**Title**
Invoking Agency: Talking About Racial Diversity and Campus Climate on Social Media

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**Introduction**

The 2016 Presidential election, riddled with bigotry and political scandal, illuminated historically anchored divisions between Americans' ideological standpoints on race and racism. Unsurprisingly, many individuals turned to social media as an outlet for personal reflection and expression on the election occurrences. While social networking sites generally attract a wide variety of users, their most frequent users tend to be teens and young adults (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Lenhart, 2015). In fact, when it comes to undergraduate students, social media usage rates are soaring. Social media is one of the primary platforms of information-gathering, entertainment and personal expression for today's young adults (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010; Lenhart, 2015; Kellner & Share, 2007). Consequently, in the midst of Donald Trump's rise to political power, where a large majority of students extracted their daily news from Facebook (Greenwood, Perrin & Duggan, 2016), social media served as an important space for political engagement and student-led discussions of race and racial oppression.

Importantly, undergraduates' use of social media for political dialogue and personal reflection inevitably positions these sites as crucial components of the higher education experience. In the words of Brendesha Tynes, a professor of educational psychology at the University of Southern California, students' online interactions are most often reflected in offline spaces (Tynes, Rose & Markoe, 2013). Stated differently, what happens online does not stay online; instead, it overflows into college classrooms, dormitories, and dining halls, blurring the once-rigid contours of campus racial climate to include the complex, ever-changing facets of social media. In order to understand the role that social media plays in the construction of campus racial climate, it is pertinent to first understand its prevalence in the lives of college-age youth. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, teens and young adults consume about 7.5 hours of non-academic media per day, 7 days a week (Rideout et al., 2010). When the reality of multitasking and simultaneous media use is taken into account, media intake rates skyrocket to approximately 10 hours each day. This means young adults are spending more time consuming media than they are attending school. Moreover, Amanda Lenhart's recent study on teens and social media consumption (2015) reports that 92% of teens are online everyday and that their internet access is primarily facilitated by smartphones. Of social media platforms, young adults are most likely to be on Facebook (71%), followed by Instagram (54%) and Snapchat (41%). Studies such as these indicate that teens and young adults are the most connected and largest consumers of social media in the United States.

The circulation of racist media has likewise grown exponentially with the advent of the internet. Ideological investments in "post-racialism" require

new forms of racial common sense (Omi & Winant, 1994) and the invisibility of Whiteness (Daniels, 2013) serves to limit our understanding of race and racism in social media engagement. Following the Civil Rights Movement, the nation discursively embraced racial equality, and everyday expressions of racism underwent a grand transformation. No longer socially or politically acceptable, overt expressions of racism metamorphosed into subtler, more clandestine forms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Tate, 1997). This neo-racism, perpetuated as "colorblindness," enabled systems of oppression and disenfranchisement to remain intact while making public acknowledgement of race and racial prejudice a social taboo (Bell, 1992). The hegemonic construction of colorblind racism renders all forms of racial oppression virtually invisible in digital and physical spaces, allowing other forms of monoracism, colorism, and sexism to go largely unchecked. Now more than ever, recognizing and challenging racial inequality are hotly contested tasks, as many Americans believe wholeheartedly that the legacy of racism has been abolished (Brown, Carnoy, Currie, Duster, & Oppenheimer, 2003).

The nation's belief in post-raciality extends far beyond physical society, manifesting regularly within digital, cyber, and televisual spaces as well (Noble, 2014). Online media often circulates in the context of an imagined post-racial utopia wherein users willingly consume and create fictional, value-free images as a form of escapism (Noble, 2013; Senft & Noble, 2013; hooks, 1992, 1996). This colorblind construction of online media, coupled with the prevailing belief in a post-racial America, poses a unique challenge for scholars attempting to document the ways that modern day bigotry manifests online (Noble, 2013; hooks, 1996; Howard & Flennaugh, 2011). Ultimately, the reluctance of Americans to acknowledge racial oppression within the confines of "apolitical" social media spaces necessitates the use of identity-centered, historically situated bodies of scholarship (Bell, 1992; Howard & Flennaugh, 2011; Solórzano, 1997) to make sense of undergraduates' use of social media as a space for political dialogue, civic engagement and racialized resistance.

In order to better understand how students utilize social media to talk about issues of racial/ethnic diversity and campus climate at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the authors conducted a preliminary study. They posed the following research questions: How do students describe their posting behaviors and engagement with issues of racial diversity and campus climate on social media? How frequently do students use social media to discuss issues of racial diversity and campus climate in either positive or negative ways? What does participant posting behavior and engagement with issues of racial diversity and campus climate on social media say about the utility of social media in promoting a positive campus climate? It is our hope that by conducting this research, the campus community can capitalize on social media use to promote a

safe, welcoming, and empowering campus environment for students of all backgrounds.

## Theoretical Framework

As a social justice framework, critical race theory (CRT) in the context of education was designed in response to the manifestation of colorblind racism in schools. Its purpose, as explicated by CRT scholars, is to deconstruct colorblind ideology at "its racist premise" in order to transform those structural aspects of society, including educational institutions and mainstream media, that maintain the subordination of Students of Color (Huber, Benavides, Malagón, & Solórzano, 2008; Solórzano, 1997). There are five tenets of CRT in education scholarship that can be used to address the reality and complexity of racism embedded within both social media and higher education. The first tenet is the Centrality & Intersectionality of Race and Racism. CRT acknowledges that racism is permanent and deeply ingrained within the very fabric of American society (Bell, 1992; Huber & Solórzano, 2015) and should therefore be centralized in discussions of Students' of Colors' educational experiences (Huber, Benavides, Malagón, & Solórzano, 2008). CRT simultaneously asserts that racism can be either conscious or unconscious and can manifest in digital, cyber, and televisual spaces as innocuous, jocular and "colorblind" posts, memes, article shares, or comments. The second tenet is the Challenge to Dominant Ideology. CRT challenges traditional social science and media discourses that position college campuses as bastions of equality, social justice and progressive racial thought (Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). Instead, CRT makes note of structural racism that permeates schools and popular media sites that regularly undermine Students of Color in myriad ways (Solórzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). The third tenet is the Commitment to Social Justice. In its struggle toward social justice, CRT in education aims to completely abolish racism, as well as to eliminate all other forms of marginalization such as class, gender, and linguistic oppression (Solórzano, 1997). This objective transcends education, as CRT is subsequently dedicated to eradicating racism, bigotry and intolerance within online mediums that are regurgitated within academe, and sustain hostile campus climates. The forth tenet is the Centrality of Experiential Knowledge. CRT recognizes that the lived experiences of Students of Color are legitimate and critical to understanding the current educational obstacles facing marginalized students on their pathway to graduation (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Huber, 2009). Scholars are encouraged to work alongside Students of Color to construct counterstories as a means of challenging, resisting and speaking back to racial bigotry, ignorance, or intolerance perpetuated in both off- and online campus spaces (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Huber, 2009). The fifth tenet is the Interdisciplinary Perspective.

Critical race scholars actively integrate race and racism within a historical context by drawing upon scholarship from ethnic studies, feminist theory, history, film studies, and many other social science fields (Yosso, 2005).

Collectively, CRT's five tenets can be used to examine the "racialized layers of subordination" that have historically restricted undergraduates of color's access to equal academic opportunities and that continue to influence their educational experiences and trajectories (Yosso et al, 2009, pg. 663). These layers, often manifesting as unstated norms, policies, practices, and ideologies, set the context for racialized subjugation not only on campus, but also in online spaces including social media sites like Facebook. As a guiding framework, CRT provides the lens through which to view studies of higher education research as it relates to racial oppression, social media and campus climate. Though much of the literature on campus racial climate focuses on a range of educational contexts, including residence halls, classrooms, student clubs, and athletic affiliations, there exists a critical dearth in educational scholarship examining the how the racialized social media terrain influences students' perception of campus racial climate (Tynes, Rose & Markoe, 2013). Given the immense rates of undergraduate media consumption, it is not altogether surprising that students' online racialized interactions, both positive and negative, shape their perceptions of offline spaces such as lectures halls and dormitories. Thus, it is imperative that higher education scholars take heed of the increasingly blurred lines between social media and campus climate in order to ensure students' experience positive, empowering and socially just experiences on campus.

## Methodology

This study employs qualitative interviewing and critical content analysis as its primary data collection tools. By embedding these methods in a critical race theoretical framework, this research intends to forefront the marginalized voices of undergraduates of color while simultaneously grounding the analysis in a rich sociocultural context. Two theoretical and epistemological approaches to research make up the researchers' methodology: 1) qualitative research and grounded theory methodology; and 2) critical race theory (CRT) research and counter-story methodology.

## Qualitative Research and Grounded Theory Methodology

Standing apart from quantitative research in its promotion of words and images over numbers and statistics, qualitative research is an epistemological stance towards scholarly investigation that attempts to make meaning of the world

through an in-depth exploration of people's experiences (Merriam, 2009). While qualitative research is influenced by a plethora of theoretical traditions, our inquiry is informed by critical qualitative research.  The aim of this particular strain of research is to challenge and critique systems of power while simultaneously working to empower marginalized groups and transform those structures in society that maintain oppression and subordination (Merriam, 2009). Critical race theory, a prominent critical qualitative research epistemology, is operationalized in this study in order to center the voices of undergraduates of color and work towards transformational resistance.

Our operationalization of qualitative research is also informed by grounded theory—a tradition that encourages researchers to "attend to what we hear, see and sense while gathering data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). While traditional positivist theories emphasize the separation between research, affective knowledge and researcher positionality, grounded theory notes the unique strength in pursuing hunches and intuitive analytic ideas when collecting and interpreting data (Ibid). Grounded theory recognizes that the researcher is not a "passive receptacle into which data are poured" (Ibid, p. 27). Instead, it acknowledges the inherent subjectivity of the researcher and positions her values, personal experience and positionality as valid forms of knowledge that strengthen the analytic process. This idea flows from grounded theory's firm stance on the inability of researchers to "dismiss scrutiny of our values by claiming neutrality and authority" (p. 27). Not only does grounded theory acknowledge the ways lived experience and personal standpoints influence a researcher's analytic lens, it also recognizes the influence her positionality has on the participants' sense of trust.

**Critical Race Research and Counter-Story Methodology**

Critical race theory is a research epistemology that serves to expose the workings of racism and white supremacy. As described in detail above, the five tenets of CRT that form the infrastructure of this study's methodology are: 1) A central focus on race and racism; 2) a challenge to dominant ideology; 3) a commitment to social justice; 4) the importance of experiential as knowledge; and 5) an interdisciplinary approach to research. There are a variety of themes that inform this research method, however, we draw heavily upon the notion of *counter-story methodology* (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001) in this investigation. Counter-storytelling enables members from marginalized communities, such as undergraduates of color, to have voice, name their struggle and work towards combating interlocking systems of intersectional oppression both on and offline (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Crenshaw, 1991).

**Interview Protocol**

Eighteen semi-structured interviews with UCLA undergraduates were conducted in order to gain a better understanding of the way students view the campus climate and social media use among their peers. Researchers also attempted to garner insights on the ability of social media to serve as a platform for productive conversations about race, diversity, and campus climate at the institutional level. Interviews lasted approximately 30-35 minutes and participants received a Bruincard reward as an incentive for their participation in the study.

Interviewing was the method of choice for this study namely because of its ability to gain insight into behaviors, feelings and standpoints that would otherwise be unknown or misunderstood to the casual onlooker (Merriam, 2009). With its ability to unveil covert behaviors, narratives, or worldviews, interviewing can be a powerful tool in educational scholarship attempting to elucidate marginalized standpoints on race, social media, and higher education.

**Sampling and Participant Demographics**

In acknowledging participants' need for privacy and comfort when discussing sensitive topics such as race and racial diversity, the research team elected to use referrals and purposeful sampling as a means of acquiring a sizeable sample. Having undergraduates conduct interviews potentially allowed participants to express their views about the campus racial environment and social media experiences in ways they might not have expressed them to a campus administrator. Researchers made a concerted effort to interview a diverse group of students, in terms of academic major, year in school, race/ethnicity, and gender. All demographic information was self-reported. Names of participants were removed from study transcripts and reports, as was any other potentially identifying information, to protect participants' privacy. Table 1 displays participant demographics.

*Table 1.* **Participant Demographics (n=18)**

| Race/Ethnicity | Asian/ Asian American (2) |
| --- | --- |
| | Black/African American (2) |
| | Latino/Hispanic (9) |
| | Native American (1) |

| | White/European American (4) |
|---|---|
| Gender | Female (13) Male (5) |
| Academic Major | Political Science (5)<br>Communications (3)<br>Anthropology (1)<br>Astrophysics (1)<br>Biological Sciences (1)<br>Chicano Studies (1)<br>Cognitive Science (1)<br>History (1)<br>Sociology (1)<br>Psychology (1)<br>Psychobiology (1)<br>Unknown (1) |

**Content Analysis Protocol**

In addition to interviewing, the research team also performed a content analysis on the Facebook profiles of each participant. To maintain a sense of privacy and confidentiality, the profiles of the participants were entrusted to the respective team members who interviewed them. Since a referral process was used as the primary sampling method, a majority of the participants were already "Facebook friends" with the research team member that interviewed them. Following the interview, the researchers examined the participants' social media profile from October 2015 to March 2016 and documented any discussions of race, racism, and UCLA campus climate in the form of statuses, photographs, videos, comments, or shared posts.

**Data Collection and Analysis Protocol**

Analysis of interview data began with analytic memos in which research team members reflected not only on the content of individual interviews, but also on the changes observed between what was stated in the interview and what was observed on the participants' social media pages. The team reviewed transcripts and collectively developed a coding schema that captured trends and themes across interviews and social media pages that was used to code all transcripts and social media content. Transcripts and content were coded more than once to ensure inter-rater reliability among team members.

Data collection occurred in four phases (outlined in Table 2), the first of

which explored undergraduates' understanding and use of social media, its suitability as a platform for discussions of race and diversity, and their perception of its impacts on UCLA's campus racial climate via semi-structured interviews. The second phase consisted of transcribing and coding the interview for common themes, patterns and perspectives related to race, gender, social media and campus climate. During the tertiary phase of data collection, the data was analyzed in order to make claims about the ways UCLA undergraduates perceive racialized reality television to shape their socio-academic experiences. During the final phase, participant Facebook pages underwent a qualitative content analysis where posts about race were analyzed for frequency, form, and function.

As data was being collected, codes and categories were reworked, developed, and collapsed as to understand UCLA students' perception of social media and the impact online discussions of race have on campus racial climate. The initial phases of data analysis involved open coding (Merriam, 2009). This process consists of jotting down relevant themes, topics or quotes that will inform the more specialized coding schema in subsequent phases. From these initial codes, categories and subcategories were constructed (Merriam, 2009). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, categories were reduced, refined and collapsed into more specialized categories and subcategories.

*Table 2:* **Phases of Data Collection and Analysis**

| Phase | Data Collection and Analysis |
|---|---|
| 1. Gathering student perspectives on social media, race, and campus climate | ▢ Semi-structured interviews with undergraduate participants <br> ▢ Open coding of interviews |
| 2. Identifying thematic messages about race, social media and UCLA campus climate | ▢ Transcribing interviews <br> ▢ Coding of transcripts for common themes, patterns and ideas |
| 3. Analyzing interview data | ▢ Comparing, collapsing, revising & reworking categorical overlaps |
| 4. Facebook Content Analysis | ▢ Taking screenshots of every post about race or campus climate <br> ▢ Documenting frequency of codes <br> ▢ creating thematic categories for |

| | form & function of racialized posts |
|---|---|

**Findings**

In order to determine the frequency with which UCLA undergraduates post about racial diversity and campus climate, the study team analyzed two academic quarters worth of content analysis data from participants' Facebook pages. Broadly, these data suggest that undergraduates at UCLA post about race and racial diversity more frequently than they post about UCLA campus climate alone. Stated differently, students post about race, both broadly and as it relates to UCLA campus climate, more prevalently than they do about UCLA culture in a general sense. Figure 1 shows the frequency of Facebook post types identified.

*Figure 1:* **Frequency\* and Orientation of Facebook Posts about Race or Campus Climate**
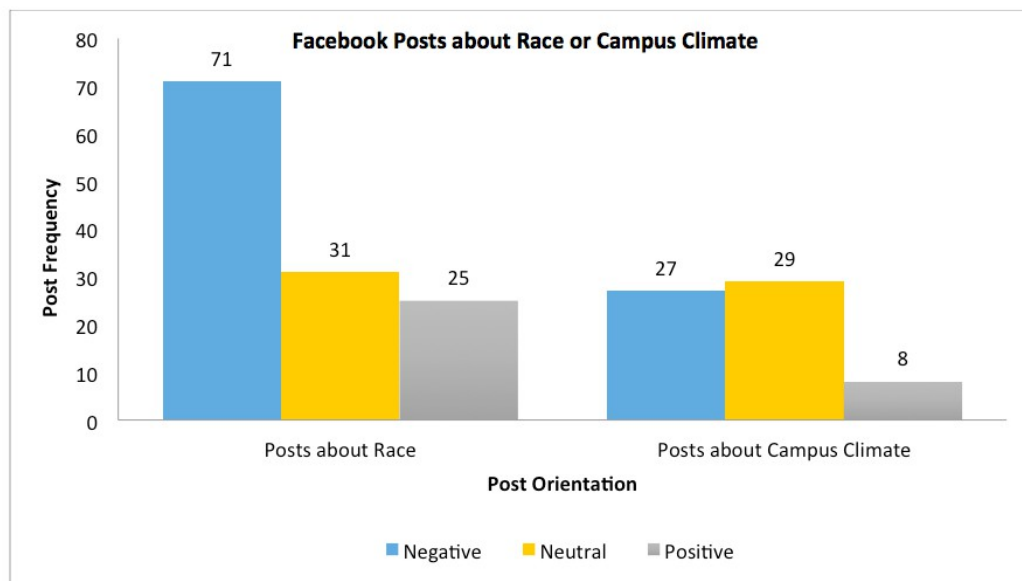


\* It is important to note that since a single Facebook post could be doubly coded (i.e. it was a post that was a positive post about both race and campus climate), the number of Facebook posts represented in each bar column is higher than the number of Facebook posts that were coded in all. Thus, the authors elected to tabulate frequencies rather than percentages

In addition to calculating quantitative frequencies, content analysis data was simultaneously operationalized to determine not only the type of post that were most prevalent, but also the purpose of function of such posts.

Thematically, two major findings arose from this secondary analysis: 1) *when students do post about race, it is most often about a negative encounter with race or racial diversity*; and 2) *when students do post about race, their purpose is most frequently to teach and inform their peers about race*. Figure 1 also displays the breakdown of race posts in terms of positive, negative or neutral orientation.

In addition to content analysis data, interview data was leveraged to provide more in-depth insight into UCLA students' use and perception of social media as a platform to adequately address issues of race and campus climate. Overall, three major findings emerged from the interview data: 1) social media acts as a *real-time news source* for campus events and occurrences; 2) social media posts are used to *create awareness* about racial diversity; 3) Students have conflicting beliefs about social media's ability to facilitate *productive dialogue* about racial diversity.

**Real Time News Source**

When asked to discuss their perceptions of social media and its most prevalent usage amongst undergraduates, participants generally agreed that social networking sites such as Facebook serve as a real time news source for finding out about local, national and global occurrences. In the words of a Latina Biology major, "Facebook is kind of the center of all social medias. You see stuff that you see on Snapchat, on Instagram, on Twitter, all on one central platform." Facebook's multifaceted user interface seemed to make the site seem more accessible to students looking for immediate coverage of news events, both at home and abroad, than other sites such as Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat. The difference between these sites, as explicated by students, lies in the fact that most social media sites maintain relatively simple interfaces that focus on one type of media, such as Snapchat videos or Instagram pictures. Since Facebook users can upload pictures, share articles, stream live videos, write statuses, comment on other users' pages, and link nearly every other social media site to a single Facebook account, this particular social media site stands out to undergraduate participants as a centralized site that contains the most holistic view of campus life, events, and occurrences.

While Facebook's trending topic feature keeps students abreast of national and international news stories, its ability to stream live video, share location tags, host pictures and display its users' posting behaviors in real time makes it particularly useful as digital location for campus-specific social happenings. When asked about his perceptions of social media as it related to the UCLA

campus community, a Latino student that majors in Psychology said, "Every time that I hear about something occurring on campus, I go directly to Facebook to see what's going on." Overall, interview data suggested that UCLA students are able to get a relatively accurate and timely view of campus culture and climate from social media sites, such as Facebook, that maintain concentrated user traffic from college age populations.

**Creating Awareness About Racial Insensitivity**

Facebook's unique ability to host a multiplicity of media platforms, including Snapchat, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter bolstered its ability to serve as "center of all social media." This ability also made it uniquely equipped to create awareness about prevalent social issues such as racial and ethnic oppression. For instance, a Latino student in Chicano studies reported: "There's been a lot of people using [social media] to like raise awareness about you know race, culture, and stuff."

For many Bruins of Color, the means by which they raised awareness about the prevalence of racial oppression in the midst of "colorblind" and "post racial" rhetoric about UCLA campus culture was through voicing their personal pain and frustration about marginalization. Although there are a variety of ways students were able to raise awareness about issues racial diversity on Facebook, Bruins of Color reported that sharing personal encounters with racial insensitivity here on campus was one of the most effective way means of creating awareness for them and their peers. For instance, one student posted the following status on her Facebook page with the #BlackBruinsMatter hashtag: "I am learning, and I am scared. I want to live...I want a life where I do not have to worry about being made fun of, discriminated against, or hated because of my skin color."

This student's passionate plea for racial justice and her willingness to be vulnerable with her Facebook community is a testament to the role social media plays in fostering restoration, resistance, and communal healing from racialized trauma in the lives of many college students. As explicated by study participants, sharing firsthand experiences with racism and racial discrimination serves as a way for Undergraduates of Color to validate their experiences, resist institutional silencing and intervene upon the dominant narrative that positions the university as a "post-racial" educational space. Reflecting back on posts she witnessed following the racially-themed "Kayne Western" costume party at a UCLA fraternity, an African American Cognitive Science major noted, "The Afrikan Student Union was laughed at when they asked [fraternities/sororities] to stop, but the fact that they posted about it made a difference. It validates how these students felt."

Students additionally reported that these personalized posts had a

significant impact on social media users because of their affective quality. In fact, an Asian American Astrophysics major noted that, "The more people show that [issues of campus climate] affects them personally, the more others pay attention to it."

An example of the educative power of personal social media posts can be seen in the following students' reflection on seeing her friends' post: "One of my friends is a Muslim woman of color, and [preachers on campus] said very derogatory things towards her, and she posted it on Facebook kind of explaining what happened to be like 'hi, this does happen, even on our campus, where I call my home.'" As a white female student, this participant felt like reading her friends' of color unadulterated posts about racism on campus was a life changing experience. These cyber testimonies and counterstories catalyzed a paradigmatic shift that helped her better understand the plight of Students of Color not only at her university, but also across the nation.

In addition to creating awareness through affective reflection and personal experience, undergraduate social media users also used Facebook to teach their peers about racial diversity issues at home and abroad. Posts aimed at educating fellow social media browsers often took the form of sharing informative articles, videos and pictures. Many students were already using Facebook to raise awareness about social issues. They were also using Facebook to organize. For instance, when a popular fraternity hosted a racist themed party in Fall of 2016, students of color and their allies responded by organizing a campus-wide march and walk out. Reflecting upon the walkout, a Native American history major stated, "[students] were able to unify, set up a time, spread the word, and it was a big turn out on the campus. And I think social media definitely allowed for this to occur."

In the eyes of many students, social media is an effective means of creating awareness about social issues, teaching and informing peers about racial injustice and organizing against institutionalized oppression. Coupled with its activist utilities is Facebook's unique ability to serve as a counterspace for marginalized student groups. On Facebook, many students feel safe enough to vent about, reflect upon and find healing from their racialized trauma. Thus, social media appears to have the potential to positively alter campus racial climate through the sharing information on social justice while also playing a therapeutic role by helping to bolster strength, resilience and solidarity on the individual student level.

**(Un)Productive Two-Way Dialogue**

While many students felt that Facebook was a beneficial platform to create awareness about racial diversity through one-directional article shares or posts,

they were less likely to view it as a place to have productive, two-way dialogue about issues of diversity. More specifically, study participants felt that discussions of racial diversity that manifested in user comments, wall posts and statuses tended to be hostile and argumentative. In fact, a Latina political science major stated, "I feel that people tend to argue more and express their ideas more on social media rather than in person because they do not face like a physical threat...they would rather just hide behind a screen and say what they have to say."

Content analysis data pulled from participants' pages during the 2015-2016 academic year supported students' claim that Facebook does not always foster safe and productive dialogue about race. After a long, emotional debate about race, racism, and the 2016 presidential election, one Facebook user commented: "This discussion has been hurtful to many people and I really don't think it's proactive or worthy of so much stress." Importantly, there seemed to be a difference in students' perceptions of what "productive" dialogue meant. Thorough analysis of interview data suggest that students have conflicting definitions of productive dialogue, with some defining it as simply as sharing a personal opinion or standpoint with peers on social media, some as changing other people's opinions to match their own and still others believing it to mean coming to a peaceful resolution at the end of the digital debate. These differences in perception made it difficult for the study team to determine whether or not students believed Facebook, as it currently stands, is the most beneficial platform for promoting safe and productive student dialogue about race and racism. Finally, findings from this study suggest that UCLA undergraduates feel more comfortable discussing issues of racial oppression in cyber spaces that are student-created and student-led. In fact, Facebook groups that were affiliated with the University (i.e. ASHE, Student Leadership, etc.) had significantly less student posts about race and campus climate than those that were student-generated and student-moderated (i.e. UCLA Secrets, UCLA Republicans, Black Bruins, etc.). It would appear that students feel more comfortable expressing their honest beliefs about the state of UCLA's racial climate in spaces that are not moderated by the UCLA administration, perhaps because the fear of institutional repercussions is minimal in these spaces. Consequently, the University could support the creation of student-led pages dedicated to having safe, intergroup dialogue conversations about racial diversity, discrimination and insensitivity as well as providing more institutional support for pages that are already doing such things.

**Implications for Practice**

Comprehensive analysis of the data suggests that social media could indeed be leveraged as a means of addressing and remediating issues of racial

insensitively on campus. Student Affairs faculty and administrators should consider ways to meaningfully incorporate social media sites into their departmental and student service program design. Students in this study suggested that honesty about racial discrimination is more likely to occur online due to its age-specific audience and its considerations of user anonymity. However, the operationalization of such social networking platform at an organizational level would necessitate thoughtful accommodations and modifications to ensure user safety when discussing sensitive issues such as racial and ethnic discrimination. This section contains suggestions and practical advice for how to construct a social media page that would adequately address the needs for safety, honesty and anonymity raised by participants this study.

Since students seem to feel more comfortable expressing their beliefs about the state of UCLA's racial climate in spaces that are not moderated by staff, faculty or administration, the University could support the creation of student-led pages dedicated to moderating safe, intergroup dialogue conversations about racial diversity, discrimination and insensitivity. In addition to supporting the creation of intergroup dialogue social media pages, UCLA could work to provide more institutional support for student-led social media pages that are already attempting to inform the Bruin community about campus climate issues.

In terms of site modifications, participants suggested having student-led pages that have messaging options that would allow students who have questions about racial/ethnic diversity or simply want to share their experiences about UCLA racial campus climate to engage in safe, supportive and informative conversations with peers that have been trained in facilitating intergroup dialogue. These chats could take place in one-on-one messages or within moderated chat rooms that would allow multiple users to discuss a single issue simultaneously. Specialized chat rooms could be designed around a specific topic of pertinent interest to the campus community and take place at a regular time each week, month, or quarter.

Participants also suggested that the University should take strides to increase the frequency at which UCLA affiliated pages share information about racial insensitivity on campus. Although findings from the study suggest that both UCLA student groups and individual students themselves are sharing information in hopes to alter campus racial climate, such informative messages were not as prevalent on UCLA affiliated pages. In order to increase the prevalence of information and resources, University-affiliated pages could circulate news articles, share information about crisis counseling or social justice events on campus, provide information about ethnic studies courses, and even facilitate monthly polls on campus racial climate. The latter might provide the UCLA campus community with more timely, user-friendly information on campus racial climate than more traditional paper or email surveys do. Also, by hosting a single-

question poll on a social media page, the University could increase the likelihood of student participation, both because of its quick-and-easy design and its prime location in a space that attracts heavy student traffic.

## Conclusion

The sample size of 18 students in this study may have been a limitation to comprehensively understanding the way students view campus climate and social media use among their peers. The sample size may have also limited the scale and diversity of suggestions for using social media as a tool to address campus climate. Further research can address these limitations by expanding the sample size and studying how students across universities in the United States use social media to express their racial concerns.

Despite these limitations, this study makes an important finding in showing that social media is a popular avenue for undergraduate discussions of race, racism, and campus climate. Findings from this study expand upon previous research in higher education and social media that suggests social media serves as a digital reflection of offline campus racial climate (Tynes, Rose & Markoe, 2013). Consequently, improvements to the virtual UCLA campus racial climate via the creation of student-led intergroup dialogue pages, sharing more informational posts about racial diversity on UCLA affiliated pages, and regularly polling students on the UCLA campus racial climate could have a ripple effect on the physical campus climate at UCLA.

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