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Racial Identities on Social Media: Projecting Racial Identities on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter

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Racial Identities on Social Media:

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Title: Racial Identities on Social media: Projecting Racial Identities on Facebook,

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's

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Table of Contents

Racial Identities on Social Media:

Projecting Racial Identities on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter

Abstract

Because social networks are an important aspect of the lived realities of those who participate in them, this study examined the way racial identity was signified, indicated, or displayed 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 social media. The study looked at the use of photos, textual communication, concealment of racial identity, and interactions with race related content to assess how participants projected racial identity on social networks. Results suggested that racial identity is not intentionally projected on social networks, and participants do not attempt to hide or filter out their racial identities on social networks. Despite the finding that participants tended not to intentionally project racial identity, non-Caucasian participants used photos, text, and interactions to convey racial identity more than Caucasian participants. Findings suggesting that participants expect their racial identities are assumed through photos and visual appearance (i.e., skin color, appearance, and/or faces). Furthermore, participants expect that their racial identities can be inferred from written discussions, bios, and/or text; interests, interactions, and/or "friends" or network connections; as well as from heritage, culture, nationality, and/or holidays. In addition, culture and nationality affected the way African and African American respondents interacted with race-related content on social networks. Implications of the findings are also provided.

Chapter One: Introduction

Social media can 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 the past three 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.

There are many complex issues to be investigated regarding race and social networks, however, it is important to first look at the way race is projected on social networks to give context to additional questions about race on social media that are to be explored in future research. This topic is important for three reasons. First, mass consumption of social networking sites is a relatively new phenomenon and has changed the way we communicate, making interactions on social networks important research frontiers. Second, the way society defines race is problematic, and this injudicious definition carries over into conversations on social media. Lastly, the sociopolitical climate has created heated debates about race on social networks.

Beginning with the first reason, social media has shown remarkable growth as a major form of communication around the world. Social media is used in many ways; individuals and businesses can make pages to display photos, distribute information about themselves, and post a microblog for their followers to read. These networks are also used for a broad spectrum of communication activities relating to personality and identity. Social networking cites have grown in popularity and are becoming an important tool of communication. According to Boyd (2007) social networking sites are used as a

form of mainstream socialization that can equate to offline public spaces. Online social

networks provide space for the kinds of interactions that used to take place in physical

public spaces such as coffee shops, the barbers, or practically any location accessible to

people to meet. 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 are

themselves a form of a public space. Brock (2009) finds 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. Like traditional public spaces, social networks facilitate the

communication and interactions that shape identities and world views. Therefore, mass

consumption of social networks is one of many reasons racial identity projection on

social networks is an important topic for communication research. Due to individuals'

reliance on visual perception in defining race, people of color have started to rely on

social media as a space to explore racial identity.

Next, it is important to understand the way problematic definitions of race carry

over into conversations on social networks. The history of race in America provides an

important background to understand the complex dynamic of racial identity on social

networks. The meaning and classification of racial groups has changed dramatically over

time and will presumably continue to evolve. According to DiAnglo (2012) the concept

of race is used as a classification system for human beings. Racial categorization has led

to a hierarchy within the classification system, making Caucasians the dominant group.

Racial categories change over time as society decides to ascribe racial identity to others

differently than they had in the past. Social network communication offers an opportunity

to study race, and other socially constructed identity categories, on computer mediated communication mediums. This is particularly important today because race is often treated as if it is a visual aspect of identity that is "set" at birth, when in reality racial identities are subject to change as society determines who is a part of what racial group and the hierarchies of racial groups.

Racial identity in America is a difficult topic to understand. Asante, Sekimoto, & Brown (2016) explain that race, in particular, blackness, is more than outside appearance. They claim that racial identity is constructed through symbols, language, culture, and group experiences. Therefore, racial identity is not about skin color. Condry (2015) expressed a similar concern that much of society assumes that race is conveyed though visual perception. Condry notes that it is difficult to define exact racial boundaries. It is therefore important to understand race as a socially constructed idea when it comes to exploring racial identity in an online medium.

Because social networks are a relatively new method of communication, few studies have been conducted to evaluate the impact of race on social media. In one of these studies, 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. Using the Theory of Symbolic Interactionism, Chan's findings indicated that racial identities are influenced by communication on social media.

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." According to Florini, Twitter users are able to express racial identity through the microblogging service. Florini explained that linguistic performances through vocabulary, grammar, and textual cues on social networks is one of the ways that social network users can perform their racial identities. The use of linguistic performance in an online environment is an example of racial identity for both individuals and the group to be conveyed through text.

The phenomenon of "black Twitter," has created important meeting spaces in the current sociopolitical context for people of color. Recent events in the United States have contributed to discussions about race on social networking sites. Arguments over the President of the United States (POTUS) rhetoric, the Black Lives Matter movement, immigration policy, and changes to DACA policy are just a few examples involving racial discourse that take place on social media. There is a need to understand how racial identity functions on social networks where discussions surrounding race take place. This study does not aim to understand current events, but rather create a starting point for racial identity to be understood on popular social networks.

Lastly, offline events affect communication on social networks, and as a result, the current sociopolitical climate has contributed to heated debates about race on social networks. For example, Bryne (2008) used content analysis to examine posts on Asian Avenue, BlackPlanet, and MiGente blogging websites about heritage and identity. She explained that current day events affect communication on the internet, and reflect norms,

structures, and knowledge learned offline. Bryne's findings suggested that online

mediums such as social networks will base their understanding of race on offline

discourses and understandings. Online mediums can affect how race is perceived, but

anyone using a social network will likely have perceptions of racial identities based on

face-to-face interactions. Similar to Bryne, Parker and Song (2006) claimed that online

exchanges can have consequences to offline life. Parker and Song used the blogging

websites www.barficulture.com and www.britishbornchinese.org.uk to connect with

users and editors for interviews; they also conducted a content analysis of blog posts.

They concluded that blogging websites such as at these have the ability to make

significant contributions to those who interact with them. Social networks shape both

personal and collective identities. They provide a space where groups do not have a

unified or one-dimensional experience, and yet no individual's experience is completely

fragmented from the groups. Furthermore, their findings suggested that present day

events and political climate will have an effect on the expression of racial identity on

social networks.

　　　　With race being an important contemporary topic, there is even more of a reason

to study this phenomenon. Perceptions of race will be brought on to online mediums, and

the ensuing discourse can affect both online and offline conversation. Both online and

offline interactions and discussion of race affect the other. Recently, social networks have

facilitated heated conversations on topics, like race, that evoke public controversy.

Participants of social networks find themselves "logging on" to witness, and sometimes

participate in, public debate over sociopolitical ideology. As made apparent with the

#BlackLivesMatter movement, the individuals can face animosity, discomfort, and

misunderstanding when it comes to issues of race, racial expression, and identity expression on social networks. Individuals who would never have been heard by the pubic have access to a "microphone" (social networks) that allow them to be heard by large amounts of people all over the world. This is all made possible by social networks.

Facebook pages, Tweets, and Instagram hashtags bring the words and ideas of individuals to the attention of the public in an unprecedented manner. 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 recent examples of current events that led to racialized conversations on social networking sites. Research by Leonhardt and Philbrick (2018) explained that President Donald Trump has been under careful scrutiny for his rhetoric regarding communities of color, such as tweeting about "inner-city crime," describing African American employees of his casinos as having a laziness trait, and using racialized terminology when debating Mexican immigration. The social network Twitter has been at the center of many of these controversies as it is used as a dominant medium for communication by the President with the American public. Much of what President Trump has said has been taken by the public and media to be racially exclusive. According to Pew (2017), 60% of Americans believe Trump's presidency has had a negative effect on race relations in the United States. Yet, in 2009 only 9% of Americans felt that race relations were worsening under former President Obama. The political climate has changed drastically in the last few years, and tension is building as a result.

Discussions taking place on social networks affect the lived experiences and shape the identities of the members of these social networks. America has reached an

important time in history, where turmoil over racial conflicts seems ready to boil over.

Due to the advances in computer mediated communication, the problematic nature in

which individuals define race, and the conflicts of today's political climate, there is a

need to research social media, especially social networks, and their effect on racial

identity. Researchers must find ways to better understand how race is perceived,

negotiated, and conveyed on social media.

The present study begins by examining past research regarding the

conceptualization of race, social media platforms, identity construction on social media,

and research questions. Next, the scales used for quantitative data collection, as well as

the qualitative data collection process are discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Results

and tables are provided in Chapter Four. Finally, a discussion of implications surrounding

the findings of the research, limitations of the study, and possible future research are

examined.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Conceptualization of Race

Race is a difficult term to define. The concept of race is not absolute in its

definition. Race is not determined through biology; it is constructed through narratives,

and socially defined by what the population understands race to be (Condry, 2015;

Graves, 2010; DiAngelo, 2012). DiAngelo (2012) defines race as a false concept

considering that the superficial designators of race are the result of geographic

differences, rather than biological ones. In other words, geographic variances of the

human race are used systematically to create pseudo-sub-categories of the human race.

DiAngelo wants the reader to understand that race is not a simple concept that can be

determined through sight. Graves (2010) compared the difference between biological

understanding of race and socially constructed understandings of race. Graves claimed

that the human race is one species, and it cannot be biologically split into different races.

There are many misconceptions about race that are unfortunately viewed as public

knowledge. Graves argued that there are no biological variances between the socially

constructed racial categories. Obasogie (2010) found through experimentation that the

blind have a generally undiminished understanding of race. Obasogie finds that sight is

not necessary to understand racial identity, and the blind still ascribe society's

assumptions of race to others if they are aware of their racial identity. These studies help

to confirm race as a socially constructed concept, and not a matter of visual or biological

variances.

Despite findings clarifying race as a social construction, people in society often

treat race as a biological phenomenon. For example, Byrne (2008) cites several blogging

websites where contributors talk about ancestral bloodlines as a claim to their own racial

identities, and use phrases like "[I'm] black cuz I got half [black] blood." (pp. 29). It is

problematic for individuals to conceptualize race as a biological phenomenon because it

leads to misunderstanding racial identities. Furthermore, thinking of race as a biological

concept creates a false ideology that the human race has biological differences, when it in

fact does not. Maragh (2017) talks about the real effects of race, by explaining that as a

socially constructed idea, race has real effects on identity performance. Race has become

a part of identity that is to be acted out, creating an "authentic performance" or expected

norms to follow for specific racial groups. For example, Margah claimed that individuals

feel obligated to perform identity in specific ways that others who share the same race as

their own perform it. Because race is socially constructed, it has lasting and life-long effects on expected behavior as individuals learn the norms pertaining to the way they are expected to interact and communicate.

Not only is it important to understand race, it is also vital to understand differences in ethnicity. According to Brown (2009) race is an important signifier that affects one's experiences and understanding of the world. For example, Asante, Sekimoto, and Brown (2016) describe the concept of blackness as being "… more than a skin color; it is a contested terrain of memory, identity, culture, and politics." (p.368). According to Asante, Sekimoto, and Brown, individuals negotiate their blackness differently as an African than as an African American. For example, identifying as African rather than "Black" is an example of an ethnic marker to signify a difference between African and African Americans. For non-Americans, ethnic markers can be used to negotiate the way others ascribe stereotypes, particularly those associated with Black Americas. African and African Americans do not necessarily have a shared identity by virtue of being "black." Furthermore, the study finds that African participants studying in American schools come to America with negative stereotypes about African Americans that influence their interactions with African Americans. Therefore, it is important to understand race as both an individual and group experience. Although society might consider both African and African Americans "Black" it does not mean they share the same racial identity.

In the same way that African and African American identities are often pushed into the racial category of "Black", the identities of Korean, Japanese, and Chinese ethnicities are often clumped into one racial category of Asian. Condry (2015) used the

example of the website www.alllooksame.com to reinforce that visual perception is an

erroneous measure of race. On this website, participants are able to take a quiz where

they must separate faces of Korean, Japanese, and Chinese heritage using only visual

perception. Condry discussed the importance of understanding that individuals should not

be forced to forfeit the right to claim heritage and ethnicity but should also be aware that

race is a concept that cannot be determined through visual perception. Condry writes that

inability to separate socially constructed races by sight is evidence to the false belief that

race can be visually perceived. Although race is a concept whose definition and

attribution is controlled by society, it is important to remember the way one's perceived

heritage affects one's identity. How race is experienced can be influenced by ethnicity,

and many racial groups are broad categories with many ethnicities.

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. Participants can express similar

experiences with all three of the platforms, or express contrasting differences between the

sites. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are popular social networks, and each of them

have distinct differences from one another, allowing individuals on the site to interact

differently. According to Hall (2016), Facebook was first launched in 2004 for Harvard

students. Facebook was officially open to everyone in 2006 (Boyd and Ellison, 2008).

The company had more than one billion users in 2012 (Hall, 2016). According to Smith

(2015), Facebook now has one and a half billion consumers using the network monthly.

Hall (2016) described Facebook's popularity as a development of the human need to feel

as if they belong to a group. Besides Facebook, Twitter is also a popular social network.

Harvey (2014) stated that "Twitter is a web application for microblogging, or publishing

mini posts called "tweets," that are limited to 140-character messages" (p.2) Unlike

Facebook, Twitter focuses on short blogs. 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. What Twitter lacks in an in-depth

individual profile, 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. Russmann and Svensson (2016)

described Instagram as an image sharing service. The social network centralizes around

the sharing of photos and videos. Russman and Svensson explained Instagram's

popularity due to the social media platforms shifting to a focus on imagery. Instagram

was included as a platform to examine in this study because it focuses on photos and

videos significantly more than Facebook and Twitter

        In addition to variation in the amount and types of info that can be shared on

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, it is also important to consider anonymity. Anonymity

allows internet users to take on different identities than the one bestowed upon them by

society, however, some social networks are less anonymous than others. Zhao,

Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) claimed identity construction on sites like Facebook are

not designed with the intention for users to create anonymous accounts. Therefore,

Facebook is a non-anonymous social network. Facebook is designed to let users validate the online identities of one another in the offline world, and Twitter and Instagram are also non-anonymous social media platforms. Therefore, participants are not expected to experience a lot of anonymity on social networks like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. This is important because the findings from studies on blogging, dating sites, and other forms of social media may be different due to an allowance of anonymity. Non-anonymous social networks are used for this study, so the results will indicate how social network users project identity in a non-anonymous situation. It is possible for anonymous accounts to be made on sites like Facebook, however, they are quite unconventional and deter Facebook users who dislike associating with accounts they do not believe to be authentic. The results will focus on the way individuals project their identities specifically on non-anonymous social networks.

Using the three different social media networks will likely lead to a better understanding of how race is experienced in these online communities. It is important to understand the differences each medium may or may not bring. Facebook gives users the ability to create profiles and interact through both text and photos. Twitter supports short microblogs that primarily deal with text, and Instagram is a photo based social network. All three are popular non-anonymous social networks that offer different interfaces for social network users to interact with each other.

Identity Construction on Social Media

Individuals have the opportunity to construct identities on social networks. According to Boyd and Ellison (2008) 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. Foldy (2012) explained that identities are fluid and frequently change with new experiences and environments. Foldy described identity construction as a process where identities develop and adapt to an individual's characteristics, actions, and context. Social networks provide the context for such identity development because users have an opportunity to create a profile and project an identity to other participants in the online medium. It is important to examine how individuals display identity in general, and racial identity in particular, on social networks. Because individuals do not perform identity from only one aspect, it is also important to examine the potential influence of intersectionality.

It is vital to study how individuals project identity on social networks. Obviously, participants of social networks have the ability to choose what they post, which gives researchers the opportunity to examine how such participants convey identity. Research shows that photos can be used to project identity on social networks. For example, Uimonen (2013) performed a content analysis of university student's Facebook profiles, focusing on images used, to understand how cultural identities are represented through the medium. She found that photographs were used to display aspects of identity. Furthermore, images were sometimes selected to depict specific aspects of identity including culture. Uimonen found profiles used in the content analysis displayed performances of identity through photos, offered an outlet for cultural and religious performance of identity, and connected individuals globally to help them understand the world outside of the culture in which they live. Furthermore, the findings suggested that individuals can perform cultural identity though photos posted on social networks,

making photographs an important aspect to study when looking at the projection of racial identity on social networks.

In a similar study, Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) claimed that photos are used to visually project the self or identities social media users want others to see. In addition, Zhao et al. explained that other information posted on social networks such as interests, hobbies, favorite movies, artistic tastes, and narratives in the "about me" section of a social media profile help to construct identities on social media. Another study reported additional means for users to display their identity on social networks. For example, with data collected from interviews and ethnography, Boyd (2007) found that users primarily rely on their profile on the social network, their 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. Furthermore, social networks allow for public displays of connections with others. Network connections (sometimes called "friends") are important, as social network users are judged based on their associations. Boyd explained that social network users make assumptions about tastes and attitudes of others as a result of the groups with whom the user may identify. 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.

In addition to understanding how individuals project identities on social networks, it is important to examine the way racial identity is performed on social networks. According to Bryne (2008) African Americans use social networks as a place to

communicate with other African Americans about similarities of racial and cultural

identity, and further validate their identities through discourses about shared experiences.

She finds that social networks, blogging sites, and shared internet spaces provide the

opportunity for individuals to build bigger and better cultural networks than they might in

offline spaces. Bryne explained that social networking sites are important for validating

cultural identity, learning to navigate aspects of race in everyday life, and engaging in

larger conversations about cultural history.

However, there is pressure on the way individuals perform racial identity on

social networks in regard to expected norms. For example, Maragh (2017) explored black

racial authenticity on Twitter and finds that discourse about "acting white" and "acting

black" influence the linguistic performances. When performing identities there is a

pressure to act and behave by certain norms of one's racial group. Fryer (2006) claimed

the phenomenon of "acting white" is sometimes a label given to people of color when

they engage in performance that is perceived to be characteristic of whites. Often times

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) as

historic and political contexts that lead to groups using … "authenticating discourse [that]

enables marginalized people to counter oppressive representation of themselves." (p.3).

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 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. According to Maragh, what is not being performed on Twitter is a form of

censoring aspects of identity. These findings fit with the claims made by Toma and

Carson (2015) that Facebook users are selective in what they choose to post in order to

project a specific image. Toma and Carson claimed that Facebook offers a means of

presenting identity selectively because of the ability to choose what they post, and that

Facebook users are aware of the way they present themselves on Facebook. A sample of

212 students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison completed a survey

questionnaire and lab exercise where they rated fifteen dimensions of their Facebook

profile based on their perceptions. The participants examined their own profiles. Toma

and Carson found that based on their own assessments of their Facebook profiles,

individuals rated themselves as less reliable, polite, intelligent, and deep compared to

their actual selves. However, participants felt their profiles accurately represented how

talkative, creative, likeable, friendly, and physically attractive they actually were. Toma

and Carson concluded that Facebook users were likely to represent these parts of their

identity as accurately as possible because their audience might easily detect enhancement

of these dimensions. Participants thought 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. Although all users may be selective in how they choose to portray their identity on social media, it is important to remember that experiences are not limited or constrained to one specific group. Intersections between genders, social class, and political affiliation, etc. may, or may not, link experiences between individuals.

Because identity is not made up solely of race, it is important to explore intersectionality and the potential influence of other identity aspects such as gender and social class. According to Crenshaw (1989) race and gender are often regarded as separate, and mutually exclusive from one another, when they actually have large effects on each other. For example, Ro and Loya (2015) examined how gender and race affected GPA and self-reported learning outcomes. Ro and Loya found that White and Asian men reported higher GPA's than Black and Latino men and women. Black and Latino students appeared to have lower academic success than their White and Asian counterparts, regardless of their gender. Ro and Loya also reported that women of color reported higher test scores than men of color. These claims suggest that women of color, on average, have different experiences than men of color in academic pursuits. In addition, Ro and Loya claimed that gender has an impact on the scores of different race groups when looking at self-reported communication, leadership, and teamwork skill scores. Their findings suggested that race and gender affect each other. Therefore, it is important to understand that the intersection of gender and race may lead to different experiences.

In addition to the intersection of gender and race, the intersection of social class and race has also been examined. Boyd (2007) examined the intersection of race and social class and notes that even though poor urban blacks are more likely to lack internet access at home, they are just as likely to have social network accounts, however, they access their accounts less often. Shradie (2012) found similar results. Using statistical analysis on data from Pew internet and American Life Project surveys taken in 2002-2008, Schradie reported that African Americans are more likely to blog than Caucasian Americans. Schradie also indicated that social class provides a divide between those who blog and those who do not blog. They hypothesized that higher social class would allow greater access to the resources needed to blog on social networks. The hypothesis was rejected; findings indicated that whites are likely to have a higher social class than African Americans, yet Whites blogged less. These studies on intersectionality point out that different aspects of identity can affect one another. When analyzing results, it is important to avoid thinking of race as a singular identity, and keep in mind the intersections that may be influencing each other.

As the literature reviewed reveals, social network users are selective about how they display their identity. Furthermore, identity is projected on social networks through photos, text, information on profiles, and associations/ "friends." Racial identity is performed on social networks and there are expectations about how one performs authentically. Lastly, intersections of different aspects of identity like gender and social class are important to keep in mind when assessing results.

Social Media, the Internet, and Race

Finally, it is important to examine differences in 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. Cisneros and Nakayama highlighted the way internet anonymity allows racist remarks to thrive. For example, a phenomenon on an ambiguous social media blog 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 prejudice 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. 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) finds 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 why Correa and Jeong's (2011) findings 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 suggested that minority populations use social networks to express their opinions and views where they might not have had the same opportunity without the connections on social media.

Computer mediated communication does not always lead to positive or negative attributes. Globe, Beattie, and Edwards (2016) examined the difference between Twitterbots who identified as black or white in terms of credibility and interpersonal attraction. The only difference between the two twitter blogs was the race of the avatar used as a profile image for the account. Globle, Beattie, and Edwards (2016) did not find race to have a large impact on credibility and attractiveness. The Twitterbot depicted as black was found to have slightly higher credibility and attractiveness. Globe, Beattie, and Edwards find that race is not a binary element linked to positive or negative results of perception.

Beyond Twitter, research on other forms of social media can help to contextualize this study. For example, past research about racial identity has also been done on dating websites. Feliciano and Robnett (2014) study race and online dating. Feliciano and

Robnett collected data from 2004 and 2005 from dating profiles on the popular dating

website Yahoo Personals from individuals who self-identified themselves as Black,

White, Asian, or Latino. The participants were from large cities in the United States: New

York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Atlanta. Quantitative data came from the information

available to the public on the user's profiles. People on the dating site could list a

preference for race/ethnicity of the individuals they were hoping to meet. Feliciano and

Robnett found that 31% of Whites and 24% Blacks preferred to date others who

identified as only White or Black, compared to only 10% of Latinos who prefer to only

date Latinos. Additionally, they found that 60% of whites exclude Blacks as dating

partners, while only 5% of Blacks exclude Whites. It is important to note that Feliciando

and Robnett also found that Latinos who appear Black are far more likely to include

Blacks, than those who Appear Latino or White. The results of the study suggested that

self-identified race, as well as skin tone, has an impact on dating preferences. The

findings suggested that those with lighter skin tones prefer to date others with lighter skin

tones. The study's findings might be understood through the lens of American society,

and the power and privilege given to those who are ascribed as White. It is important to

note that not only self-identified racial identity, but also perceived racial identity have an

effect on social network interactions.

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

reinforcement about 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. He found that some participants are hesitant to post about race, or engage with race related content, out of fear that they will appear to others that they do not know what they are talking about. People can feel anxious about how other might criticize their views on race when they post on social media.

Past research offers useful background information to provide context for this study. It is important that the reader understand race as a social construct, and not a biological one, in order to understand why racial identity varies greatly between individuals. Racial identity is much more than what society attributes to an individual based on visual perception. The three social media platforms examined in this research (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) provide the opportunity to explore how users construct identities though photos, text, and shared personal information. Social networks provide a space for racial identities to be constructed though interactions with others, interactions with online content, and self-expression specific to racial identity.

Research Question

This study aims to better understand how individuals display racial identity on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram —i.e., what cues are used to signify race on social networks. Due to the lack of research exploring the projection of racial identity on social networks, this study was framed as a preliminary investigation into the topic. Therefore, rather than hypotheses, a research question was developed as follows:

RQ: In what ways do individuals signify, indicate, or display their racial identity on social networks?

The study will look specifically at ways in which participants use photos and communication, hide racial identity, and interact with race related content to project racial identity on social networks. These dimensions are important points of interest for this study in regard to racial identity.

Chapter Three: Methods

Participants

Data was collected from 347 participants. The participants were recruited from a medium sized university in the Midwest. 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 & Carson, 2015; Uimonen, 2013). The university used for data collection has approximately 1,300 international students (there are no statistics on the specific diversity of this population), 2,300 students, faculty, and staff of color, and a total of 15,000 students. The University has not reported clear numbers on the demographics of their student population, however it can be inferred that the campus has a very low number of students of color. Due to lack of diversity, registered student organizations for students of color were recruited for the study, with the hopes of having more than 15% of the sample comprised of students of color.

Demographics

The survey was distributed to 347 participants. There were 284 (81.8%) participants aged 18-20, 51 (14.7%) participants aged 21-23, and 12 (3.5%) participants aged 24-29. Male participants comprised 45.2% of the sample at 157 participants. Female

participants comprised 54.2% of participants at 188. Two participants identified

themselves as non-binary and or "other" for gender. Participants were able to identify

racial identity in ten different ways. There were 20 (5.8%) African participants, 24

(6.9%) African American Participants, 14 (4%) Asian participants, 7 (2%) Asian

American participants, 1 (0.2%) Indian participant, 26 (7.5%) Latino participants, 215

(62%) white/Caucasian participants, 36 (10.4%) biracial and multiracial participants, and

4 (1.2%) participants as "other." To avoid results being skewed by small sample sizes in

several of the groups, racial identities were organized in three different ways; these are

described below.

Organization of Racial Data

In order to analyze the data effectively, participants were sorted three different

ways based on their self-identified race. First, they were grouped into the 4 largest racial

groups, then into a single race versus multi race groups, and finally into Caucasian versus

non-Caucasian. Each of these were distinct from one another and allowed for three

different ways of looking at the data based on the racial identities of the participants.

First, racial groups were coded into the four largest categories and given the name

Primary Racial Groups: African and African-American, Asian and Asian-American,

Latino, and Caucasian. There were 58 (16.7%) African and African American

participants, 31 (8.9%) Asian and Asian American respondents, 32 (9.2%) Latino

respondents, and 214 (61.7%) white/Caucasian respondents. The remaining 3.5% of the

responses did not fit into the four categories, and therefore would not have been used in

the analysis. This coding scheme was not used, because the racial groups did not have

large enough sample sizes to make testing means against the larger Caucasian group reliable.

Racial groups were also sorted into a binary between single race and biracial or multiracial groups. In this category those who identified as a single race were grouped separately than those who reported being biracial or multiracial. There were 311 (89.6%) single race participants and 36 (10.4%) multi race participants. The single race and multiracial groups were not used for analysis because the number of participants in the multiracial group was too small.

Finally, participants were split into Caucasian and non-Caucasian groups. Since white individuals have societal power, this category looked at a difference between a binary of the two. Any participant who self-reported as biracial or multiracial identity was put into the non-Caucasian group; even if one of the racial identities was Caucasian. This choice was made because a multi-racial individual has a likelihood of experiencing reality differently than someone who self identifies as white/Caucasian. There were 214 (61.7%) Caucasian participants and 133 (38.3%) Non-Caucasian participants. The Caucasian versus non-Caucasian groups were the only ones used for data analysis. Caucasian and non-Caucasian groups were the most similar in sample sizes compared to the other two ways race was grouped. Furthermore, based on the literature reviewed regarding racial hierarchy and privilege and marginalization of non-Caucasian groups in American society, this grouping seemed the best fit in answering the research question.

Measurement of Variables

The purpose of the data collected is to find themes, and to serve as a preliminary investigation on how individuals convey racial identity on social media. Discovering the

patterns of users in this study may aid future researchers in developing studies to then

explore such patterns in greater depth. Data collected on social networks will target

participant responses on the social networks Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The

survey methodology was chosen for two reasons. Surveys allow participants to share

their subjective opinions though dichotomous, Likert, and open-ended questions.

Secondly, survey data on this topic, is very sparse.

  A survey was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data about how

participants convey racial identity on social media. The aim of this survey was to get both

statistical insight from the viewpoint of respondents as well as short answer responses

that allowed respondents to answer in their own words. The combination of quantitative

and qualitative questions allowed a richer understanding of participants' answers. Besides

the one open-ended question, survey questions used were in Likert format. Data collected

was used to understand how participants display racial identity on social networks.

  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. For example, Vandiver, Cross, Worrell and

Fhagen-Smith (2002) used the Cross Racial Identity scale (CRIS) to examine racial

identities through an exploration of the way participants think of their own nationality,

perceptions of racial groups, bias against other racial groups, and perceptions about the

importance of diversity. The CRIS did not ask participants about the way in which they

expressed identity, nor was racial identity explored in the context of social media;

therefore, this scale was not useful for inclusion. Casey-Cannon, Coleman, Knudtson, and

Velazquez (2011) used three measures to examine racial and ethnic identities on

adolescents specifically: Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), Collective Self-

Esteem Scale-Race (CSES-R), and the Multidimensional inventory of Black Identity

(MIBI). The MEIM assesses feelings of belonging to racial groups. CSES-R measures

self-esteem as it relates to one's racial identity, and the MIBI is used to specifically

measure connectedness to historical, social, and cultural experiences. Again, these scales

are useful tools for understanding aspects of racial identity, however these dimensions do

not assess the means of racial identity projection. Finally, the White Racial Identity

Attitudes scale developed by Carter (1996) was used to explore two dimensions:

abandoning racism and developing a nonracist identity. Their study examined the

comparisons between White and Black participants through five subscales which

examined contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, and autonomy.

Whereas they used questions relating to perceptions of racial superiority, frustration with

racial groups, and comfort or discomfort communicating with other racial groups these

items would not have been effective research mechanisms to understand the way race is

projected on social networks. Ultimately, social media is a vastly different context than

face-to-face. 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 was considered to help determine what questions

should be used for each scale.

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 reinforcement about their racial groups by sharing media content (i.e., photos, videos, hashtags), posting about accomplishments with the context being their 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. Additionally, Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) and Toma and Carlson (2015) claimed participants used photos to project aspects of identity on social networks. More specifically, Uimonen (2013) found that participants used photos to display racial, cultural, and religious identities. These studies suggestd 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: *Depiction of Racial Identity scale,* and *Exposure scale*. When developing questions for each scale past research was consulted, as described above.

Depiction of Racial Identity Scale

The Depiction of Racial Identity scale was developed to measure the extent to which participants in this study used photos and communication/text to convey racial identity. The Depiction of Racial Identity scale 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 sub-scales [Photo sub-scale 1 and Text sub-scale 2]. 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 sub-scale 1 had 3 items, including "Do you use the photos you post to [Facebook], [Instagram], [Twitter] to display your race to others?" Text sub-scale 2 also had 3 items, including "I speak with others about my racial identity on [Facebook], [Instagram], [Twitter]." See Appendix A for the Depiction of Racial Identity scale with Photos and Text sub-scales.

Exposure Scale

The Exposure Scale was developed to measure the extent to which participants interacted with race on social networks. The Exposure Scale is a 9-item Likert scale in which a 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 sub-scales, Hidden Identity sub-scale 3 and Direct Communication sub-scale 4, to allow a more exact analysis of the two ideas. Both scales had high alphas ($\alpha = 0.944$, $\alpha = 0.930$). The Hidden Identity sub-scale 3 had 3 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. [Direct Communication sub-scale 4] 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.

Along with the two scales used by the research, additional questions explored the way others directly, indirectly, and incorrectly point out participant's race on social networks. The additional questions were designed to supplement the findings of the two scales, and give more context to the way others point out racial identity on social networks.

Data collection

The survey software Qualtrics was used to administer the scales and collect additional data. Once the survey questions were entered into Qualtrics, a link was provided to allow a participant to anonymously take and submit the survey online.

To distribute the link to the survey, a systematic sampling approach was used. Reinard (2008) described a systematic sampling as a procedural sampling where respondents are preselected. Twelve sections of Fundamentals of Communication Studies 100 were given the opportunity to participate. Additionally, two of the University's registered student organizations, Black Student Union and Chicano Latin-American Student Association, participated in the study. Additional registered student organizations were contacted: Somali Student Association, Asian Pacific Student Organization, The Hmong Student Association, Black Intelligent Gentlemen, Black Motivated Women, Chinese American Student Organization, and the Native American Student Association. These student organizations did not respond to the request to participate in the study. The leaders of the registered student organizations were emailed a short script briefing them about the survey and requesting permission for the researcher to attend one of the organization's meetings, where the researcher would distribute the survey.

The teachers of the sections of the Fundamentals of Communication Studies 100 were also emailed a short script, requesting to visit one time when the class met. This method of survey distribution was selected in an effort to reach a large number of participants, whose diversity is greater than the diversity of the surrounding area. By sampling a population with greater diversity, the study attempted to avoid drawing information from a pool of only Caucasian participants. A student population was seen as more ideal than the adult general population because of their heavy involvement in the younger social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Lenhart, Horrigan, and Farrows (2004) explained that college students, particularly those under the age of 25, are much more likely to post and contribute to the internet, validating the use of college students as participants.

When meeting with the two registered student organizations that participated in the study (Chicano Latin American Student Association; Black Student Union), the researcher read through the consent form and asked participants who were interested in participation to sign the consent forms. The leader of the student organization was given the link to the study and dispersed it to their participants. This was done so that the researcher would not have any email information about the participants. Those who signed the consent forms completed the online survey, and the presidents of the student organizations were given a $10 Chipotle gift card to award to a random participant.

When meeting with the 12 sections of the Fundamentals of Communication Studies 100 classes, a similar process was followed. The researcher read through, passed out, and collected consent forms for the study. The instructors were given an anonymous link to the study to share with their students. Participants took the survey in the

classroom, and teachers took note of those who participated and awarded 3% extra credit to those students. The students were made aware that additional opportunities for extra credit would be available to those who did not wish to participate in the research.

Data Analysis

Once data was collected it was analyzed using independent sample t-tests. The independent variable was the racial group categorization: Caucasian or non-Caucasian. Dependent variables were individual scale scores for each of the instruments and additional questions. An independent sample t-test was used to test for significant difference between the means. 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 $α > .7$ indicated high response reliability for the scale.

Qualitative data analysis.

A total of 326 responses were collected in response to the question "How others might know your racial identity on social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter?" Thematic analysis following the methodology of Owen (1984) was used to find and separate the responses into themes. According to Owen, thematic analysis involves searching for themes using three factors for selection: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence involves finding two or more responses that share the same meaning, but not necessarily the same words verbatim. Repetition is found by identifying the same words, phrases, and sentences in the data. Forcefulness is identified by inflection, volume, and dramatic pauses; this was exhibited in the text with capitalized

words and punctuation used to accent information. Two coders were trained to use the

methodology of Owen (1984) for thematic analysis. Campbell (2016) used thematic

analysis on their short answer survey questions to develop qualitative themes in the same

way this study uses the thematic analysis.

The coders each read the 326 responses and developed themes by working

together to look for recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. The resulting themes

included: photos, skin color/ appearance/ my face, written discussions/ bios/ and text,

interests/ interactions/ who they are friends with, and heritage/ culture/ nationality/

holidays. After developing themes, the coders separately placed each individual

participant response into the themes listed. Then the coders met to clarify which

participant responses they had separately categorized into the previously developed

themes. Coders expressed their understanding of the different themes and articulated

what they though stood out in each theme. To ensure accurate understanding of each

theme and to ensure high inter-coder reliability, any discrepancies in placement of

participant responses were discussed. In some instances, coders had to discuss the

difference between text/bios and heritage/culture to determine how to best code the

participant response. For example, one participant stated, "Mostly by my name because

it's really a common [one] and people question my identity based of [on] that." This

response required discussion between the coders to ensure accurate coding. The coders

concluded that this would be an example of heritage/culture since the response is

referring to a name which is a product of one's culture. However, there were very few

discrepancies in coders' placements of participant responses into themes, helping to

ensure dependability Bitsch (2005).

Chapter Four: 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. The results were analyzed using independent sample t-tests in order to look for significant differences in the means of each scale. The independent variables were the two racial groups: Caucasian and non-Caucasian. The dependent variables were the results of each scale (Photos, Text, Hidden, & Direct Communication). Additionally, effect size (*r)* was examined for each question to determine if there is a large ($r = .8$), medium ($r = .5$) or small ($r = .2$) effect associated with the means.

Depiction of Racial identity

Photos sub-scale 1.

When comparing Caucasian and Non-Caucasian groups statistical significance was found for Photos, t (338) = -6.503, $p < .001$. The scale results indicated that Caucasian participants had a mean of 1.303 (SD = 0.714) and non-Caucasian individuals had a mean of 1.935 (SD = 1.078). The results suggest that Caucasians were least likely to post photos on social networks to display their racial identity. However, results indicated a small effect size of $r = 0.3266$. Table 1 shows results of an independent sample t-test and descriptive statistics for Photos sub-scale 1.

Text sub-scale 2.

When comparing Caucasian and Non-Caucasian groups statistical significance was found for Text, t (343) = -9.646, $p < .001$. The scale results indicated that Caucasian participants had a mean of 1.160 (SD = 0.4417) and non-Caucasian individuals had a

mean of 1.838 (SD = 0.8594). The findings suggest that Caucasian participants speak

with others about their racial identity on social networks less than non-Caucasian

participants. A medium effect size is associated with the means ($r = 0.4448$). Table 1

shows results of an independent sample t-test and descriptive statistics for Text sub-scale

2.

Exposure

Hidden Identity sub-scale 3.

The sub-scale Hidden Identity examined if 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, $t (333) = -.995, p = .320$.

Results are listed in Table 1.

Direct Communication sub-scale 4.

When comparing Caucasian and Non-Caucasian groups statistical significance

was found for Direct Communication, $t (338) = -4.947, p < .001$. Caucasian participants

had a mean of 1.303 (SD = 0.714) and non-Caucasian individuals had a mean of 1.935

(SD = 1.078). The results 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

shows results of an independent sample t-test and descriptive statistics for Direct

Communication sub-scale 4.

Table 1

Results of Independent Samples t-test and Descriptive Statistics

| Scale | Racial Group | | | | | | 95% CI for Mean Difference | | |
| | Caucasian | | Non-Caucasian | | | | | | |
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Photos	1.303	0.714	1.935	1.078	-6.503	<.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.

Additional items.

Three additional questions were asked of participants to determine their

perceptions of how others identify their racial identities on social networks. These results

can be used to understand how participants feel their racial identities are directly and

indirectly pointed out, as well as the accuracy of others' assumptions about their racial

identity. With the first item assessing participant perceptions of whether or not others

directly point out their race or ethnicity on social media (Item 1), an independent samples

t-test reveals significant differences in means for Caucasian and non-Caucasian

participants, $t(337) = -8.001$, $p < 0.001$. Mean results for Caucasian participants were

1.37 (SD = 0.623). Mean results for non-Caucasian participants were 2.04 (SD = 0.918).

Furthermore, the results have a small effect size ($r = -0.3927$). The findings suggest non-

Caucasian participants perceive that others point out their racial identities on social media

more than Caucasian participants. Results are displayed in Table 2.

On the second item assessing participants' perception of whether or not others

indirectly point out their race/ethnicity on social media (Item 2), an independent samples

t-test reveals a significant difference, $t(332) = -9.125$, $p < 0.001$. Mean results for

Caucasian participants were 1.44 (SD = 0.734). Mean results for non-Caucasian

participants were 2.28 (SD = 0.993). This suggests non-Caucasian participants perceive

that others indirectly point out their racial identity more than non-Caucasian participants.

A close to medium effect size was associated with the means $r = 0.4475$. Results are

displayed in Table 2.

On the third item assessing participants' perception of whether or not others

classify their race/ethnicity incorrectly on social media (Item 3), an independent samples

t-test reveals a significant difference, $t(339) = -9.410$, $p < 0.001$. Mean results for

Caucasian participants were 1.30 (SD = 0.650). Mean results for non-Caucasian

participants were 2.24 (SD = 1.192). Table 2 provides independent sample t-test results

for Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants. Findings suggest non-Caucasian

participants experience others incorrectly classifying their racial identity on social

networks more than Caucasian participants. A close to medium effect size was associated

with the means, *r = 0.440.*

Table 2

Results of Independent Samples t-test and Descriptive Statistics on Additional Items

| | Racial Group | | | | | | 95% CI for | | |
| | Caucasian | | Non-Caucasian | | | | Mean Difference | | |
Item	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
1	1.37	0.623	2.04	0.918	-8.001	<.001	-0.835	-0.505	-0.393
2	1.44	.734	2.28	0.933	-9.125	<.001	-1.020	-0.658	-0.448
3	1.30	.650	2.24	1.192	-9.410	<.001	-1.138	-0.744	-0.440

Note. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit, *UL* = upper limit. *1* = others directly point out your race; *2* = others indirectly point out your race; *3* = other incorrectly assume your race.

Male Versus Female Racial Identity Intersectionality

         To better understand the results, further analysis was conducted to look for

differences in responses based on gender. Strictly looking at the genders of males and

females, there was a significant difference, t (336) = -3.169, p =.002, for Photos sub-scale

one between male and female participants. Male participants had an average of 1.37

(SD= .623), and female participants had a mean of 2.04 (SD = .918). A small effect size

was associated with the means (r = -.172) There were no significant differences for male

and female participants for sub-scales 2, 3, and 4. Results are displayed on Table 3

Table 3

Results of Independent Samples t-test and Descriptive Statistics on Gender

| | Gender | | | | | | 95% CI for | | |
| | Male | | Female | | | | Mean Difference | | |
Scale	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
Photos	1.372	.781	1.686	1.001	-3.169	.002	-.511	-.120	-.172
Text	1.334	.618	1.482	.766	-1.883	.060	-.293	.006	-.101
Hidden	1.503	.785	1.655	1.056	-1.458	.146	-.356	.053	-.082
Direct	2.196	1.160	2.415	1.431	-1.529	.127	-.501	.063	-.095

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

         The results were also analyzed by gender for Caucasian and Non-Caucasians. For

Photos there was a significant difference, t (206) = -3.055, p = .003, between Caucasian

males and females. For Photos, Caucasian males had an average of 1.15 (SD = .513) and

Caucasian females had an average of 1.448 (SD = .839). A small effect size was

associated with the means (r = .163). There were no significant differences for non-

Caucasian male and female participants on Photos. For Hidden Identity there was a

significant difference, t (201) = -2.370, p = .019, between Caucasian males and

Caucasian Females. For Hidden Identity, Caucasian males had an average of 1.402 (SD =

.661) and Caucasian females had an average of 1.685 (SD = .947). A small effect size

was associated with the means (r = .171). There were no significant differences for

Hidden Identity between non-Caucasian males and females. Furthermore, there were no

significant differences for Text and Direct Communication between Caucasian male and

females as well as non-Caucasian male and females. Results are displayed in Table 4.

These analyses indicate little to no influence of intersectionality when including gender in

addition to race, for the participants of this study.

Table 4

Results of Independent Samples t-test and Descriptive Statistics on Gender and Race

| | Gender | | | | | | 95% CI for | | |
| | Male | | Female | | | | Mean Difference | | |
Scale	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL	UL	Cohen's d
					Caucasian				
Photos	1.150	.513	1.446	.839	-3.055	.003	-.490	-.106	-.163
Text	1.129	.424	1.187	.459	-.996	.320	-.181	.060	-.065
Hidden	1.402	.661	1.676	.947	-2.370	.019	-.502	-.046	-.171
Direct	2.001	1.003	2.088	1.143	-.529	.597	-.375	.216	-.040
					Non-Caucasian				
Photos	1.784	1.001	2.029	1.125	-1.278	.204	-.623	.134	-.114
Text	1.724	.727	1.891	.912	-1.127	.262	-.460	.126	-.101
Hidden	1.685	.948	1.625	1.201	.306	.760	-.328	-.049	.023
Direct	2.521	1.344	2.875	1.659	-1.281	.202	-.882	.189	-.116

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

American Versus non-American Intersectionality

Testing results between African and African American participants was important, because experiences can be different between the two groups (Asante, Sekimoto, & Brown, 2016). There were no significant differences between African and African American participants on any of the scales except Direct Communication, *t* (42) =-2.837, *p* = .007. African participants had a mean of 2.450 (SD = 1.207), and African American participants had a mean of 3.701(SD = 1.635). The findings suggest African American participants, who have grown up within the context of racism in America, are more likely to think about their racial identity when posting and interacting on social media than African participants. The results had a medium effect size of (*r* = -0.399). Table 5 displays the results of an independent sample t-test between African and African American participants Direct Communication. There were no significant differences found between Asian and Asian American Respondents. No inferences could be made about other nationalities for the other racial identities in the study.

Table 5

Results of Independent Samples t-test and Descriptive Statistics on American and Non-American

| | Nationality | | | | | | 95% CI for | | |
| | African | | African American | | | | Mean Difference | | |
Scale	M	SD	M	SD	*t*	*p*	LL	UL	Cohen's *d*
Photos	1.708	.872	2.188	1.352	-1.365	.179	-1.188	.229	-.177
Text	1.867	.805	2.070	.918	-.771	.445	-.734	.382	-.064
Hidden	1.783	1.352	1.479	.636	.981	.332	-.321	.930	.142
Direct	2.450	1.207	3.701	1.635	-2.837	.007	-.372	.981	-.399

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

Qualitative analysis

Thematic analysis of the responses to the open-ended question "How might others know your racial identity on social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram?" resulted in five themes: Photos; skin color, appearance, and/or faces; written discussions, bios, and/or text; interests, interactions, and/or "friends" or network connections; heritage, culture, nationality, and/or holidays.

The first theme revealed that participants expressed photos could be used to cue others into their racial identity. Participant responses indicated that they perceived race visually and felt their visual appearance in photos would let others know their racial identity. For example, one participant said: "I post a lot of photos and I'm very obviously just a mix of a bunch of European ethnicities." Another stated, "I really don't think that I post anything about my race on social media, so the only way they could tell would be that I am white in my pictures." This theme emerged because of the repetition of specific words such as "photo", "picture", and "seeing". Furthermore, recurrence occurred as participants explained in a variety of ways that others knew their racial identity through photos. Results of the t-test pertaining to Photos sub-scale one revealed that participants did not feel they deliberately projected their racial identity on social networks through photos, however, this theme helped to convey that people still feel their racial identities are inferred through photos.

The second theme involved responses about skin color, appearance, and/or faces. Participants expressed having their racial identities revealed by the way they look to others, and specifically noted skin color and their face as frequent means of racial

identification. Participants used phrases and sentences such as "my physical appearance",

"Others might know my racial identity on social media just because of the color of my

skin.", and ". . . by looking at my face. I'm Asian, and I believe I look pretty Asian."

This theme was created due to the repetition of specific words such as "skin", "skin

color/tone", "face", and "appearance". Furthermore, recurrence of this theme as apparent

in the various ways participants explained that others knew their racial identity: specific

physical signifiers, allusions to skin tone as "White" or "Black," and facial features.

Coders expressed surprise at the fact that Caucasian respondents let their racial identity

be known (i.e., "It's clear that I am white"), while other races did not make as many

direct statements to indicate that they assumed others would easily identify their race.

Furthermore, the coders also found it interesting that people said others could tell their

racial identities from their face and did not refer to other attributes such as hair. This

theme helped to expand the understanding of the results of the t-test on Photos sub-scale

1 by explaining the types of physical signifiers that participants felt others used to judge

their racial identity.

   The third theme involved statements pertaining to written discussions, bios,

and/or text. The coders noted that this was the second largest theme, subsequent to the

photos theme. Respondents noted using textual messages on their social networks to

convey their racial identity. For example, one participant indicated, "People may know

my race and ethnicity because of my biography box on my FB [Facebook] profile if

they're friends with me." Another claimed that his/her racial identity may be known "just

based off the things I say and support." Others made reference to their bios or taglines.

This theme was formed through both repetition and recurrence. Words such as

"biography/bio" and "posts" were repeated. In addition, there was recurrence of responses that alluded to textual cues being used for a display of racial identity. Quantitative data finds that participants generally do not intentionally project racial identity through text, however, this theme suggested that participants still feel others can access their racial identity as a product of the written text on their profile.

The fourth theme involved interests, interactions, and/or "friends" or network connections. Participants recurrently expressed that race has an impact on the kind of things individuals would like on social media, and that there are perceptions about what someone will "like" on social media that correlates to their racial identity. Participants made reference to who they "follow," their political views, and their friends as ways in which racial identity was expressed. The findings help to further explain the t-test results pertinent to Direct Communication sub-scale 4 because they provide a better look at how participants feel others assess the way they interact and communicate on social networks.

The last theme of responses was pertinent to heritage, culture, nationality, and/or holidays. Respondents referenced cultural objects such as clothing and flags, as well as other aspects of culture such as language and the holidays they celebrate. For example, one participant stated: "The types of holidays I celebrate can help others to know my racial identity on social media." Another claimed, "They could look at my family members and their comments on my posts that are in Spanish." Another participant stated that others would know his/her racial identity "because of the clothes I wear in my pictures or my location." Repetition of key words such as "clothes", "my name", "language", and "holiday" helped to form this theme. In addition to repetition, recurrence of meaning regarding culture, heritage, and nationality was apparent. This theme

displayed how racial identity is projected on social networks in a way that was not obvious in the quantitative survey because none of the scales asked about culture or nationality in regards to identity projection.

The five themes provide information about the way participants feel others might know their racial identity on social media. These themes and responses are important as they allowed participants to answer the questions with more freedom than the quantitative questions. According to the coders the two largest categories were photos and written discussion, bios, and/or text. Many of the themes reveal that respondents suspect others know their racial identity though visual cues such as physical attributes, skin tone and their face, as well as cultural objects like clothing, flags, nationality, language, and holidays.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Results of the study aid in answering the research question "In what ways do participants signify, indicate, or display racial identity on social networks?" Quantitative findings suggest that participants do not intentionally display racial identity on social networks, 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. In addition, results of the study suggest that social network users do not intentionally hide their racial identities. Qualitative findings reaffirm the quantitative results, suggesting that participants expect their racial identities are assumed through photos and visual appearance (i.e., skin color, appearance, and/or faces). Furthermore, participants expect that their racial identities can be inferred from written discussions, bios, and/or text; interests, interactions, and/or "friends" or network connections; as well

as from heritage, culture, nationality, and/or holidays. Finally, there are differences in the way African and African American participants display their racial identities given culture and the historical context of race.

Results of this study indicate that participants do not intentionally project racial identities on social networks. Participants most often selected *disagree* or *strongly disagree* in response to the question about use of photos to depict racial identity on social media platforms. Interestingly though, there were significant differences between Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants. Non-Caucasian participants were more likely to show racial identity through pictures on social media. The findings present an interesting phenomenon, but not one that is unexpected. The influences of racism on society are subtle, and this can be found in the small effect size of the subscale. Because racism and racial discourse in America are often disguised and intentionally difficult to fully perceive, the effect size matches the way participants might be affected in their everyday lives. Discrimination against people of color in America is designed to be deniable by society, therefore, a large effect size would not be expected as the differences in racial identity projection would likely be very pronounced between Caucasians and non-Caucasians.

Past research supports that social network participants use images to display identity (Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin, 2008), but there has been no data to support that individuals on social networks use photos to display specifically racial identities. Additionally, the responses of participants to the open-ended question in this study offer an important context to these results. Interestingly, many of the participants felt that their racial identities are obvious through photos. For example, a participant stated, "They may

know my racial identity by seeing in photos that I am white/Caucasian." This confirms

Condry's (2015) claim that race is perceived as a visual part of identity, even though it is

a social construct.

Very similar results to Photos were found when asking participants if they speak

about their racial identity on social media. Both Caucasian and non-Caucasian

participants said they *disagree* or *strongly disagree* that they speak about their racial

identity on social media. However, again, non-Caucasians disagree significantly less than

Caucasian participants. According to their answers on the survey, participants do not

express racial identity through text, however the short answer thematic results signal that

the ability to project racial identity though text, blogs, and bios is there. For example, one

participant stated "[Others know my racial identity] from the Bio column in Instagram

and from my profile description on Facebook." Statements such as this suggest that

participants feel they don't intentionally convey racial identity though text, blogs, and

bio, however, they suggest others might be able to make inferences though the text on

their social networks.

Past research reported that identity is conveyed through blogs and textual displays

on social networks (Florini, 2013; Boyd, 2007). However, results of this study indicate

that racial identity is not conveyed *intentionally* through communication on social

networks. It can be deduced from the results that participants do not intentionally project

their identity on social media through text or photos, but instead feel that it is ascribed to

them. Because people on social networks have their racial identities ascribed to them, it

may influence the way they understand their racial identities. 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 be more a reflection of assumptions about that person's identity

due to his or her gender, race, social class, etc. When identities are ascribed to

individuals, they 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 we 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. The results showed non-Caucasian

participants thought about their race *about half the time* when posting, commenting, and

interacting with race on social networks. This could be the result of the way others

interact with them as a consequence of the identity ascribed to them due to race.

Furthermore, the inference that participants feel their racial identities are ascribed to them

more than they are intentionally constructed through photos could be made. However,

addressing this requires future research.

The three additional questions used for analysis reveal that non-Caucasians felt

others directly, indirectly, and incorrectly pointed out their racial identities, significantly

more than their Caucasian counterparts. These findings help explain why non-Caucasian

participants think about their racial identities more when they use social networks.

Additionally, this may explain why non-Caucasians are more likely to project racial

identities, as it is brought to their attention by others more.

Although non-Caucasians did not believe that they intentionally projected their racial identity, they did indicate that they think about their racial identities when posting, commenting, and interacting with race related content on social networks significantly more that Caucasians. These findings fit with past research (Chan, 2017) that people on social networks experienced apprehension when posting on these social networks. Chan (2017) claimed people consider that what they say could be seen as representative for their whole racial group. This is an important aspect of racial identity on social networks. People on social networks may feel that others ascribe an identity to them through viewed photos; they don't feel they can hide their racial identity on social networks, and non-Caucasians are affected by their racial identities more than Caucasians when interacting on social networks because they think about their racial identities more than Caucasians when posting, commenting, and interacting with race related content.

It is important to consider that young adults attending a Midwest university were the sole contributors to the study. Therefore, the findings are indications of how college age adults view race and racial identity. Qualitative answers indicate that this population feels race is conveyed visually through photos, textual cues, and cultural objects. Young college aged adults also indicated that they do not intentionally project racial identities on social networks. Therefore, it is important to notice how this specific group limits the importance of racial identities through disregarding the benefits of salient racial identity projection. Furthermore, negative consequences may come as a result of the limited expression of racial identities.

The findings suggest that participants feel others can see their racial identities, however, they do not necessarily intentionally project racial identity through photos or

text. Still, it is very interesting that non-Caucasian participants did not disagree to the same extent as the Caucasian participants. It could be deduced that Caucasian participants, being a part of the dominant race in America, do not see their racial identities as an important identity to express. Furthermore, it would be advantageous to Caucasians to disregard the importance of their racial identity for the continuation of the colorblind narrative, where the 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 their expressions of racial identities. Whereas, the dominant racial group feels the expression of racial identity is an unimportant one; 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 the reflex of #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. American society failed to realize the reason for the expression of racial identity and the desire to draw attention to the way people of color experience interactions 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 by 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.

The tyranny of the Nazis' regime has given Anglo Saxon Whites a reason to fear the celebration of racial identity. Whereas, groups like the KKK use racial identity projection to an extreme that is not only exclusive, but also a catalyst of hatred toward

others. For this reason, future research should be conducted to better understand the implications of the Caucasian participants' assumption that racial identity projection is not important. Considering the colorblind ideology of America, it can be further inferred that specific racial identities, their projection and subsequent experiences, are not valued in part because they contradict norms set by a Caucasian dominated culture. Through culture individuals learn how to interact with the world around them. Therefore, American society has taught its people through culture to devalue the expression of differences regarding race. However, the expression of salient racial identities of non-Caucasians is very important to make progress towards breaking the colorblind narrative. Through positive expressions of racial identities, colorblind ideology, and the effects of whiteness on the social norms of social networks, might begin to change the tides of racial animosity. American society may begin to value the different experiences people have in relation to the way they negotiate the world as an equation of their racial identities. If society can begin to value racial identity and understand the difference in how reality is experienced, progress may be made towards a better and more inclusive understanding of one another.

Again, participants feel their racial identities are visually assumed, and that they do not intentionally project them through photos or text. The exception to this would be participants who expressed using cultural objects to give specificity to their racial identity. For example, some participants feel their racial identity is displayed through clothing, cultural objects, and holidays significant to specific regions. These findings confirm past research of Asante, Sekimoto, and Brown (2016) who explained that race is constructed through symbols, language, culture, and group experiences. This was

confirmed in the qualitative results of this study, as participants reported using flags and other cultural objects, nationality, and language as their means of expressing identity on social networks. This is important because African Americans and Africans are typically placed into the same racial group, however, they experience and interact with race in different ways. Cultural objects can be used to distinguish one's racial identity. It is interesting to see participants using cultural objects to convey identity because on the one hand, participants express visual attributes such as face, skin color, and physical characteristics, which may lead to others ascribing a particular racial identity. On the other hand, participants admit to the use of cultural objects to convey racial identities. This is an example of racial identity transcending societal assumptions that race is a biological construct and reveals that it is actually a social construction hiding behind the pseudonym of biology. However, there are likely additional associations made through cultural objects than those made based on physical appearance and future research should be conducted to better understand these differences.

As discussed, participants in this study did not intentionally project their identity, and yet non-Caucasians were significantly more likely to project racial identity through photos, text, and communication. Results of this study also suggest that individuals do not intentionally hide their racial identity. As explained in the Results section, both Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants strongly disagreed that they hide their racial identity on social networks. This was supplemented by responses from the qualitative data, where participants explained that they feel their racial identity is obvious to others on social networks. "It's [my racial identity] pretty obvious. I am sure they all know," said one participant. Participants appear to feel they cannot hide their racial identities

because they think of them as being ascribed and something that other people know just by looking at them. This confirms previous research of Toma and Carson (2015), which suggested that individuals on Facebook are likely to attempt to accurately present parts of their identities that individuals can confirm are seen; statements from respondents like "It is apparent that I am white", suggesting that participants feel their racial identity is simply a visible attribute. Examples like this suggest that people on social media are restricted to projecting racial identity in the manner that it is ascribed to them rather than a more accurate representation of who they are. There are expectations about the way participants present their racial identity, therefore, people may feel that they have to submit to the notions of others rather than a more accurate presentation of self (Collier & Thomas, 1988). Realistically, someone would be very non-traditional in their use of social media if they did not use photos on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Because respondents are not able to effectively escape their visual representation on these social networks they clearly feel that they are unable, for the most part, to hide their racial identity.

It is worth noting that a few participants did not agree that their racial identity on social networks is known to others unless they directly state it, however these respondents were in the minority. Overall, participants seem to feel as if they are unable, and don't need to, hide their racial identity. Past research has indicated that participants manage their identities on social media by filtering out portions they do not wish to display (Toma and Carson, 2015). The quantitative results of this study suggest that participants do not attempt to filter out racial identities. The qualitative results suggest that participants either don't want to hide their racial identity, or don't feel that they have

the option to do so. As one participant stated, "I don't ever talk directly about my racial

identity on social media, however, people can see from the pictures I post that I'm white

and come from a white family." This indicates that participants do not attempt to hide

their racial identity in order to alter the way it is projected on their social media accounts.

Finally, because of research which indicates that Africans and African Americans

have different experiences of race (Asante, Sekimoto, and Brown, 2016), and the

opportunity to explore the intersection of nationality and race in this study, an

independent samples t-test was conducted on these two groups of participants. Africans

and African-Americans had similar responses to the survey questions; therefore, there

were no significant differences pertaining to using photos to convey racial identity,

speaking about racial identity, or hiding racial identity. However, when it came to the

way race affected interactions on social networks, there was a significant difference

between African and African American participants—likely because they experience race

differently. The historical context facing African Americans is one that African

participants either strive to reject or do not fully participate in because they have not

experienced the same racial context. It is important to realize that the experiences of non-

Caucasian participants, while different than Caucasians, are not always the same. How

race affects identity construction may vary by country of origin. This implies that

projecting and experiencing race on social media is affected by historic and cultural

aspects.

Results of this study suggest that racial identity is not intentionally projected by

the participants. Rather, participants assume their identities are obvious to others through

photographs of themselves. Participants also do not intentionally display racial identity

though textual means; rather, they assume others might know their racial identity as a result of the way they post, or references they make to cultural objects. Additionally, participants in this study did not attempt to hide or filter out their racial identities on social networks. The findings suggest that participants do not feel they need to, or have the practical ability, to hide their racial identities as they feel it is disclosed to others through photos. Non-Caucasian participants disagree less than Caucasian participants that they use photos, text, and interactions to convey racial identity. However, both groups do not believe that they intentionally project racial identity on social networks. Lastly, culture and nationality were found to have an effect on the way African and African American respondents interacted with race related content on social networks. The implications of this study's findings suggest it is an important topic of study and warrants further research.

Conclusion

The 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. Findings of this study reveal racial identity is not intentionally projected on social networks. Rather, participants feel as if their racial identities are ascribed to them through the content on their social networks. However, non-Caucasian participants use photos, text, and interactions to convey racial identity significantly more than Caucasian participants. It may be the American sociopolitical context that leads non-Caucasian participants to be more aware of their race when commenting, positing, and interacting on social networks. Non-Caucasian participants think about their race *about half the time* where Caucasian

participants *almost never* think about their racial identity when posting, commenting, and interacting with race on social networks. This phenomenon is an example of race related privilege in America. The Caucasian participants held the privilege of ignoring their racial identities, as they were a part of the dominant culture.

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. Participants either feel that they are unable to hide their racial identities, or they have no apparent interest in attempting to hide their racial identity. Lastly, culture and nationality affect the way African and African American respondents interact with race related content on social networks. Although African and African Americans are commonly ascribed to the same group, it is important to note the distinctions between them.

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. Findings indicate that participants do not intentionally project their racial identities. Past research had not specifically explored how racial identity was projected on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Furthermore, research on whiteness, as well as colorblindness, might draw from the findings that Caucasian participants care about projecting racial identities.

Researcher Reflexivity and Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. 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 racial identity. Using quantitative survey methodology for the topic of race can result in the entrenching of troublesome ideology. 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%) participation rates. This has the potential to skew results. For example, asking participants to self-identify their race and to then make generalizations about their experiences can lead to stereotypical expectations of how one might experience the world through the lens of their racial identity. Future research should look more deeply into the results of the survey with qualitative methods and allow participants to have a voice independent of the constraints found in a quantitative survey. Therefore, the findings are that of a preliminary study, and must be explored further using additional research methodology.

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, a biracial individuals might have different experiences as a result of the way society interacts with them. The participants of the survey are likely to be primarily from the Midwest, and not offer perspective of the many regions of the United States. Sampling college students also affects the socioeconomic status of the response pool. 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. Furthermore, the University population sampled was not very diverse.

Therefore, more than half of the respondents identified as Caucasian. A binary between Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants was used because the sample sizes for each of the non-Caucasian racial identities were too small to give grounds to be used as standalone groups. The compilation of non-Caucasian groups into one assembly can be problematic. These groups do not necessarily have the same racial experiences. Non-Caucasian groups might be united in the fact that they do not possess the societal power that the Caucasian racial group holds.

Three popular social networks were used to help develop themes between the different types of social networks (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) regarding racial identity presentation. This research takes place in 2018, and is limited to the social networks of the time period. A shift in popular social networks could have a large effect on racial identity projection. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are currently popular mediums, but are subject to being replaced someday by a newer medium.

Future Research

Future research could take a number of different directions. First, alternative research methods and social network mediums could add depth to generalized findings and diversify the social networks that have been explored. More specifically, it would be interesting to explore why Caucasians feel that identity projection is unimportant. In addition, 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. Lastly, differences in how individuals with different nationalities project racial identity should continue to be explored to better understand these differences.

Alternative forms of research (i.e., focus groups and interviews) and different forms of social media (i.e., LinkedIn) might offer new insights on racial identity projection. Qualitative research would allow participants to answer more freely than is allowed in a typical quantitative study and would let participants give personal insight to their experiences. In addition to alternative research methods, other mediums such as Snapchat and LinkedIn could be explored to identify how the differences in these social networks affect the way racial identity is displayed. Perhaps looking at a more casual social network such as Facebook and a more professional one such as LinkedIn would yield interesting results.

One specific avenue of research would be to explore Caucasians' perceptions of racial identity projection. Such studies may help to clarify whether Caucasian participants feel their racial identities are irrelevant and do not need to be projected, or instead that projection of white racial identities could be construed as harmful by others (i.e., viewed as agenda of extremist groups such as KKK), or something else altogether. Another path might be to collect qualitative data on the way participants feel their identities are ascribed to them on social media. Because identities are often ascribed to individuals on the basis of race, this research might also look at biracial identity projection on social networks as part of an exploration on the autonomy and limitations people feel when projecting racial identities on social networks.

In addition, future research might explore the apparent lack of choice in displaying racial identity on social media. Would participants choose to hide racial identity on social networks if they felt they had the practical ability to do so? Focus groups and interviews could be used to discover whether participants feel they can hide

their racial identities to further understand the way participants feel their racial identities are ascribed to them. Additionally, given the opportunity would people choose to accurately depict their racial identity? Future research such as this might uncover the way people would manage their racial identities online if given more authority over their ability to project racial identities of their choosing.

Finally, future research should also look more specifically at the way African and African American identities are negotiated on social networks. Furthermore, sampling African American participants in other areas of America may lead to different voices from a more diverse economic and educational background and may provide more holistic insight. The Midwest has its own unique culture, and surely racial identities could be experienced with some difference in other areas of the United States. Future studies that allow racial identities to be evaluated with greater specificity than a Caucasian and Non-Caucasian binary could find more implications pertaining to the way racial identity is projected and navigated on social networks. Specifically looking at the way more racial identities are projected between American and non-Americans could provide insight on the way these groups experience racial identity.

It is important to continue to explore racial identity projection on social networks as 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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Appendix A: Photos and Text

Photos Sub-Scale 1

1) Do you use the photos you post to Facebook to communicate your race to others?
    a. Always
    b. Almost Always
    c. About Half the Time
    d. Almost Never
    e. Never
    f. N/A
2) Do you use the photos you post to Twitter to communicate your race to others?
    a. Always
    b. Almost Always
    c. About Half the Time
    d. Almost Never
    e. Never
    f. N/A
3) Do you use the photos you post to Instagram to communicate your race to others?
    a. Always
    b. Almost Always
    c. About Half the Time
    d. Almost Never
    e. Never
    f. N/A

Text Sub-Scale 2

1) I speak with others about my racial background on Facebook.
    a. Always
    b. Almost Always
    c. About Half the Time
    d. Almost Never
    e. Never
    f. N/A
2) I speak with others about my racial background on Twitter.
    a. Always
    b. Almost Always
    c. About Half the Time
    d. Almost Never
    e. Never
    f. N/A
3) I speak with others about my racial background on Instagram.
    a. Always
    b. Almost Always
    c. About Half the Time
    d. Almost Never

e. Never
f. N/A

Appendix B: Exposure

Hidden Identity Sub-Scale 3

1) I choose to hide my racial identity on Facebook.
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Somewhat Agree
   e. Agree
   f. Strongly Agree
   g. N/A
2) I choose to hide my racial identity on Twitter.
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Somewhat Agree
   e. Agree
   f. Strongly Agree
   g. N/A
3) I choose to hide my racial identity on Instagram.
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Somewhat Agree
   e. Agree
   f. Strongly Agree
   g. N/A

Direct Communication Sub-Scale 4

1) My racial identity influence what I choose to post on Facebook.
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Somewhat Agree
   e. Agree
   f. Strongly Agree
   g. N/A
2) My racial identity affects the things I like and comment on when using Facebook
   a. Strongly Disagree
   b. Disagree
   c. Somewhat Disagree
   d. Somewhat Agree
   e. Agree

       f. Strongly Agree

       g. N/A

3) My racial identity influences what I choose to post on Twitter.

       a. Strongly Disagree

       b. Disagree

       c. Somewhat Disagree

       d. Somewhat Agree

       e. Agree

       f. Strongly Agree

       g. N/A

4) My racial identity affects the post I favorite and "re-tweet" on Twitter.

       a. Strongly Disagree

       b. Disagree

       c. Somewhat Disagree

       d. Somewhat Agree

       e. Agree

       f. Strongly Agree

       g. N/A

5) My racial identity influences how I post on Instagram.

       a. Strongly Disagree

       b. Disagree

       c. Somewhat Disagree

       d. Somewhat Agree

       e. Agree

       f. Strongly Agree

       g. N/A

6) My racial identity affects what posts I favorite on Instagram.

       a. Strongly Disagree

       b. Disagree

       c. Somewhat Disagree

       d. Somewhat Agree

       e. Agree

       f. Strongly Agree

       g. N/A

Appendix C: Additional Questions

Item 1

Do others directly point out your race/ethnicity on social media?
a) Never
b) Almost Never
c) About Half the Time
d) Almost Always
e) Always
f) N/A

Item 2

Do others indirectly point out your race/ethnicity incorrectly on social media?
a) Never
b) Almost Never
c) About Half the Time
d) Almost Always
e) Always
f) N/A

Item 3

Do others classify your race/ethnicity incorrectly on social media?
a) Never
b) Almost Never
c) About Half the Time
d) Almost Always
e) Always
f) N/A