politicized, or they became conscientious in their identification.

Political identification and activism are for the educated

Although there is diversity in terms of age, racial and ethnic identities, and experiences, all of the participants have one thing in common: they are college-educated. With the exception of one participant with some college experience, all have earned at least a bachelor's degree, and most have advanced degrees. When I asked participants

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when they became conscious of their racial and/or ethnic identity, several mentioned a basic understanding of racial or ethnic differences at a young age. However, a majority – thirteen of the seventeen participants – said they developed a politicized and conscientious understanding of their identities in college. Also, ten of the seventeen participants said that their activism started in college.

In this section participants connect their complex racial and ethnic identities to their educational experiences. Even as participants share how their identities became politicized, several problematized the education and class divides in interracial coalition-building work.

Politicization through education

In addition to complex, situational, and political racialization, participants observed that their racialization is mutually constituted with other groups through a history of colonialism and systemic oppression. Fifteen of the seventeen respondents spoke about their journey of understanding their racial identity politically and conscientiously and all but two of these participants observed that essential milestones in this process occurred in college. Participants specifically described courses or experiences that helped shape their understanding of racial and ethnic identity. For example, Nicole and Vinnie, both Filipinx Americans, took ethnic studies courses and started thinking about racial identity and learned about decolonization and the history of Asian ethnic struggles in the United States.

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Taking courses to learn about Asian American history is a crucial motif for many of the participants. Eight of them mentioned taking at least one ethnic studies, American studies, or Asian American studies course in college. Three others mention working with Asian American organizations on campus while in college, one of whom, Abir, worked with an Asian American Leadership organization to advocate for an Asian American studies program.

Participants learned that their identities are mutually constituted with other ethnic groups within the Asian American communities and with broader racial and ethnic groups. For example, Sarah grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area in California where Asian Americans have a lot of political and economic influence. She describes the politicization of her racial and ethnic identity by sharing the experience of going to college out of state where Asian Americans were a minority, and mostly Southeast Asian:

> [I]t was the first time I had been in a place where, first of all, I didn't really identify with the majority racially in the area… and so that was sort of what I started to think, "okay, well, I'm Asian, but I'm not this kind of Asian, and what does that mean for me..."

This experience, coupled with an Asian American studies course she took, helped Sarah think through the complex racialization of Asian Americans based on geography, class, and migration patterns. Specifically, Sarah was exposed to Southeast Asian Americans

and understood the different racialization they experienced compared to her upbringing. Also, in her sophomore year Sarah volunteered to work with organizations in predominantly black communities, and took a workshop that specialized in interracial training. These experiences helped her understand how her privileged Asian American experience was connected and contrasted to communities of color, including Southeast Asian American communities.

Some participants more specifically share that learning about their own histories helped them become conscious of their racial identities in a politicized way. Michael, the clergyman, grew up in the Sacramento area, and spoke about how his identity became more politicized in college:

> when you begin to do much more in depth reading and looking at the history and all that, and finding out the stories that your grandparents, your aunts and uncles didn't really talk about much, I think that's when that political consciousness becomes alive a little bit more.

Kai Hui, the community organizer, says taking Chinese classes in college got them thinking about their family history; they got to visit their grandparent's hometown, which in turn led to taking courses on Asian American studies which "radicalized my politics." Abir credits the development of his racial and ethnic identities to a few significant factors, two of them historical. The first are the Bengali experiences that his parents brought to the United States with them. The second is growing up in a diverse

neighborhood where he learned about the history of the United States. He shares a story of when his parents gave him a book about Dr. Martin Luther King. Jr. when he was very young and the impact it made on him. He said, "I just think that if they gave me a book about George Washington as my first sense of American-ness… I would definitely be a different person I think."

There is a clear connection between education and the politicization of participants' identities. Participants were heavily influenced by their college experiences, particularly Asian American studies courses.

Critical reflection on educational and class divide

Education, particularly in ethnic studies or Asian American studies, may serve an important function in the development of complex and political racial and ethnic identities and interracial solidarity building for the participants interviewed. A few participants expressed an awareness that attitudes on interracial and class solidarity differed along educational and class divides. For example, Valerie observed different mentalities within her Asian American community around education and generation. She also shares that the "hurt" between black and Asian people is indicative of broader economic and historical forces which she learned about in college:

> we have had, you know, not great relationships with black and Latinx people… unfortunately a lot of that understanding around intersections of identity around working class-ness I only learned in college so I was able to confront it in college

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whereas working class people who are working two to three jobs, six to seven

days a week, may not be able to see those issues and see those traumas inflicted

against them. And they just have an anti-black view as a result.

Valerie expresses empathy with those in the Asian American community whose impulse

is to react without breaking down the ramifications. She credits her college education

and higher-class status with being able to think and learn about these issues. This

extends to the use of language; Valerie observed that terms she used in our interview like

'conditional citizenship' are academic terms that are not accessible to non-academics,

and this "requires us as Asian Americans to spread that language and to share that."

While Valerie's focus was on how the rift affected interracial solidarity, Ravi

lamented the rift within the Asian American community along with class and education.

Namely, he viewed the criticism lobbied at fellow Asian Americans of lower class or

education as problematic:

for activists and other folks who are commenting, but particularly online, it's like

the thought pieces that are getting picked, you know, were especially two, three

years ago… about what Asian Americans should do and how they could be good

allies and all these things, you know how I should yell at the auntie who is

working fifteen hours a day on the corner shop, I mean come on.

In his experience there has been much performative allyship within Asian America, which he sees take form in shaming fellow Asian Americans. Embedded in his statement is concern about the divide in Asian America around class. He views these criticisms as throwing the working-class members of the Asian American community under the bus.

Similarly, Abir also observed the behavior of class-privileged Asian American activists who flatten Asian American identity and thereby erase the experiences of working-class Asian Americans:

> I get annoyed at the Asian American activist who is themselves very bourgeois and very upper middle class who wants to, in a weird way, by showing solidarity, disappear all the Asian Americans who are working class and struggling still… you have to really be willing to confront your position, not make up a strawman Asian American character who you can feel better about, saying "oh it's us," no it's you. Your dad is the pharmacy guy, your dad is an asshole and says awful things, and even says awful things about the other Asian Americans, so like you have to confront it.

Disappearing other Asian Americans flattens diverse experiences and created an equivocation in which all Asian Americans must recognize their privilege. But Abir makes the point that the privilege – the appeal of whiteness – belongs to mostly middle-class Asian Americans. These class-privileged Asian Americans are using this equivocation to deflect their own complicity in class shaming.

Though the participants' educational attainments may not definitively be representative of all activists who participate in online Twitter discourse, these observations may potentially be indicative of a divide in interracial solidarity and activism work by class and education. Specifically, education in Asian American and ethnic studies may be the significant factor: eight of the participants took at least one ethnic studies, American studies, or Asian American studies course, with three others being involved in Asian American organizations in college.

In summary, most participants articulated complex and nuanced understandings of their racial and ethnic identities. Identities are situational and diverse, as is evidenced by multiple identities being claimed according to space and context. They are also political; Asian America is diverse, and participants intentionally used their identities for solidarity purposes. Finally, most of the participants came to political and conscientious understandings of their identities through education; several participants problematized the educational and class divides within Asian America.

The white supremacist racial order

The second broad theme in the interviews is that participants understood their racialization as Asian Americans within what Kim (2000) terms the racial order. The racial order is the racialization of groups in relation to one another to uphold positions of dominance and subordination. The current racial order is meant to uphold a white supremacist system. Most of the participants referred to white supremacy in their interviews. This concept provides the foundation for participants' articulation of Asian

American identities and interracial solidarity. I will first discuss how participants understand white supremacy, and then discuss the two ways participants identified how Asian Americans have been racialized to uphold the current white supremacist system: colonialism and the model minority stereotype.

<div align="center">*White supremacy*</div>

Thirteen of the seventeen participants spoke about white supremacy. All who spoke about white supremacy did so unprompted by me during the interviews. That this concept recurred organically throughout most of the interviews demonstrates its importance. Besides, answers about participants' definitions of white supremacy reached saturation as will be discussed below. Participants mentioned white supremacy mostly in the context of when I asked them variations of the question, how do you see your identity in relation to the identities of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, other people of color, and white Americans?

White supremacy as systemic

Once participants mentioned white supremacy, I asked them for their definitions of it. Contrary to popular discourse about individuals and groups who espouse white supremacist ideals, the participants defined white supremacy as systemic. Ten of the respondents specifically use the language of systems and structures which favor particular people and marginalizes others. For example, Renu, a lawyer living in New York City, said white supremacy "is a system of thinking that then impacts the lived

experience of the world around us that prioritizes, prizes, values whiteness above other racial identities as being better than other racial identities." Sarah, who works in activism in the San Francisco Bay area, further clarified that this system of white supremacy pervades many prominent aspects of American life She said, "it's built into our legislative system, it's built into our educational system, it's built into our arts and culture and media, it's built into how we grow and distribute and eat food, it's everywhere." Additionally, two respondents defined white supremacy as cultural. Valerie's understanding of white supremacy is "believing that the white race is superior to other races and white culture is superior, like Eurocentric culture that is, and so yeah, this idea that white culture dominates, or Eurocentric culture dominates."

For the respondents, white supremacy is when society understands whiteness as valuable and therefore dominant, as Renu observed. This preference for whiteness is reinforced through systems that work to privilege white people and marginalize non-white people, including legal systems, educational systems, and media industries, as Sarah observes.

How white supremacy uses Asian Americans to perpetuate itself

White supremacy was brought up by participants mostly within the context of participants' understanding of their racial and ethnic identities within the racial order. They made observations about how white supremacy perpetuates itself in three ways: how Asian Americans have been lured by a false invitation to whiteness, how a white supremacist system uses certain people of color – usually Asian Americans – to uphold

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an unjust system, and how the white supremacist system pits people of color in opposition to each other.

Firstly, participants observed that Asian Americans – currently racialized as the model minority – are lured by a white supremacist system into aspiring to whiteness. Kai Hui makes the observation that because of our ostensible economic and political success, "we are seen as being closer to achieving the white supremist idea of success than other ethnic groups." Two respondents independently used the metaphor of climbing a ladder to describe this. Renu expresses her concern about her community:

> I really worry about whiteness in some way being offered to Asian Americans as a way of maintaining white supremacy… I really worry about that exchange, that offer of acceptance in exchange for buying into existing structures… people are very focused on climbing the ladder of white supremacy, and are not often thinking about dismantling it instead.

Participants also emphasized that this lure of whiteness is a false promise, however. Joy observes that the ladder is going to change; in other words, Asian Americans will not always be a favored minority. Valerie, a teacher in New York, City, describes this as conditional citizenship. She explains,

> I am okay only until I do something wrong, or I'm succeeding too much, and now you're thinking that I'm an enemy… People see us as white possibly until

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they don't. Or they see us as acceptable until they don't based on our skin color

and the way we look…

Because racialization is context-specific, Joy and Renu say Asian Americans will never

fully achieve whiteness. Joy uses strong language in condemning Asian Americans who

think they can aspire to whiteness; she calls them "utter fools." Renu talks about trying

to convince her community, "'they don't want you, you're still not white enough for

them,' like it doesn't matter what job you have, it doesn't matter how much money you

make, it doesn't matter where you go to school." As close as Asian Americans can get to

whiteness, a few respondents also refer to how Asian Americans can still be racialized as

the perpetual foreigner. Hollie observes that "your white colleagues never get asked

where they're from, or if their English is good enough."

The second way white supremacy perpetuates itself is using Asian Americans to

uphold the system. In the current racial order Asian Americans are perceived as being

closer to whiteness; we are closer to the top of the ladder in the racial order than other

people of color. As Joy observed, "if you're climbing this ladder, you don't want that

ladder to change, right, and so you just want to climb that ladder." Asian Americans'

vested interest in maintaining the status quo, then, means they are upholding an unjust

system.

Lauren, a graduate student in the social sciences, explains how Asian Americans

are used to uphold this system. She makes note that the homogenization of a diverse

Asian America

is a narrative that is used to control groups… if this immigrant group can be so successful and pull on their bootstraps so damn hard, then if these other groups can't do the same thing it must be a deficit of those groups.

Esther, another graduate school who lives in Southern California, echoes this in tracing the history of how Japanese Americans, who faced internment, were compared to African Americans after they were freed from slavery. She described the anti-black mentality: "okay, well Japanese American people recovered from this, why can't black communities recover from slavery?" She if referring to how Japanese Americans were described as the first model minority for achieving success, and how this discourse hides anti-blackness under the guise of meritocracy. White supremacy uses Asian America's high socioeconomic success as a tool to shame other people of color and maintain the status quo.

Asian Americans are complicit in upholding an unjust system because they are higher up on the ladder of racial injustice and white supremacy. Michael, a religious clergyman in the San Francisco Bay area, said of being used as a wedge, "I think we play into that because wealth and privilege is seductive, and so if we can promise that to people, I think we're willing to throw other people under the bus." Implied here is that Asian Americans actively choose complicity in a white supremacist system.

The end result of this is the third way white supremacy perpetuates itself: creating tensions and opposition between communities of color. A few respondents use

the language of 'pitting' communities of color against each other. Kai Hui describes how Asian Americans are used against other communities of color who are attempting to create alternatives to white supremacy:

> compared to all these other people who continue to make trouble because they're trying to get, create that second culture of ways of being, and so this creates all these myths about, you know, Asians are so good at math, they're so good at science, they're quiet, submissive, blah blah blah you know, all that stuff, and it really, it pits people against each other.

Additionally, Hollie traces the current tensions between communities of color to white supremacist attitudes and beliefs which mediate the relationships between communities of color, preventing solidarity. She mentions how communities of color may consume media that perpetuate harmful stereotypes, instead of building direct relationships across color lines.

White supremacy featured prominently as a motif in the interviews on Asian American identity and interracial solidarity. Participants defined white supremacy as a system that privileges whiteness over other communities of color. White supremacy became salient in conversations about Asian Americans because of the role Asian Americans play in this racial order. Specifically, participants observed that Asian Americans are lured into aspiring to whiteness, and their complicity in climbing the

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metaphorical ladder of whiteness sustains this unjust system at the expense of all communities of color, and creates tensions that prevent interracial solidarity.

Colonialism and imperialism

One of the ways that Asian Americans have been racialized into the existing order is through the history of colonialism. Over half of the participants – ten out of seventeen – brought up colonialism and imperialism as factors which determine Asian American racialization in the current racial order. Participants observed the role colonialism and imperialism have played in the racialization of Asian Americans and other communities of color. For example, Lily, a university professor, and Ravi, a lawyer, both observe that Asian American racialization happened with respect to American international policies and war in the Asian continent, including Vietnam and Korea. Both made their comments in the context of bringing nuance to a shallow understanding of Asian American identity and history.

Several participants mentioned how colonialism has specifically impacted their racial and ethnic identities. For example, Nicole, a San Francisco Bay area native, talked about how she really started thinking about her racial identity in college taking ethnic studies courses and learning about decolonization and the Philippines. Joy similarly spoke about how her racial identity is informed by her parents' experience growing up in colonial British Hong Kong:

my parents were post-World War II refugees from mainland to Hong Kong, and

their growing up formative years were always connected to a still colonial Hong

Kong, so British Hong Kong… I never really felt a kinship with Chinese

identity… and so to see these people start identifying themselves as Hong

Kongers, like when I heard that I was like that makes sense to me… so there is a

difference in Chinese diaspora culture in different ways due to colonialization,

post-colonial relations etc.

Asian America is not a monolith; the histories of how specific ethnic groups migrated

here and the colonial forces that shaped those migration patterns are different. Hannah,

for example, shared that she realized in high school that the refugee migration narrative

is different from the narrative of immigration; it is a difference between forced

displacement and voluntary migration. Participants talked about the contrasting effects

colonialism has had on different Asian American ethnic groups. For example, Vinnie, a

consultant in the Washington, DC area, talks about the unique position that Filipinx

Americans are in because of their history:

because we were also colonized by Spain and the U.S. I think that history also

because, and how that has impacted our culture, also positions us to be able to be

bridge builders and connectors to broader communities of color.

Vinnie observed that Filipinx Americans can act as bridge builders across communities of color due to their specific colonial past. Indrajit, who works in the technology sector, contrastingly observed that South Asians like himself, "folks from areas of South Asia that were colonized to the British, like we come in speaking English, we come in having a little bit of cultural context about Anglo-American norms." Because of this, certain South Asians from a particular class or language background may be more comfortable in Anglo-American culture or spaces and can aspire to whiteness. Indrajit makes clear that this is not representative of all South Asian experiences, but is the case for certain people like his family.

For Nicole, Joy, and Hannah, their colonial histories help them understand their individual racial and ethnic identities. Vinnie, Indrajit, and others observe how colonialism affects the general racialization of their respective groups. Though different ethnic groups in Asian America had different migration patterns that contributed to contrasting racializations, one respondent, Ravi, summed it up concisely: "the American imperial project is why we're here often, you know?"

Model minorities

I observed above that white supremacy perpetuates itself by using Asian Americans as tools. The model minority myth simultaneously racializes other communities of color as deficient and culpable for lower socioeconomic statuses that are a result of systemic racism. A white supremacist system sows tensions between communities of color. Fifteen of the seventeen respondents spoke about the model

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minority stereotype in their interviews. This is not surprising considering it is the prominent stereotype of Asian Americans since the 1960s. Firstly, participants spoke about the model minority myth in context of its role in creating conflict between Asian Americans and other people of color; in other words, they spoke about how the model minority acts as a wedge. This wedge, in turn, perpetuates the current racial order. Second, several also spoke about how the model minority myth is harmful to Asian Americans as well because it glosses over the needs within our communities. Third, there is variance on whether participants want to dismantle the model minority altogether or use the position to advocate for racial justice.

Participants connected the model minority stereotype to the discourse which the white supremacist system used to uphold the current racial order: comparing other people of color to the model minority. For example, Valerie explicitly says that society "literally pitted Asians against other people of color through the model minority myth." Esther describes the mentality which upholds the current racial order: "Oh, Asian Americans are highly successful, why can't other communities be successful?"

A few participants make a direct connection between white supremacy and the model minority myth. For example, Hollie says that she was raised to believe that the model minority myth was racist at its core. She explains

> I'm aware of how harmful it is to be used as a weapon against other people of color, saying like 'why can't you be like them?... the fact that we can be utilized in that way, particularly some of these affirmative action lawsuits, it's just a

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deeply cynical white supremacist stereotype and system that really hurts other people of color.

The model minority is a tool with which a white supremacist system upholds the status quo.

Secondly, several participants make note that the model minority stereotype is harmful to Asian Americans as well. Although it ostensibly places Asian Americans in reaching distance of whiteness in the racial order, it prevents those who do not fit that stereotype from being allocated necessary resources, thereby creating the false illusion of Asian American prosperity. A few make note that the model minority myth hides the diversity within the Asian American community, and how this can obscure the language barriers, education and economic needs of specific groups within Asian America. Kai Hui explains, "there aren't resources that are really specifically being allocated to Cambodian or Vietnamese communities that, there are instances of really huge income and inequities or so on and so forth."

Lastly, there is a little bit of variance regarding how Asian Americans ought to respond to the model minority stereotype. Hollie, for instance, says the model minority myth is deeply racist and harmful at its core, even to Asian Americans. Esther observes that the talk around the model minority myth is that "we have to move away from the model minority because it's rooted in anti-blackness." Nicole and Renu talk about wanting to dismantle white supremacy which, as is discussed above, is upheld by the model minority myth.

One participant, however, sees the model minority as a status that is afforded to East Asians, and chooses to use it positively: Chris, a scientist, discusses how he uses the model minority status afforded to him to advocate for other marginalized groups. He explains that as Asian Americans

> we're in this really nice space to actually fight where we can take advantage of our model minority status and infiltrate group… we're in a position now where I can stand up… and say something and not be accused of being too whatever that black people get accused of or brown people get accused of

Similarly, when I asked Vinnie if he identifies as a model minority, he says some people might perceive him as such because of the privileges afforded to him. Simultaneous with his goal to "smash the model minority myth on its head," he uses his privilege to give voice to other marginalized groups. He said, "how am I consistently, constantly leveraging and utilizing that privilege to uplift and bring up the stories and narratives of impacted folks, folks who have been marginalized or disproportionately impacted?"

By contrast, Ravi has a more cynical understanding of the model minority myth. He observes that model minorities "throws their own people under the bus," and is indicative of the lack of solidarity within the Asian American community. He uses strong words to describe Asian American model minority mentality:

it's more this wholesale, "Asians suck," which I couldn't stomach it. There's a lot of self hate that's coming out in these spaces, or there was anyway, and that was really painful… And so when I talk about some of this, and I talk about, when we're talking about real liberation and the revolution who's gonna make sure our people are there? Who's gonna make sure the day after tomorrow that our people even know where to go? And that, for me, that's the genesis of this for me

Ravi, who has over two decades of experience working with Asian American and African American communities, laments how the model minority mentality has eroded Asian American solidarity. His language of liberation and revolution imply a dismantling of the current status quo, and his criticism of the model minority mentality would suggest a dismantling of that as well.

The model minority myth is used by a white supremacist system to maintain the status quo by comparing other communities of color – racialized like there's something wrong with them – with Asian Americans who are racialized as having done all the right things to achieve success. Participants observed that the model minority myth hurts our own communities as well. Finally, responses were mixed regarding how the model minority stereotype could be used, and on how active Asian Americans were in racializing themselves as such.

Analysis

In this section I argue that interviewees construct their identities deliberately to combat their racialization as model minorities for interracial and intraracial solidarity. They use race as technology to liminally and provisionally redefine themselves and the racial order. Participants' situational and political racial and ethnic identifications challenge white supremacy. They are using their identifications as a tool or mechanism to combat the model minority myth and the current racial order. However, redefining themselves and the racial order is liminal in that there is some variance on how interviewees chose to address the model minority stereotype despite general consensus of its problematic nature. As these redefinitions are nascent they are also provisional. I also observe that there exists an educational barrier to interracial solidarity work on Twitter.

Racial formation and the racial order

Most respondents spoke of the model minority stereotype without me bringing it up first in the interview. They said that Asian American model minority racialization was put to use to divide communities of color from one another. One respondent, Esther, a graduate student living in Southern California, describes the liminal positioning of Asian Americans in the racial order, in which we can toggle between different racializations:

So then I feel like sometimes broadly there are perceptions that Asian Americans are groups that can go back and forth, like you're only a person of color when you're trying to maybe use them as a wedge, or somehow it benefits the majority, and then sometimes it's like, "oh they're not people of color."

Though the second person changes towards the end of this excerpt, Esther's point is that Asian Americans are sometimes positioned differently depending on what purpose they serve. Joy, who works in higher education, similarly made another point that Asian Americans can be racialized differently through history. "[W]e are at a time when Asian American is generally considered a favored minority group to some degree."

Although as of these interviews Asian Americans are largely racialized as the model minority, this observation demonstrates the socially constructed and historically specific nature of racial formation (Omi & Winant, 2015). Racializations will change. In addition, Kim's (1999, 2000) concepts of racial triangulation and racial order are useful in understanding these context-specific racializations because Asian Americans are defined in relation to other communities of color, and the way Asian Americans are racialized have status implications. In 'valorizing' (to use Kim's term) Asian Americans as a model minority they are being afforded a higher status and closer proximity to whiteness than other communities of color. These statuses and racializations are dictated by dominant institutions that perpetuate dominant ideologies. A white supremacist racial order uses Asian Americans as model minorities to shame other communities of color.

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Racial and ethnic identity as technology

It's within the context of a white supremacist racial order that the interviewees articulate complex and situational ethnic and racial identities. Some of the interviewees explain that their identifications are politically motivated by interracial and intraracial solidarity. For example, Michael said he identifies according to what is best suited for the space – Asian American, Filipino American, or Chinese American. For example, he is comfortable identifying as Asian American in the context of #Asians4BlackLives because identifying with the panethnic label demonstrates strength in numbers as compared to identifying as Filipino. Abir similarly identified with multiple identities – Bengali, South Asian, and Asian American – for solidarity purposes. The interviewees are using their racial and ethnic identities as technologies with which to redefine the status quo (Coleman, 2009; Chun, 2013).

However, as referenced in the previous chapters, these alternative racial projects are provisional. In Chapters 3 and 4 I described how activists are claiming labels that are definitely *not* the model minority. Alternative racializations draw upon cultural resources which may include the ones activists are trying to problematize such as the model minority stereotype. Gatson (2003) writes of the conscious act of identification as amorphous: "this understanding of our personal and political worlds allows us to reach out across constructed boundaries. At the same time, we must continue to acknowledge the ongoing sources of those boundaries, even as they shift" (p. 41). Although this negative identification is an important step the process is still provisional. This is demonstrated in the variance in how interviewees' chose to deal with the model minority

stereotype. Although the model minority stereotype was problematized, there was no consensus on whether it should be dismantled entirely or leveraged to speak up about racial inequity. For example, Esther said we need to move away from the model minority stereotype because it is rooted in anti-blackness. However, two other respondents, Chris and Vinnie, said they leverage their ascribed privileged racializations to advocate for and amplify the stories of those from whom the same messages would not be received positively. The way forward in expressing interracial solidarity through new racial projects is not entirely clear; should Asian Americans use these ascribed racializations to undermine them and amplify the concerns of other marginalized groups? Or should they move away from this racialization altogether since it is actively used by a white supremacist system to marginalize other communities of color?

In one sense interviewees are reacting against identities ascribed to them by a white supremacist system. However, in another sense interviewees are undoing racial projects that other Asian Americans are actively working to maintain. As Joy and Renu described in their interviews, Asian Americans are interpellated into desiring to climb the ladder, and many work to maintain that ladder since they have been given a higher rung. As Wu's (2017) research also shows, Asian Americans were complicit in their own racialization as model minorities as well. The model minority identity was both ascribed to and avowed by Asian Americans, and interviewees are choosing alternative racialization.

Activism and privilege

There appears to be an education barrier to participating in interracial coalition building online, as evidenced by the demographics of the interviewees. In their racial and ethnic identifications interviewees highlight the diversity within Asian America. Lauren, a graduate student in social sciences, for example, notes that Asian Americans have the highest poverty rate in New York City, and that "homogenizing Asian Americans as a single successful group obscures that and makes it so that we don't have to deal with those types of problems." However, ironically the interviewees are homogenous in terms of educational achievement: all went to college and all but one have at least a bachelor's degree.

Twitter has a low-barrier of entry, so why are all the interviewees educated? As evidenced in the findings above, most of the interviewees became political conscious in college and by taking an ethnic studies or Asian American studies course. Although access to Twitter may not be limited by education, it does appear to be limited by educational achievement. The counterpublic for interracial solidarity, then, seems to be represented by privileged groups of Asian Americans.

I argued in the previous chapters that Asian American activists have worked towards creating a counterpublic on Twitter, taking advantage of the affordances that open up opportunities for nearly everyone to participate so long as they have access to the Internet. As scholars have pointed out, however, social media that are touted as neutral platforms may have biases in its inherent architecture and in content moderation (van Dijck, 2013). Brock (2012), for example, observes that although Twitter was

initially designed for a technologically adept white user base, its design and functionality were conducive to the performance of black discursive culture, namely signifyin'. Brock states black discursive activity helped bring the assumed neutral-but-white online activities into relief. In the case of Asian Americans, the educational barriers may indicate the problem of educated Asian Americans speaking about members of our community with less educational and class privilege. Although my analysis has not found any hard-coded biases about Asian Americans, Asian American online activism may contribute to what Kido Lopez and Ng (2017) term "images of the e-proficient model minority" (p. 307) while simultaneously combating such problematic stereotypes. As a few interviewees have observed, the task is to break down class and educational barriers to interracial solidarity activism.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the findings of an analysis of the guided interviews with Asian American participants who participated in at least one of the following hashtags: #Asians4BlackLives, #JusticeForAkaiGurley, and #NotYourWedge. There were two broad themes in the interviews. First, interviewees racialized themselves in situational and political ways. Most of them recounted becoming politicized and conscientious in their identity formation in college. A few problematized the educational barrier to this understanding and how educated non-working-class Asian Americans may marginalize working-class members of our communities. Second, interviewees named a white supremacist racial order which perpetuated itself through colonialist projects and

the model minority myth. They observed the harm that the model minority myth does not just to other communities of color but also to the Asian American community. However, participants expressed different opinions on how to best address this stereotype.

The findings demonstrate the socially and historically specific nature of racial formation (Omi & Winant, 2015). They also problematize the white supremacist racial order and the model minority stereotype. Interviewees connect their self-identification to interracial and intraracial solidarity. Their political racializations are used as technology to dismantle the model minority stereotype and problematize the white supremacist status quo. However, these alternative racializations are provisional and liminal. The interviews also show that interracial solidarity work is overrepresented by educated Asian Americans and reveal a barrier to solidarity work on Twitter, potentially undermining the work of dismantling the model minority stereotype.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I first heard about Vincent Chin's murder at the hands of disgruntled, white auto workers while I was a sophomore in college. We were at a retreat for cabinet members of student organizations at the beginning of the fall semester, and the man who told me about him was the director of multicultural development. It is within this specific context that I learned about this important event in Asian American history. It is a reminder that Asian Americans weren't always a favored model minority, nor are we guaranteed to hold onto that status permanently. In fact, as of this writing there have been anecdotal reports of rises of anti-Asian racism within the context of the global COVID-19 virus pandemic. This demonstrates that racialization may oscillate, and Asian Americans may sometimes occupy multiple statuses.

To me, Asian American history is was inaccessible through K-12 public education. But the space we occupy within the racial order in the United States serves an important purpose: reinforcing structures that continue to privilege whiteness and marginalize communities of color. This is one of the observations made by Asian Americans on Twitter who are attempting to build interracial solidarity. In doing so they problematize the current racial order.

This dissertation sought to answer the question of how Asian Americans express solidarity with other people of color online. More specifically, it explores the discursive

activities employed in hashtag activism, and how Asian Americans construct their identities while practicing hashtag activism around interracial coalition building.

In this study I understand race as a social construct that is mutually constituted among multiple groups across history. Using Omi & Winant's (2015) racial formation theory and racial projects concept, and Kim's (1999; 2000) racial triangulation and racial order theories, I explored how Asian Americans contend with their current racialization – the model minority – by tracing hashtag discourse across a five-year time period. In the process I examined the constitution of solidarity minded Asian American identities. I also employed literature on race and digital media, specifically drawing from Coleman's (2009) and Chun's (2013) understanding of race as technology, literature on social media and hashtag activism, and the concept of techno-Orientalism.

Because Twitter participants problematized racial relations, I used critical discourse studies (CDS) and discourse tracing as methods of inquiry. CDS is problem-oriented and understands discourse as a social practice, and discourse tracing is an effective framework to keep track of any changes in the language used.

The overarching research question for this dissertation was how do Asian Americans express solidarity with other people of color online? The answer is that hashtag participants employ several different interracial solidarity discourses that redefine Asian American identity and place in the racial order. Because race is mutually constituted and historically embedded (Omi & Winant, 2015), in their solidarity discourse Asian American activists must interrogate their own role and complicity in maintaining the current white supremacist racial order (Kim, 2000). Their discursive

strategies use race as technology to achieve their goal of interracial solidarity. Asian American activists also take advantage of the affordances of Twitter to create a counterpublic through which to distribute this discourse. However, Asian American activism online appears to be overrepresented by privileged Asian Americans: the town hall was criticized for mostly being East Asian, and the interviewees all had college educations. Although these observations do not necessarily indicate hard coded racial biases within the architecture of Twitter, they may indicate that interracial solidarity activity is limited to those who may fit techno-Orientalist perspective and the model minority stereotype.

Summary

In this section I will summarize the findings on discursive strategies in hashtag activism and guided interviews that were reported in Chapters 3 through 5.

Hashtag activity on Twitter

Through #Asians4BlackLives Asian Americans exhibited general solidarity with African Americans and observed our use as tools in anti-black racism. Consequently, during the Oakland Police Department shutdown event Asian American activists were centered as they created a blockade to the front entrance of the OPD. The discourse evolved a few months later during the Lunar New Year of 2015 to acknowledgement of anti-blackness within Asian American communities. Discourse of anti-blackness and pro-whiteness in Asian American communities continued with emphasis on state

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sponsored racism again communities of color, particularly black communities during a Google Hangout session organized by 18 Million Rising and live tweeted post-Peter Liang's conviction in February 2016. Finally, general statements of solidarity became prominent again, and the emphasis on anti-blackness in Asian American communities became less emphasized after Philando Castile's and Alton Sterling's deaths in July 2016.

Though #JusticeForAkaiGurley was not put to use by any specific racial or ethnic group, Asian Americans used the hashtag a few times over the course of its lifetime to express solidarity. The Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV), an Asian community organization group based in New York City, used the hashtag prominently, beginning with a vigil outside of One Police Plaza in March of 2015 with family of Akai Gurley, the victim killed by Chinese American officer Peter Liang. The discourse used by CAAAV and other Asian Americans in this hashtag was accountability for all officers. This seemingly post-racial discourse of accountability was actually a response to pro-Liang supporters who advocated for leniency for Liang because of white officers dodging punishment for high profile killings of African Americans. Accountability for all persisted as a discourse throughout Asian American participation in #JusticeForAkaiGurley. In addition, tweeters also acknowledged anti-blackness in Asian American communities during April of 2015. This discourse evolved after Liang's conviction in February 2016 to include observations of living within a white supremacist system, a choice for Asian Americans between aspiring to whiteness or solidarity with communities of color, and media bias in covering pro-Liang protests.

The two aforementioned hashtags overlap in terms of time, and reflect a broad evolution of discursive strategy. After the acquittal of officer Darren Wilson Asian Americans joined the OPD shutdown with general expressions of solidarity and an acknowledgement that Asian Americans have been used as tools in anti-black racism. However, the discourse shifted from passivity to agency after Officer Liang's indictment in February 2015. Asian Americans using both hashtags acknowledged the presence of anti-blackness within our communities, indicating complicity in a racist system. This discourse evolved to acknowledge a white supremacist system, establishing Asian American unique positionality in the racial order and choice between solidarity with other communities of color or aspirations to achieving whiteness.

A year after Sterling's and Castile's deaths, Asian American scholars and activists organized a town hall on Twitter using #NotYourWedge in response to *The New York Times* coverage of the lawsuit that Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) brought against Harvard University. The town hall represented the largest spike in activity in #NotYourWedge. The purpose of the town hall was to establish facts about affirmative action. Asian American participants of the town hall expressed support for affirmative action in four ways: identifying dominant discourse in service of white supremacy using media as a conduit, pushing for disaggregation of data on Asian Americans to highlight the benefits of affirmative action, using the discourse of benefits for all as established by past Supreme Court cases on affirmative action, and choosing 'justice, not just us.'

Two minor spikes in activity followed several news media articles in June of 2018 which reported that Harvard allegedly ranked Asian American applicants consistently lower in non-quantitative measures such as personality while they consistently ranked Asian American applicants highest in quantitative measures such as test scores and grades. In response to these reports #NotYourWedge participants shifted their discourse to highlight the limits of standardized testing and framing affirmative action as a corrective for institutional racism, a departure from the diversity as benefit for all discourse.

There were four overall discursive strategies used by participants in all three of these hashtags. First, discourse changed according to ruptures in time. Namely, there were two events that led to change: the indictment of Peter Liang for killing Akai Gurley in February 2015 and the news reports in June 2018 about Harvard's low personality rankings for Asian American applicants. Tracing the changes in these ruptures helped bring out anti-black racism in Asian American communities in #Asians4BlackLives and #JusticeForAkaiGurley and demonstrated the power of news media as a conduit for distribution of dominant discourse in #NotYourWedge.

Second, in all the hashtags participants referred to a white supremacist racial order. They did this either directly by naming the white supremacist system or indirectly by focusing on the effects of policies which benefit white Americans. An example of indirectly referencing a white supremacist system was when #JusticeForAkaiGurley participants criticized pro-Liang advocates' call for charges against Liang to be dropped in the same manner that they were dropped for other officers. Aspirations to white

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privilege is implied here because many of the officers who received no conviction or punishment for killing African Americans were white. Similarly, #NotYourWedge town hall participants pointed out that race-neutral policies like legacy admissions, donor admissions and student athletic scholarships tend to privilege white students.

Third and fourth, participants redefined Asian American identity and position in the current racial order in liminal and provisional ways. During the hashtag time period Asian Americans were prominently racialized as the model minority. Participants connected the model minority stereotype to a white supremacist racial order. By expressing solidarity through hashtagging, live-tweeting protest events, and explicitly eschewing the model minority stereotype, Asian Americans attempted to create alternative racial projects to counter the current racialization of Asian Americans. These alternative racial projects were provisional and liminal, however.[7]

Interviews with hashtag participants

Asian Americans who participated in interracial solidarity building constructed their self identities in complex and situational manners. Some identified using multiple labels or an amalgam of racial and ethnic markers, such as Valerie, who identified as Chinese Asian American. Others used different labels according to different spaces; Vinnie for example identified as Asian American but was more specific in Asian

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[7] It must be noted that Asian-Black solidarity movements in the 1960s and beyond may also demonstrate attempts to alternative racializations. The strength of the model minority stereotype as perpetuated in dominant discourse may have stifled the staying power of these movements, though that is beyond the scope of this project. Others have noted the effects (or lack thereof) of these movements on Asian American activism today (see Espiritu, 1992; Balance, 2012; Chou & Feagin, 2015).

American Pacific Islander (AAPI) spaces by identifying as Filipino. In addition, some participants chose their identifications specifically for political reasons. Michael identified as Asian in the #Asians4BlackLives space because of the strength in numbers that a pan-ethnic identity represents in building solidarity with the black community. By contrast, Renu chose not to identify as Asian American because it flattens the diversity within the group. She did not to erase the experiences of other groups within Asian America. Most participants pointed to college as a time where they became political and conscientious of their racial and ethnic identities; many took courses in ethnic studies or Asian American studies and learned of various Asian American groups' migration patterns and colonial pasts and the mutually constituted nature of racial groups. A few problematized the educational barrier to understanding historical racial conflicts and were critical of educated Asian Americans denigrating working class members of our communities for failing to be woke.

Participants also couched their racial and ethnic identifications within the current racial order of white supremacy. Most respondents spoke of white supremacy within the context of how they understand their racial and ethnic identities in relation to other groups, including communities of color such as African Americans, Latinx Americans, and Native Americans, and also to white Americans. All participants who spoke of white supremacy in their interviews emphasized its structural or cultural character over individual belief systems. Participants explained that white supremacy as a system perpetuates itself through luring Asian Americans into a false invitation of whiteness, uses Asian Americans to uphold an unjust system, and pits communities of color in

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opposition to one another. The model minority stereotype was centered in interviews as a prime method of upholding white supremacy.

These findings reinforce the socially constructed and historically specific nature of racial formation. They also echo the discursive strategies of the hashtags by naming a white supremacist system, and using racial and ethnic identifications as technology to build interracial and intraracial solidarity. All of the participants were educated, and several problematized the gap in interracial solidarity by class and education.

Contributions

My study offers three contributions. First, examining racial and ethnic identity is an important component in understanding interracial solidarity discourse and the racial order. As race is mutually constituted and sociohistorically contextual (Omi & Winant, 2015), studies on interracial solidarity building must acknowledge identity and positionality as integral components (Kim, 1999). Kuo (2018b) has already written about the importance of identity in interracial solidarity. She argues that to understand Black-Asian relations Asian Americans must "take on the question of agency in organized, state-sanctioned violence that structures anti-Blackness. In this vein, Asian American-ness functions as a key site for better understanding the discursive mediation of solidarity between and across communities of colour" (p. 43). My study adds to the emphasis on identity, but also uses interviewing to understand solidarity-minded Asian American activists' motivation and thought processes for their interracial hashtag activity and racial and ethnic identifications.

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Second, the study reinforces understanding of the utility of racial identity. I use race as technology as a metaphor to understand the discursive strategies used by Asian American activists. As activists use hashtags to demonstrate affinity, challenge racialization and amplify racial projects they are creating alternative racializations of their identities. I interpret these activities using Chun's (2013) conceptualization. She writes that race as technology "shifts the focus from the *what* of race to the *how* of race, from *knowing* race to *doing* race" (p. 38). Asian American activists are countering the systematic employment of race as a tool by a white supremacy by using it for their own purposes. In addition to being a utility, race is also political. As Omi and Winant (2015) write, "Race is strategic; race does ideological and political work" (p. 111).

Finally, the study contributes to how Asian American activists may be racialized online. Scholars have noted the techno-Orientalist lenses through which Asians and Asian Americans are viewed broadly (Morley & Robbins, 2002; Roh, Huang, & Niu, 2015) and in literature and film (Niu, 2008; Park, 2018). Nakamura (2002, 2009) has done some work on representation (or lack thereof) of Asians and Asian Americans online, quickly dispelling the notion that the Internet as a colorblind space in the 2000s. How are Asians and Asian Americans represented online? In what ways might the Twittersphere or other platforms reinforce problematic stereotypes about Asian Americans? Although I do not argue that the architecture of technologies demonstrate bias against Asian Americans as others have for black communities and other communities of color (Benjamin, 2016, 2019), my study indicates that Asian American activism is represented by educated Asian Americans of middle-class status or higher.

Asian American online activism must contend with the educational and class barriers to solidarity activity online. Otherwise activists may inadvertently reinforce the model minority myth and techno-Orientalist lenses while trying to dismantling problematic stereotypes and the racial order.

Limitations of the study

The first limitation was that some hyperlinks tweeted became unavailable at the time of analysis. For example, in the #Asians4BlackLives hashtags, one magazine article that users frequently shared was published on the YES magazine website in March of 2015, but has since been removed. Similarly, Storify was a website that allowed users to chronicle social media stories, and there were several links to Storify videos that used #Asians4BlackLives, but the website shut down in May of 2018 and the links subsequently went dead.

Secondly, although Twitter is primarily a microblogging platform, users may frequently add images to their tweets. For example, photos of on-the-ground activities were regularly shared as part of tweets, such as when the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (CAAAV) organized a vigil for Gurley in Brooklyn. The present study does not delve deeply into analysis of images shared. I do a cursory analysis of CAAAV's selfie campaign in which solidarity minded Asian Americans posted a photo of themselves holding up signs with various hashtag references to justice for Akai Gurley. Here I limited my analysis to the words written on the signs. In addition, I briefly discussed the physical decision made by the Oakland-based #Asians4BlackLives group

to blockade the front entrance to the Oakland Police Department. This was because it was referenced in an interview with someone familiar with the planning of the OPD shutdown. A deeper analysis can be made of the significance of Asian American faces expressing solidarity on Twitter through the selfie campaign or through photos of Asian American presence in rallies and protests. To do this will involve visual rhetoric tools.

Third, I opted not to analyze retweets without comments because they did not contribute any new data on discourse. This could be a limitation because an analysis of popularity of discourse by number of likes or retweets, for instance, may give further insight into which types of discursive strategies were most prominent.

Future research

As mentioned above, analyzing tweets by volume of likes or retweets could provide more insight into which specific discursive strategies are prominent. They could also give visual and numerical evidence for opinion leaders. For example, scholars have employed network analyze to determine the density and influence of specific Twitter users (Kuo, 2018a, Jackson, Bailey, & Foucault Welles, 2020).

A second direction for future research involves quantitative regression analysis of participation in interracial solidarity work and demographic data. I've established that many of the participants in Twitter activism are educated, with many presumably holding college degrees. If the technological barriers to participation in Twitter are low, why are Asian Americans who are educated more prone to participate in interracial solidarity building? The data analyzed in this study give the indication that the barriers

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are education and language. The more educated an Asian American is, particularly in our own history and the history of other racial groups, the more likely we are to engage in these types of activities. In addition, although Twitter supports over thirty languages, immigrant Asian Americans may be limited in their participation because the interracial solidarity activity occurs mostly in English. However, to fully establish these as barriers, a quantitative study on the correlation between participation in activism related activities and education or language should be conducted.

Third, although I problematize the class and educational barriers to activism, the current study is limited in its treatment of these elements. A detailed analysis of the class and educational divides may unveil additional dimensions to the politics of Asian American positionality in the racial order and the use of the Twittersphere to create representative counterpublics.

Finally, during the course of this study it appears that Asian American racialization has changed in real time. I established that racialization of different racial groups can change. In Chapter 1 I tracked the development of Asian American stereotypes from the yellow peril to the model minority. Okihiro (1994) made the argument that both the stereotypes uphold white supremacy in a circular relationship; these are not opposites but racializations along a spectrum that can change. Interview respondents echoed this sentiment. Joy, for example, said that the ladder to whiteness is going to change, and that anyone who thinks they can attain whiteness are utter fools.

From March 2020 onward there has been anecdotal data to support that hate crimes against Asian Americans are on the rise due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The FBI reportedly warned of potential rises in hate crimes against Asian Americans (Margolin, 2020). The Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON) has been tracking incident reports of anti-Asian racism and reported 1,100 incidents of verbal harassment, shunning and physical assault in two weeks (Asian Pacific Policy, n.d.). Reports include verbal abuse, vandalism, and even an acid attack. The conflation of the ethnic heritage of some Asian Americans with the nation state from which a virus originated may be evidence of a growing resurgence of the yellow peril stereotype. That this development is occurring toward the end of my analysis means that any conclusions regarding the change in Asian American racialization is tentative. However, it will be important to track how Asian Americans are racialized in the coming months and years and how discursive activity on and off social media adapts.

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APPENDIX A

STRUCTURED QUESTIONS IN DISCOURSE TRACING

The following are the structured questions which correspond to the third step if the discourse tracing method.

1. When do the spikes in Twitter activity occur based on the visualization of the data?
2. What online and offline events, if any, precipitated the spike in Twitter activity?
3. What do these events tell us about the discursive strategies employed? Do they constitute ruptures?

APPENDIX B

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

Basic demographic info
1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?
3. What's your highest level of education?
4. Where did you grow up? What was the racial makeup of the city/state/etc. where you grew up?
5. Tell me about your racial and/or ethnic identity, and how that identity developed for you.
6. How much interaction did you have with members of your ethnicity and Asian Americans? How much interaction did you have with other races?
7. Is your level of interaction different now than when you were growing up?

Hashtag activity
1. What made you decide to post using [#Asians4BlackLives, #NotYourWedge, and/or #JusticeForAkaiGurley]?
2. Are there experiences or stories from your life that inform your decision to post using those hashtags? If so, can you share some of them?

Self-identity
1. Do you consider yourself more [ethnic specific American] or Asian American, and why?
2. What is a common stereotype regarding [participant's racial and/or ethnic identity]?

Identity in relation to other racial groups
1. How do you see your identity in relation to the identity of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and other people of color?
2. How do you see your identity in relation to the identity of white Americans?