The Projection of Racial Identity on Social Network

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Abstract:
This quantitative study examined the projection of racial identity on social networks. A survey was distributed to 347 college students from a medium sized Midwestern university to assess ways in which participants depicted their racial identity on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. More specifically, scales were used to examine the use of photos and text, concealment of racial identity, and interactions with race related content. Results suggest that although participants do not intentionally hide or filter out their racial identity on social networks, they do not intentionally display racial identity on social networks either. In addition, independent samples *t* tests reveal that non-Caucasian participants are significantly more likely to post photos, communicate with others about their racial identity, and interact with racial content on social networks than Caucasian participants. Implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: racial identity, race, social media, social networks, online discourse, virtual communication

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1. Introduction

Social media has become a battleground for conflicts over political and social concerns. In the current political climate, issues surrounding race and racial identity have come to the forefront. Since race has tied into many of the sociopolitical debates on social networks in recent years, it is important to research and understand race on social networks. The purpose of this study is to better understand how race is perceived, negotiated, and conveyed on social media. Understanding how racial identity is projected on social media is important due to mass consumption of social networking sites and the assumed visual nature of race, which affects both offline and online relationships.

Social media has shown remarkable growth as a major form of communication around the world—in both professional and personal contexts. For example, according to Boyd (2007), social networking sites are used as a form of mainstream socialization that can equate to offline public spaces. In other words, online social networks provide space for the kinds of interactions that used to take place in physical public spaces such as coffee shops. Boyd explains that since social networks provide a place for individuals to meet and communicate in the same way they might in physical locations, they too are a public space.

This public space provides a forum for individuals to explore racial identity. For example, Chan (2017) interviewed college students to better understand how interactions on social networks about race shaped their racial identities. Chan reported that racial information from social networks influences identities of those who use the networks by connecting them to other group members, encouraging pride in their racial identity, and by partaking or not partaking in direct or indirect discussion about race. Through the lens of the Theory of Symbolic Interactionism, Chan's findings indicate that racial identities are influenced by communication on social media.

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In another study that assessed the utility of social media for exploration of racial identity, Florini (2013) explained how Twitter provides a space for people of color to connect with one another and share experiences. For example, Florini explained the phenomena of "black Twitter," in which Twitter users rely on linguistic performances with vocabulary, grammar, and textual cues to perform racial identity.

Finally, Brock (2009) claims social media to be a meeting place for people of color to discuss black identity. Brock explains that social media helps society understand race differently because the medium lacks all the physical signifiers of face-to-face communication. Due to individuals' reliance on visual perception in defining race in face-to-face interactions, people of color have started to rely on social media as a space to explore racial identity.

On the one hand, the assumed visual nature of race has led to social networking sites being used as a platform for exploration of racial identity for people of color. On the other hand, assumptions individuals make when race is perceived visually may lead to unhealthy discourse on social media, stemmed in problematic definitions of race. Race is often treated as if it is a visual aspect of identity that is "set" at birth, when in reality racial identities are socially constructed and subject to change by members of society (Asante, Sekimoto & Brown, 2016; Condry 2015; diAngelo 2012; Graves Jr. 2010; Maragh 2017). Asante, Sekimoto, and Brown (2016) explain that race, in particular, blackness, is more than outside appearance; in fact, racial identity is constructed through symbols, language, culture, and group experiences. Therefore, racial identity is not about skin color, yet that is how most individuals perceive and understand race. This is problematic because how individuals understand race directly affects their conversations about race and the way in which they project racial identity in the online world. In other words, individuals bring their perceptions of race to online mediums, and the ensuing discourse can affect both online and offline relationships.

Recently, social networks have facilitated heated conversations relevant to race. NFL players kneeling for the national anthem, racialized anger towards police officers and the #BlackLivesMatter slogan, the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's fight against an oil pipeline, and the 2016 presidential election are examples of current events that led to racialized conversations on social networking sites. Facebook pages, Tweets, and Instagram hashtags bring the words and ideas of individuals to the attention of the public in an unprecedented manner. This provides an opportunity to marginalized individuals who do not often have a voice in society; social media provides a "microphone" that allows them to be heard by large amounts of people all over the world. However, there is a downside. As made apparent with the #BlackLivesMatter movement, marginalized individuals may face animosity, discomfort, and misunderstanding when it comes to issues of race, racial expression, and identity expression on social networks.

Discussions that take place on social networks affect the lived experiences and shape the identities of the members of these social networks. After a long history of racial conflicts, the United States has arrived at a time in which racial conflicts have heightened and need to be addressed. Due to the advances in computer mediated communication and the problematic nature in which individuals define race, which affects offline and online discourse and relationships, there is a need to research how individuals explore their racial identities on social media. Researchers must find ways to better understand how race is perceived, negotiated, and conveyed on social media. Therefore, this study aims to better understand how individuals project racial identity on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Due to the paucity of research exploring the projection of racial identity on social networks, this study was framed as a preliminary investigation into the topic with the following research question examined quantitatively as described in Methods.

Research question: how do Caucasian and non-Caucasian college students display racial identity on social networks?

2. Literature review

In order to set the framework for this study, an examination of the literature pertaining to social media platforms, online identity construction, and online versus face-to-face communication about race follows.

2.1 Social media platforms

Because of their widespread use, it is possible to examine racial identity on three primary social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. According to Duggan (2015), 72% of adults who use the internet use Facebook, 28% use Instagram, and 23% use Twitter. The sites were selected to allow participants to express how various social media sites affected their experiences differently. Unlike Facebook, Twitter focuses on short blogs. In other words, Twitter does not provide the full profile interface that Facebook does. On Facebook, users have the ability to change their profile picture, edit and project large amounts of personal information, control albums of photos shared by individuals and their friends, as well as blog. In addition, the global reach of Facebook offers the opportunity for facilitation of intercultural interactions (Wu & Marek 2018). What Twitter lacks in terms of depth (i.e. no opportunity for individual profiles), it gains as a frequent blogging site whose character limits force users to get to the point. For these reasons both Facebook and Twitter have been chosen for the study. The last social network examined is Instagram. Instagram was included as a platform to examine in this study because it focuses on photos and videos significantly more than Facebook and Twitter. All three social media platforms examined in this study (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) are non-anonymous platforms (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). In other words, they are designed to let users validate the online identities of one another in the offline world. Considering their similar nature as non-anonymous platforms and their differences in foci, the three different social media networks will lead to a better understanding of how race is experienced in online communities.

2.2 Identity construction on social media

Social networks provide the opportunity for identity construction. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007) social networking sites, including Facebook and Twitter, have been of interest to researchers because users intentionally construct online representations of themselves and engage in impression management. Furthermore, identities are fluid and frequently change with new experiences and environments (Foldy 2012). Foldy described identity construction as a process where identities develop and adapt to an individual's characteristics, actions, and context. Therefore, social networks provide a platform for exploration of identity projection.

Research shows that individuals project identity on social networks in various ways. Some studies have found that photographs were used to display aspects of identity (e.g., Uimonen 2013; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). In addition to photos, Zhao et al. (2008) found that interests, hobbies, favorite movies, artistic tastes, and narratives in the "about me" section of a social media profile are used to construct identities on social media. Boyd's (2007) findings suggest that users primarily rely on their profile, friends list, and comments/blogs to construct their identity on social network sites. Boyd claimed that people use these aspects as a means of identity management. This is because social network users are aware of the connections they have with others in the offline world. Boyd explained that the link between offline and online identities is so close that social network users are likely to present themselves so as to be viewed in a positive light by their peers.

However, there is pressure to adhere to expected norms when performing *racial* identity on social networks. For example, Maragh (2017) explored black racial authenticity on Twitter and found that discourse pertaining to "acting white" and "acting black" influenced linguistic performances; in other words, individuals felt pressure to act and behave according to the norms of their racial group. Fryer (2006) claimed that people of color who "act white" are sometimes attributed negative labels because they are perceived to be engaging in performance that is characteristic of whites. These studies reveal that there is pressure on people of color to resist "acting white" and instead act in a manner that is "authentic" to their racial group. This is reminiscent of the concept of racial authenticity. The term racial authenticity was first described by Johnson (2003, 3) as historic and political contexts that lead to groups using … "authenticating discourse [that] enables marginalized people to counter oppressive representation of themselves." Johnson explained the difficulty in using terminology such as blackness to give essence to specific identities because the concept is a product of history, politics, and social norms. Therefore, people of color can use social networks, like Twitter, to express identity in a manner that is defiant of the oppressive dominant racial culture and norms. Maragh (2017) pointed out that phenomena like "Black Twitter" can legitimize performances of racial identities that counter the narrative of the dominant culture.

Not only is identity performed, it can also be hidden. In addition to racial identity performances, Maragh (2017) claimed that people on Twitter engage in censorship of certain aspects of identity and highlight other parts of identity. She explained that because there are "rules" for maintaining racial authenticity, Twitter users only perform specific identities. These findings fit with the claims made by Toma and Carlson (2015) that Facebook users are selective in what they choose to post in order to project a specific image. Toma and Carlson claimed that Facebook offers a means of presenting identity selectively because of the ability to choose what is posted. In other words, Facebook users make conscious choices about the way they present themselves on Facebook. Toma and Carlson concluded that Facebook users were likely to represent selected parts of their identity as accurately as possible because their audience might easily detect enhancement of them. Participants believed others might perceive their Facebook profiles as more outgoing, adventurous, relaxed, and calm than their actual selves; this was because their posts and photos were a compilation of the fun and exciting parts of their lives and filtered out monotonous tasks. Facebook users are cognizant of how they project themselves to others, and they make calculations as to how they should selectively present their identity.

2.3 Social media, the Internet and race

Finally, it is important to examine differences between face-to-face communication and social network communication about race. Cisneros and Nakayama (2015) argued that social media has changed the way society communicates about race and racial identities. For example, they examine an ambiguous social media blog, which revealed racist discourse about the election of the first Indian American woman to be awarded the title of "Miss America." A dissection of racist remarks about the Miss America title provides the opportunity to show present day society to be just as racially-derogative and prejudiced as in past decades. Social media, especially on anonymous platforms, provides a space for racial discourse to take place in a manner that does not follow the same social norms as face-to-face conversations. For example, Brown (2009) examined hate speech on several of the internet's most visited white supremacist chat rooms. Brown argued that through discourse about separate racial identities, the socially constructed ideology of race becomes more deeply rooted in the perception of people as a reality. Brown's work suggested that the internet can

provide an environment for racist discourse that supports the formation and progression of uneducated ideology.

In contrast to the previously cited studies, some research reported that social media platforms provided a space for a more positive exploration of racial identities. For example, Brock (2009) claims online spaces are used to create conversations about what it means to be Black. Online spaces work as a third place, or meeting ground, for people who otherwise would not easily facilitate their conversations. According to Brock, racial identities can be perceived differently online than in face-to-face dialogue, because race is not as easily visually assumed through social media. Florini (2013) found that social media users purposely pursue other methods of racial identity construction when there is a lack of visual representation of race. One method explained by Florini is the use of "signifying," or speaking in a particular means to give the audience cues about their racial identity. Florini explained that Twitter users must project racial identities and make them visible in order for others to recognize them. Social networks like Twitter provide a space for racial identities to be shaped and projected. This may explain Correa and Jeong's (2011) findings, which revealed that minority populations have a greater involvement on social media than their white counterparts. Correa and Jeong also found that self-expression was an important part of the online experience. The findings suggest that social media provides a platform for marginalized populations to express their views.

People can also use social networks to promote positive racial group identities. Chan (2017) claimed that people of color use social networks to project positive images of their racial groups. He explained social media can be used to display pride and empowerment of racial identity, as well as hurt and marginalization. Additionally, Chan reported that people who post about race, or engage with race related content on social media, typically do so to promote positive representation of their racial group.

The literature reviewed reveals that it is natural for individuals to construct identity through social media. However, it is not clear whether or not that identity projection often involves racial identity specifically. There have been very few studies that have explored the projection of racial identity on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. This study helps to fill a gap in the literature.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Data was collected from 347 participants, recruited from a medium sized university in the Midwest in the spring of 2017. Although a convenience sample, college students make ideal participants because a majority belong to the younger generation, and research shows that members of younger generations use social networking sites at a higher rate (Lenhart, Horrigan & Farrows, 2004). Other studies have used college students for social network research as well (Chan 2017; Toma & Carlson 2015; Uimonen 2013). Due to the lack of diversity on the campus in which participants were recruited, students were recruited from both college classrooms and from registered student organizations for students of color (i.e. Black Student Union and Chicano Latin-American Student Association).

3.2 Demographics

The survey was distributed to 347 participants. Most of the participants were 18-20 years old (81.8%); 14.7% of the participants were 21-23, and 3.5% participants were 24-29. Gender was fairly equally distributed with 54% of the participants female. The majority of participants were Caucasian (62%), while the rest identified as African (5.8%), African American (6.9%), Asian (4%), Asian American (2%,) Latino (7.5%,) biracial or multiracial (10.4%), or other (1.2%). Due to the skewed sample sizes, participants were split into

Caucasian (n = 214; 61.7%) and non-Caucasian (n = 133; 38.3%) groups. Since white individuals hold privilege in U.S. American society, this category looked at differences between the two groups. Any participant who self-reported as biracial or multiracial identity was placed into the non-Caucasian group, even if one of the racial identities was Caucasian. This choice was made because a multi-racial individual has the potential to experience reality differently than someone who self identifies as Caucasian due to the societal privilege often attributed to Caucasians in U.S. American society. Based on the literature reviewed regarding racial hierarchy and privilege and marginalization of non-Caucasian groups in U.S. American society, this grouping seemed the best fit in answering the research question.

3.3 Scale development

Scales used in past research were reviewed to examine the prospect of adapting them for this study. However, existing scales did not examine the projection of racial identity in the context of social media. Instead, they explored perceptions of nationality and bias [i.e. Vandiver, Cross, Worrell & Fhagen-Smith's (2002) Cross Racial Identity scale], self-esteem and feelings of belongingness of adolescents (i.e., Casey-Cannon, Coleman, Knudtson & Velazquez's (2011) Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, Collective Self-Esteem Scale-Race, and Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity), and the development of a non-racist identity (i.e., Carter's (1996) White Racial Identity Attitudes scale). These scales are useful tools for understanding aspects of racial identity. However, they are not useful for exploring racial identity projection in the context of social media, and social media is a vastly different framework than face-to-face communication. For example, individuals would not project their racial identity with the use of pictures in a face-to-face context, yet that would be a very common way to project racial identity through social media. Therefore, newly developed scale items were necessary to measure effectively in this context. However, when crafting questions for each of the scales, previous findings from qualitative studies pertaining to the projection of racial identity in online environments were considered.

Findings from previous qualitative studies confirmed that it was important to ask participants questions about displaying racial identity through photos and text. For example, Chan (2017) found that people of color use social networks to project positive images of their racial groups by sharing media content (i.e. photos, videos, hashtags), posting about accomplishments within the context of racial identity, and commenting on race related content in an effort to positively promote their racial group (i.e. text). Florini (2013) found that Twitter can be used to express racial identity though text. Other studies found that participants used photos to project aspects of identity on social networks (Toma & Carlson 2015; Uimonen 2013; Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). More specifically, Uimonen (2013) found that participants used photos to display racial, cultural, and religious identities. These studies suggest that questions related to photo and text depiction of racial identity are important. Therefore, scale items were developed with this previous research in mind.

Relying on themes found in previous research on the depiction of racial identity, two primary scales were developed: the Depiction of Racial Identity Scale, and the Exposure Scale. When developing questions for each scale past research was consulted, as described above.

3.3.1 Depiction of Racial Identity Scale

The Depiction of Racial Identity Scale (DRIS) was developed to measure the extent to which participants in this study used photos and communication/text to convey racial identity. The DRIS is a 6-item Likert scale in which responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always)*. Although the Cronbach's alpha was high for this 6-item scale ($\alpha = 0.881$), due to the conceptually distinct nature of the concepts measured (photos and communication/text), the

scale was separated into two subscales: the Photos subscale and the Text subscale. Additionally, this division would likely lead to a more meaningful interpretation of the results. Both scales had high alphas: $\alpha = 0.910$, $\alpha = 0.833$. The Photos subscale had three items, including "Do you use the photos you post to [Facebook], [Instagram], [Twitter] to display your race to others?" The Text subscale also had 3 items, including "I speak with others about my racial identity on [Facebook], [Instagram], [Twitter]."

3.3.2 Exposure Scale

The Exposure Scale (ExS) was developed to measure the extent to which participants interacted with race on social networks. The ExS is a 9-item Likert scale in which responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Although the Cronbach's alpha was high for this 9-item scale ($\alpha = 0.889$), due to the conceptually distinct nature of the concepts measured (hiding racial identity and interacting/directly communicating with race), the scale was separated into two subscales, the Hidden Identity subscale and the Direct Communication subscale, to allow a more exact analysis of the two ideas. Both scales had high alphas ($\alpha = 0.944$, $\alpha = 0.930$). The Hidden Identity subscale had three items, including "I choose to hide my racial identity on [Facebook], [Instagram], [Twitter]." This scale assessed whether individuals reported hiding their racial identity on social media. The Direct Communication subscale had 6 items, including "My racial identity influences what I choose to post on [Facebook], [Instagram], [Twitter]." This scale looks at the way racial identity influences how individuals choose to post on social networks.

3.4 Data collection

Using systematic sampling, students from 12 sections of the basic communication course were offered extra credit to participate in the study. Additionally, to increase the diversity of the sample, the opportunity to participate was offered to nine student associations for students of color. Students from two of those registered organizations (i.e. the Black Student Union and Chicano Latin-American Student Association) chose to participate. A $10 Chipotle gift card was awarded to a random participant in each student group. The survey software Qualtrics was used to administer the survey; a link was provided to allow a participant to anonymously take and submit the survey online.

3.5 Data analysis

Data was analyzed using independent samples *t* tests with racial group categorization (Caucasian or non-Caucasian) as the independent variable and the four scale scores as dependent variables. Independent samples *t* tests were conducted to test for significant differences. Additionally, effect sizes were reported to allow a better understanding of the *t* test results. An effect size of $r = .2$ indicated a small effect, while $r = .5$ indicated a medium effect and $r = .8$ indicated a large effect. To test the reliability of the scales Cronbach's α was used. An $\alpha > .7$ indicated high response reliability for the scale.

4.0 Results

The research question sought to discover ways in which participants signify, indicate, or display their racial identity on social networks. Using four scales, this question was explored on the four dimensions of *photos, text, hidden identity,* and *direct communication*. Results for the subscales are described below and included in Table 1.

4.1 Depiction of Racial Identity Scale

4.1.1 *Photos* subscale

There was a statistically significant difference between Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants for *photos*, t (338) = -6.503, $p < .001$. The means for Caucasian participants (M = 1.303; SD = 0.714) and non-Caucasian individuals (M = 1.935; SD = 1.078) suggest that Caucasians were less likely to post photos on social networks to display their racial identity. However, results indicated a small effect size of $r = 0.3266$.

4.1.2 *Text* subscale

There was a statistically significant difference between Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants for Text, t (343) = -9.646, $p < .001$. The means for Caucasian participants (M = 1.160; SD = 0.4417) and non-Caucasian individuals (M = 1.838; SD = 0.8594) suggest that Caucasian participants speak with others about their racial identity on social networks less than non-Caucasian participants. Results indicates that means are approaching a medium effect size ($r = 0.4448$).

4.2 Exposure Scale

4.2.1 *Hidden identity* subscale

The subscale Hidden Identity examined whether or not participants reported hiding their racial identity on social networks. Results of the t test indicate that there are no significant differences between Caucasian and non-Caucasian groups, t (333) = -.995, p = .320.

4.2.2 *Direct communication* subscale

There was a statistically significant difference between Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants for Direct Communication, t (338) = -4.947, $p < .001$. The means for Caucasian participants (M = 1.303; SD = 0.714) and non-Caucasian individuals (M = 1.935; SD = 1.078) suggest that Caucasian participants interact with racial content on social networks less than non-Caucasian participants. However, the effect size is small (r = .2588), indicating that the difference in racial interactions on social networks is very subtle, and would be difficult to detect just by looking at the social networks.

Table 1: Results of independent samples t-test and descriptive statistics

	Racial group								
	Caucasian		Non-Caucasian				95% CI for mean difference		
Scale	M	SD	M	SD	*t*	*p*	LL	UL	Cohen's *d*
photos	1.303	0.714	1.935	1.078	66.503	<.001	.441	.823	.327
text	1.160	.4417	1.838	.8594	-9.646	<.001	-.817	-.540	-.445
hidden	1.543	0.831	1.648	1.096	-0.995	.320	-.313	.103	-.054
direct	2.046	1.077	2.746	1.544	-4.947	<.001	-.979	-.422	.259

Note: CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit

5. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand how college students display racial identity on social networks. Findings suggest that although participants do not intentionally *hide* their racial identity on social networks, they do not intentionally *display* racial identity on social networks either. However, non-Caucasian participants in this study were significantly more

likely than Caucasian participants to display racial identity with the use of photos, text, and communication. Implications of these findings are discussed.

Previous research reveals that identity is conveyed through blogs and textual displays on social networks (Boyd 2007; Florini 2013). However, results of this study indicate that racial identity is not conveyed *intentionally* through photos, text, or communication on social networks. Perhaps it is instead true that college students feel that racial identity is ascribed to them by others. Collier and Thomas (1988) claimed that individuals have both avowed and ascribed identities. Individuals wish for others to accept their avowed identities because that is the identity such individuals believe to be a true reflection of themselves. However, at times, others ascribe identities to an individual that may reflect assumptions about that person's identity due to his or her gender, race, social class, etc. When identities are ascribed to individuals, such individuals may either attempt to resist such identities or instead, succumb to them. Chan (2017) has addressed this same phenomena through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism, explaining that individuals learn about the self through interactions with others. This implies that when an identity is ascribed to an individual due to his or her race by people on social networks, that individual is placed into the proverbial "box" of racial identity; therefore, subconsciously and consciously the individual may build his/her racial identity around what others say about him/her.

Results of this study showed that although they did not intentionally project their racial identity, non-Caucasian participants thought about their race significantly more than Caucasian participants. In fact, they thought about their race *about half the time* when posting, commenting, and interacting with race on social networks, whereas Caucasian participants reported thinking about their race *almost never*. This difference may indicate that non-Caucasians think about race more while on social media as a result of the identity ascribed to them due to race. These findings fit with past research, which reveals that non-Caucasians on social networks experienced apprehension when posting on these social networks (Chan, 2017). Chan believed that participants experienced apprehension because they feared being perceived as a representative for their whole racial group. Further research could help to explore these notions at a deeper level.

It is also interesting that Caucasian participants strongly disagreed with the notion that they project their racial identities on social media (through photos, text, or communication). It could be deduced that Caucasian participants, being a part of the dominant race in America, do not see their racial identity as an important one to project.

It may also be true that non-Caucasian racial identities and the subsequent experiences of marginalized individuals, are not valued in part because they contradict norms set by a Caucasian dominated culture. Therefore, Caucasian Americans are taught implicit norms surrounding the colorblind narrative—taught to devalue the expression of differences regarding race. Furthermore, it would be advantageous to Caucasians to disregard the importance of their racial identity for the continuation of the colorblind narrative, where the U.S. American public claims that they "don't see race" and therefore are not biased in their interactions with others of different races. For non-Caucasians this is society's way of devaluing the expression of racial identity. The result is a culture that does not give recognition or value to the racial identities of non-Caucasians. For example, the #BlackLivesMatter movement was met with #AllLivesMatter, not only by those who disagreed with the issue, but also by those who did not understand why the hashtag was not inclusive to all racial identities. U.S. American society failed to realize the reason for the expression of racial identity and the desire to draw attention to the experiences of people of color with law enforcement. In this way, race is not only a social construct, but also a political tool that can be used to marginalize opposing worldviews. The failure of Caucasians to view racial identity projection as important creates the norm that racial identity projection

is abnormal, and the result is a climate that fails to distinguish and value non-Caucasian racial identities.

It is also possible that Caucasian participants feared that communicating about their racial identity might convey the impression that they align themselves with the values and beliefs of white supremacist groups. The tyranny of the Nazis' regime has given Anglo Saxon Whites a reason to fear the celebration of racial identity. Groups like the KKK use racial identity projection as a way to exclude non-Caucasians and as a catalyst of hatred toward others. Future research should be conducted to better understand why Caucasian participants do not project racial identity.

Regardless of the reason Caucasian participants do not display their own racial identity, it is clear that the expression of salient racial identities of non-Caucasians may be crucial in making progress towards breaking the colorblind narrative. If society can begin to value racial identity and understand the differences in how reality is experienced, progress may be made towards greater inclusivity.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the use of photos and textual communication, the concealment of racial identity, and interactions with race related content to assess how participants projected racial identity on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Results of this study suggest that racial identity is not intentionally projected by the participants. However, non-Caucasian participants use photos, text, and interactions to convey racial identity significantly more than Caucasian participants. It may be the U.S. American sociopolitical context that leads non-Caucasian participants to be more aware of their race when commenting, posting, and interacting on social networks. In addition to these findings, results of this study revealed that participants do not attempt to hide or filter out their racial identities on social networks. Future research should try to understand why this is the case. Caution must be taken in generalizing the results. However, the findings help to better understand how college aged young adults convey racial identity on social networks. The study has helped to expand the understanding of identity projection and management on social media specifically relating to racial identity.

6.1 Researcher reflexivity and limitations

Survey methodology is a difficult tool to use when conducting research about racial identity. Racial identity is a very personal topic, and there is no uniform experience for it. The instruments of the study were created for the purpose of this research and require further reliability testing and validation. It is important that care be taken when generalizing the results of the study. The sample size of 347 participants should not be used as a representative sample of the population. In addition, there was an imbalance of Caucasian (62%) and non-Caucasian (38%) participants.

Identity is unique to individuals, and there are likely many factors beyond racial identity that impact the way respondents may answer. Furthermore, various intersections might prove to have an effect on responses in future research. For example, there may be differences in the way racial identity is projected between those who have the ability to attend college, and those who do not. In addition, compiling non-Caucasian participants into one group can be problematic since they do not necessarily have the same racial experiences. However, non-Caucasian groups might be united in the fact that they do not possess the societal privilege that the Caucasian racial group holds.

Participants were surveyed on their experiences with racial identity projection on three popular social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter). This research is limited to the social networks of the time period. A shift in popular social networks could have an effect on racial identity projection.

6.2 Future research

Future research could take a number of different directions. For example, future research could explore the way people feel their racial identities are ascribed to them on social networks and seek to shed light on the limitations to displaying avowed racial identities. It would also be interesting to explore why Caucasians feel that identity projection is unimportant. Alternative forms of research (i.e., focus groups and interviews) may be most useful in such explorations. In addition, different forms of social media (i.e., LinkedIn) might offer new insights on racial identity projection.

It is important to continue to explore racial identity projection on social networks because it is an interesting frontier, with many avenues for future research. Furthermore, findings of continued studies may help researchers and practitioners to understand how others experience the world. Such information may aid educators and other experts in helping individuals to successfully navigate racial identity and discussions about race on social networks. Researchers must continue to find ways to better understand how race is perceived, negotiated, and conveyed on social media. The unwanted animosity created by volatile discussions of social and political debates pertaining to race may someday be remedied with improvements in education pertaining to the social construction of racial identity and the way it is projected, specifically on social networks.

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