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Yes I Do Mind: Constructing Discourses of Resistance against Racial Microaggressions on Tumblr

Abigail Kang,
MSc in Global Media & Communications

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The Author can be contacted at abigailkangje@gmail.com

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Abigail Kang

ABSTRACT

Racial microaggressions are subtle expressions of racism that manifest through brief verbal, behavioural or environmental indignities, which have the potential to cause harm to their victims, especially through repeated exposure. While the issue has been theorized upon for a number of decades, only recently through wider exposure via social media has the topic garnered greater attention from the public. Prevailing ideologies regarding race and racism, however, have circumscribed its position within mainstream media discourse, although it remains in use by minority communities online, especially victims of microaggressive incidents.

Seeking to explore how experiences of racial microaggressions and existing social power relations are understood by this group of people, this study poses the question 'How are discourses of resistance against racial microaggressions being constructed by its victims online?' It focuses on posts made on the popular social media platform Tumblr. A critical reading of available literature on power and resistance provides a conceptual framework grounded in key theories with which to analyse the matter, with a particular focus on how they relate to hegemonic discourses of race and racism currently at play within the United States of America.

Applying a Critical Discourse Analysis, a sample of ten Tumblr posts was analysed to answer this question. The findings at this point identify four key themes in resistance discourse: 1) Barriers to learning resistance, 2) The (in)ability to resist across physical and online spaces, 3) Competing constructions of 'them' and 'us', and 4) The burden of resistance/compelled to resist. The diverse body of resistance discourse continues to speak directly to hegemonic ideas of racism as applied within their own contexts, rather than to each other.

INTRODUCTION

What are Racial Microaggressions?

Automatically assuming a Black person at a formal event is one of the serving staff and treating them as such. Shouting "Konnichiwa!" at a person of East Asian descent then speaking gibberish to them, before laughing it all off as a joke. These 'subtle, stunning, often automatic… exchanges which are "put-downs"' (Pierce, *et al.*, 1978: 66), whether committed by close friends or complete strangers, are a fact of life for many people of colour (POC) living as racial and ethnic minorities in the Western world. Chester Pierce was among the pioneers within academia to theorize on muted but offensive racial behaviours, first coining the term 'microaggression' in 1970. In the decades since he first shed light on the problem and its potential effects, subsequent studies have gone on to expand upon its focus on Black-White interactions to include other POC, as well as to refine its formulation even further (See Davis, 1989; Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986; Delgado and Stefancic, 1992; Solórzano, 1998; Franklin and Boyd-Franklin, 2000). These exchanges have also been discussed under what has been termed 'covert' (Hall, 1990), or 'genteel' (Prashad, 2000/1) racism, though there is often very little that can be considered covert or genteel about these experiences from victims' perspectives.

Solórzano, Ceja, and Rosso used the phrase 'racial microaggressions' to describe such phenomena, defining them as 'subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal and/or visual), directed towards POC, often automatically or unconsciously' (2000: 60). However, it was only more recently that the term gained further traction and entered into mainstream parlance, through the work of Derald Wing Sue *et al.* Their definition of 'brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group' (Sue, Capodilupo, *et al.*, 2007: 273) succinctly covers a fuller extent of the racially microaggressive experience.

Movements like The Microaggressions Project and I, Too, Am Harvard, helped racial microaggressions gain prominence in the public eye through the use of social media channels including Tumblr and Facebook, resulting in increasing coverage of the matter on the Internet, especially on social news websites like Buzzfeed. In response to this, a backlash occurred in mainstream media, disparaging the concerns raised by this theory. High profile

news outlets published articles claiming 'social media life has become a race to be the most offended first' (TIME, 2014), and argued that racial microaggressions ought not to be taken so seriously, and instead 'be treated as the kind of bantering that is normal and tolerable' (*The Atlantic*, 2014). But why should it not matter that people are facing a very real situation of repeated low level indignities and denigrations in their everyday lives, just because each standalone episode does not reach some arbitrarily set threshold of harm? Far from being easily dismissible, these 'casual' encounters have major detrimental effects for POC who are subjected to them, with numerous studies detailing their compound impact, from creating hostile and invalidating educational environments (Solórzano, Ceja and Yosso, 2000) to negatively affecting victims' mental health (Sue, Capodilupo and Holder, 2008). Individually, 'offensive mechanisms… often are innocuous,' yet repeated exposure often results in a damaging 'cumulative weight of their never-ending burden' (Pierce, *et al.*, 1978: 66).

Prevailing Discourses of Racism

The idea that 'race should not and does not matter' (Neville, *et al.*, 2000: 60) has become the 'prevailing racial ideology of the post-Civil Rights era' (Tynes and Markoe, 2010: 2). This 'colour-blindness' has not led to the end of essentializing people based on race or ethnicity, rather resulting in the denial of the continued existence of ideological and structural racism within society (Essed, 2002; Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Yosso, *et al.*, 2004; Tynes and Markoe, 2010). Though society has deemed overt racism illegitimate, prejudices still exist and have become far more insidious. Hate messages have become more subtle and essentializing representations of POC more ingrained in social discourse, which increasingly have 'racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions,' allowing racist statements to be made without having to talk about race and making it easier to ignore the 'racist predicates on which the statements are grounded' (Hall, 1990: 12 – 13. See also Bonilla-Silva, 2002).

The mitigation of racism as acceptable within covert racist discourse has been furthered by ideas of an 'enlightened' or 'hipster' racism, where the use of 'savvy, self-reflexive and ironic' racism is coupled with 'an express desire on the part of the racist not to be racist,' making it difficult to contest the racist tropes that are constantly being re-inscribed within society (Dubrofsky, 2013: 87 – 88). All these work alongside a 'presupposition that those exposed to discrimination are not competent to make sound judgment about the situation' (Essed, 2002: 210), which enshrine the privileges of the dominant white majority who are seen as 'raceless' within hegemonic discourse. The white epistemic gaze has produced 'an ongoing ignorance of

its own positionality vis-à-vis people variously Othered' (Code, 2004: 219), with this self-ignorance having the far-reaching consequence of producing blindness to the experiences of POC.

Key Aims

It is this mistaken yet persistent belief within dominant discourses that racism is over (D'Souza, 1995), and that social justice is no longer required, that makes studies like this – which seek to shed light on the daily occurring implicit and explicit racial snubs that are manifestations of wider social ills – a continued necessity. By ignoring the fact that, consciously or not, denigrating hidden messages are constantly being communicated to POC through racial microaggressions, many perpetrators remain blissfully unaware of the nature and operation of contemporary racism (Bell, 2002; Sue, *et al.*, 2009). Post-racial society has created a situation where it becomes almost impossible to talk about race in a constructive manner, but being blind to the effects of the sight of race within a racist culture is itself symptomatic of racism. Only through breaking the 'rules and meta-rules' of the post-racial project, and bringing to the forefront alternative memories to subvert this epistemic oppression, can society possibly attain 'an enlightenment that is genuinely multiracial' (Mills, 2007: 35).

Thus, this study seeks to study discourses resisting racial microaggressions, which both highlight existing problems and provide alternative means of viewing the issue from the perspective of the phenomenon's victims. As much of the literature and debate surrounding the issues comes from a North American perspective, this study will focus mainly on that context. A thorough overview of related theory will be undertaken in order to gain a clearer understanding of the matter, before a more focused research question is formulated. Next, justifications will be provided for the methodology employed. Given the role that online activism has played in bringing the matter of racial microaggressions to the public eye, this study will then examine discourses that have been posted to the Internet, and to the social media site Tumblr in particular.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To gain a firmer understanding of the topic of resistance against microaggression, a thorough analysis of foundational theoretical thought pertaining to it will be undertaken. It will situate the racism underpinning racial microaggressions at the nexus of discourse, power and

hegemony as understood by Foucault and Gramsci, drawing upon the same concepts to analyse possibilities and forms of resistance. A select body of the literature concerning strategies for resisting racism will then be covered, along with a brief overview of literature regarding race, resistance and the Internet. Drawing upon this wide body of knowledge, at the conclusion of this theoretical chapter a conceptual framework will be drawn up, based upon the ideas found most relevant and applicable.

On Discourse

In Foucaultian terms, discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak.' Rather than merely identifying objects, discourses 'constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention' (Foucault, 1972: 49). The implications of this view of are two-fold: firstly, discourses can order social relations, and secondly, the production of meaning arises through particular institutional practices and power relations that work to divide and classify the world according to their subjective perspectives. Discourse facilitates the social production of knowledge, and in privileging particular discourses while suppressing others, symbolic power is exercised, influencing people to believe a certain view of the world (Bourdieu, 1990; Thompson, 1995). Other subjectivities remain forcefully subjugated through being disqualified from, and rendered unworthy of, epistemic respect, becoming essentially invisible to those who have internalized such exclusions to a high degree (Medina, 2011: 11), whether these individuals are part of the dominant or the minority group.

Discourses are also a source of privilege for those who find themselves on the right side of power relations. Foucault's treatise on barriers to change in prisons (In Heller, 1996: 89 – 90) can be neatly applied to the social institution of racism. Though it runs counter to publically articulated social goals, racism survives because the social groups that have the power to ensure its continued existence benefit from this disjunction. For example, color-blind ideologies work to reproduce White privilege rather than leading to a truly post-racist world (Ryan, *et al.*, 2007), and so Whites continue to be far more likely to endorse it and socialize the valuing of this ideal. Discourses shape particular realities often without appearing to do so, and the naturalization of specific perspectives like colour-blindness as a universal good further work to legitimize it, serving to entrench existing relations of power.

On Power and Knowledge

According to Foucault, power is 'ubiquitous, diffuse and circulating' (Pickett, 1996: 457), and along the networks of power, every individual is 'always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising… power' (Foucault, 1980: 98). No binary exists between those with power and the powerless; everyone can exercise power and has power exercised upon them, though to different degrees. The flows of power are not entirely unintentional as Smart (1983: 90) or During (1992: 132) believe. Rather, 'there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims or objectives' (Foucault, 1990: 94 – 95). All power is exercised for a reason, and as a response to some consciously recognized need (Heller, 1996: 81). Foucault insists that 'power needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression' (Foucault, 1980: 119), and the exercise of it is merely 'a way in which certain activities modify others… guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome' (Foucault, 1982: 788 – 789).

That is not to say that Foucault was unaware of the oppressive hierarchies at play within society. He acknowledged the issue openly, stating that '[when] an individual or social group manages to block a field of relations of power to render them impassive and invariable and to prevent all reversibility of movement… we are facing… a state of domination' (Foucault, 1988: 3). In this state of domination, power and knowledge are intimately tied. One of the ways in which power is exercised by dominant groups is through the imposition of their subjective knowledges. Foucault underscored the sheer pervasiveness of the power-knowledge complex, arguing that there is no objective knowledge for which to strive towards (Foucault, 1994: 12). There is only the ability to impose a 'law of truth' (Foucault, 1982: 781) upon certain types of knowledge, defining them as right and legitimate, while subjugating all other forms of understanding. The dual practices of power can be seen in the construction of dominant ideas of racism, as 'at the heart of racism lies the power to define someone else' (Matheson, 2005: 142), as well as the legitimization of the repudiation of an alternative coloured memory (Mills, 2007: 30) through systematically disqualifying what it has to say.

On Hegemony and the Tyranny of Common Sense

The Gramscian construction of hegemony is one of power that, like Foucault's, is based both on consent and coercion, and a form of ideological rather than a military domination (Gramsci, 1971). Ideology has been described by Eagleton as how 'a dominant power may

legitimate itself by promoting beliefs and values that are congenial to it, naturalizing and universalizing such beliefs' while at the same time disparaging 'rival forms of thought' (1991: 5), an understanding that fits well with Gramsci's conceptualization of how hegemony operates. Consent within hegemonies is achieved through the liberal application of 'common sense,' an ahistorical amalgamation of historically effective dominant ideologies, doctrines and social myths, naturalized and made meaningful within the immediate surroundings of space and time (Gramsci, 1971: 344 – 348). Hegemonies are entrenched through convincing the majority of society that such ideas are in their interest, and normalized to the point that they become an internalized part of majority thinking. Racism can thus be understood as a construct, formed through practices of consent and coercion and driven by complex and competing discourses rendered artificially coherent.

The tyranny of common sense as a form of hegemonic representation of reality lies in the fact that it is 'completely egocentric' and 'completely devoid of alternative representation' (Gillespie, 2008: 382), allowing for no other perspectives to attain its level of legitimacy, thus forming a veneer of totality and universalism which is patently false. What was specific and partial becomes seen instead as objective and universally applicable, and what is ultimately cultural becomes naturalized to the point of being taken for granted as the way things are and ought to be. That individual perpetrators of racial microaggressions often do not see themselves as being racist, and remain unaware that their actions are not as harmless as they think (Franklin and Boyd-Franklin, 2000), shows how firmly embedded the 'common sense' construction of racism is.

On the Possibility of Resistance

Classic theories of power like that of Lukes (1974), Dahl (1961), and Bourdieu (1990) have tended to view resistance as highly unlikely, if not next to impossible, within a system of domination, whether it works through physical coercion or psychic restraint. Assuming a binary of powerful/powerless, the negative conception of power held by these theorists generally precludes the possibility of resistance. Foucault on the other hand famously asserted that '[where] there is power, there is resistance' (1978: 95-96). Though he clearly acknowledges systemic inequalities in the distribution of power as 'certain positions preponderate and permit an effect of supremacy to be produced' (Foucault, 1980: 156), no one individual or group holds a monopoly over all power (Foucault, 1990: 95), and every element of power can potentially be counter-hegemonically reappropriated.

Just as power is not absolute, neither is discourse total. While it would be easy to conceive of the total internalization of particular subjectivities, both Foucault and Gramsci make room for limitations to the acceptance of dominant discourses. In Foucault's case, assumptions of individual rationality and a degree of freedom to reject dominant discourses underpin his thinking. 'Without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to physical detention' (Foucault, 1982: 790). Further, dominant discourse has an inherent instability; even as discourse acts as the means for the social exercising of power, it also 'undermines [power] and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it' (Foucault, 1979: 101). While discourse penetrates deeply into the social conscious, it is not unchanging, and as Gramsci has pointed out, hegemonic discourse is ultimately an unstable product and a site for struggle (in Rupert, 2003: 198), leaving room for resistance to occur.

On Strategies of Resisting Racism

Gramsci saw resistance as conscious political work that needed to be undertaken by intellectuals who are to 'instil new popular beliefs… a new common sense, and with it a new culture and a new philosophy' (1971: 422 – 424). In comparison, Foucault's conception of power as spread along the entire system of social relations allows for a more inclusive view of resistance as potentially including every agent within the power network. Foucault also does not provide recommendations for strategies of resistance, rather rejecting the imposition of limitations upon the nature or form of resistance, as to do so would be an extension, consciously or otherwise, of the existing system of power that resistance is trying to overcome (Pickett, 1996: 447, 461). Any attempts to do so would be, in Foucault's words, 'totalitarian' (1980: 83). Instead, only those directly involved in the 'opposition to the effects of power that are linked with knowledge, competence and qualification' (Foucault, 1982: 781) can determine what methods to use.

Scholars resisting racism have proposed various strategies depending on what they regard as the most pressing aspect of subjugation. hooks saw the internalization of dominant discourses as the most important thing to combat, and proposed resistance against the deeply negative mass-media representations of Blacks through boycotts and writing letters of protest (1995: 118, 131). Other scholars have taken issue with the opacity of discourse within hegemonic structures, and sought to problematize taken-for-granted knowledges. Resistance in their view ought to be performed through the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' to '[unmask] previously hidden techniques of power' (Pickett, 1996: 452). Houston and Kramarae championed the production of a counter-hegemonic system of norms, values,

meanings, and ideology through speaking out, 'reclaiming, elevating and celebrating "trivial discourse" and "truth-telling" that contradicts the dominant version of history' (1991: 394 – 398).

Possibly the most structured method of racial resistance currently formulated has been put forth by theorists working under the banner of Critical Race Theory (CRT), an interdisciplinary school that emerged out of the work done by legal scholars of colour seeking to establish a jurisprudence that would lead to the elimination of racism and other forms of subjugation (Matsuda, 1991: 1331). Apart from asserting 'the centrality of race and racism' as pervasive and non-marginal (Solórzano, 1998: 122), CRT also 'challenge[s] dominant claims of neutrality and ahistoricism; recognizes the experiential knowledge of POC; maintains a commitment to social justice; and is transdisciplinary in nature' (Allen, 2010: 126). The practice of privileging the voice and experiential knowledge of POC through studying their narratives (Crenshaw, *et al.*, 1995; Solórzano, *et al.*, 2000), 'invariably uncovers how race mediates the manner in which POC experience subordination through social and institutional racism' (Allen, 2010: 126). By shedding light on forced silences, violence and the irrationality hidden within the dominant code, CRT aims to challenge hegemonic paradigms and pave the way for social transformation.

On Race, Racism and the Internet

John Perry Barlow and other cyber-anarchists sold the Internet as a new terrain where race no longer had to matter, where even as 'politicians struggle with the baggage of history, a new generation is emerging from the digital landscape free of many of the old prejudices' (Negroponte, 1995: 230). The optimism at the dawn of the Internet Age for the coming post-racial utopia has since been aggressively tempered by various scholars, who have rightly pointed out that the invisibility of ethnicity on the Internet does not represent a freedom from or eradication of racism, but a further privileging of the 'raceless,' with minority races and ethnicities being 'whited out' on the Web (Nakamura, 2002: 47). Overly optimistic views of the Internet like cyber-race theory, which argued that the Internet would promote greater understanding and lead to a decline in racial discrimination (Kang, 2000), have also been rubbished. The Internet is now seen instead as a place where racism has flourished, with POC being 'frequently exposed to racial epithets' (Tynes, *et al.*, 2008: 565) across online spaces, perhaps more so than in real life.

The Internet reflects the social contours of existing society while also providing anonymity, thus increasing the likelihood of prejudice being voiced more openly (Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Sellers, *et al.*; 2003; Glaser, *et al.*, 2002). In the same vein, the body of scholarship on race, resistance, and the Internet fall along different points across a spectrum. At one end, scholars believe the Internet is a place where minority groups are able to thrive without fear of persecution (Sökefeld, 2002) and are able to carve out their own space with the potential for further empowerment, while on the other, the Internet is seen far more cynically, and issue is taken with the idea that greater representation of minorities online necessarily correlates to them possessing any more power than the little that they currently have (Nguyen, *et al.*, 1996; Lockard, 1996). Most scholars avoid either extreme, with the understanding that although the Internet has created new avenues for the articulation of the raced self (Cheung, 2000) in a way compensating for its absence in other cultural models, even with these 'burgeoning visual cultures of race on the Internet authored by people of colour', these spaces of oppositional self-representation largely 'flourish in out-of-the-way spaces of the popular Internet' (Nakamura, 2007: 209), much like they do offline.

Conceptual Framework

At the heart of this conceptual framework is the understanding that racism is constructed and embedded through processes of consent and coercion, and the fact that 'resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault, 1990: 95). To comprehend the diversity and heterogeneity of forms of resistance, it is first imperative to understand the positionality and relationality of social agents in networks of power relations (Medina, 2011: 10). That racism is ultimately a hegemonic social construct working through privileged discourses is another key concept to be considered. It will be put into practice through borrowing the CRT method of studying resistant counter-narrative discourses, for their ability to point out what is unnatural about prevailing 'common sense', their alternative knowledges as well as their ultimate desire to bring about social justice. In conceptualizing the Internet as a space for resistance, the existing literature on race, resistance, and the Internet has been indicative of the need to take the middle ground between overweening optimism and cynicism in viewing its capabilities.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This dissertation proposes to critically analyse discourses of resistance against racial microaggressions, through textual posts on the matter that have been made readily available on the popular blogging platform Tumblr. While racial microaggression is no longer as under-studied or ignored within academic circles as it once was, most empirical research to date is largely concerned with educational environments and psychological effects. This research project hopes to cover racial microaggressions from a different perspective, namely, how everyday internet users understand and resist their experiences of racial microaggressions. To that end, it proposes to answer the following over-arching research question:

'On Tumblr, how are discourses of resistance against racial microaggression being constructed?'

The following three sub-questions provide additional framing and guidance:

1. How are experiences of racial microaggressions being constructed in resistance discourses?

2. How is resistance framed within resistance discourses?

3. What dominant discourses are mentioned within resistance discourses, and how are they understood and challenged?

METHODOLOGY

Why Study Resistance Discourses?

One of the clear criticisms of studying any form of resistance is the common pitfall where multiple scholars uncritically trumpeted any form of action and romanticized those among the oppressed with strength and agency, while overlooking the persistence of dominant structures (See Morris, 1990; Saukko, 2003). This research study is not, however, a blind celebration that might erase further need for action, but rather a necessity to further the cause of social justice. Discrediting voices of discontent is symptomatic of the denial of everyday racism (Essed, 2002: 203), making it crucial to study the concept from the

discursive perspective of POC. 'Rational' dominant discourses in favour of particular power regimes dismiss and exclude the discourses and experiences of an 'Other' who has been painted as 'irrational' (Foucault, 1971: 12 – 13), and the coercive act of silencing further isolates and disempowers people even in the speaking context of their everyday lives (Spender, 1990: 106 – 107).

Discourses enable and constrain social space and the imagination through systematically 'forming the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). Hence silence is not just the power to prevent talk, but the power to control how certain ideas can be expressed, leading often to the suppression of the authentic voice. Emerging from this position of silence thus means even more than just being empowered to speak, but also having the power to control the form and content of one's own communication (hooks, 1990). Through the uncovering of subjugated discourses, this research hopes to expose and undermine existing social power relations that enable racial microaggressions to go unabated, and contribute to the body of work that seeks to 'thwart it', as Foucault (1978: 101) succinctly put. In this case, the studying of resistance discourses is important for the understanding of how POC themselves understand racial microaggressions in opposition to dominant discourses, their potential to react, and how they might act.

Why Study Discourses on Tumblr?

As a site for study, Silk and Silk saw the Internet as comparatively undiscovered territory for academia especially in its role as a 'site of struggle between racism and anti-racism' (1990: ix). More than two decades since, the proliferation of users and websites has left much of the Internet uncharted territory still. As of June 2014, Tumblr is the 38th most visited website on the entire Internet, and the 6th biggest social networking site, with over 230 million active users on the microblogging platform.[1] Yet it remains little studied. While primarily seen as a visually-oriented site, it is also rich in textual posts covering all manner of interests. The extensive use of traceable tagging, the clustering of related pages on the dashboard, and the ability of users to like and share each other's posts on their blogs have rendered Tumblr possibly the most social of all the blogging platforms, allowing users to easily create and participate in communities with others who share similar interests. While counter-narratives

[1] Alexa (http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/tumblr.com) and Statista (http://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/) rankings.

are most commonly performed orally, the burgeoning practice of posting these personal accounts on Tumblr is creating a rich resource that can and ought to be mined for study.

Why Critical Discourse Analysis?

Given the requirements of this study, a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proved to be the most suitable research method. Two aspects stood out – its traditional leanings towards social justice, and its methodological approach. From its inception, the focus of many Critical Discourse Analyses has been on how text and talk are involved in the reproduction of or resistance against social problems, including racism and other forms of power abuses, through an examination of how underlying social beliefs like prejudices and ideologies impact the form and nature of text and talk (See Van Dijk, 1993, 2008; Fairclough, 1995, 2009; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). CDA's explicit commitment to uncovering social ills made it a good fit for this study, which likewise 'aims to contribute to addressing the social "wrongs" of the day… by analysing their sources and causes, resistance to them and possibilities of overcoming them' (Fairclough, 2009: 163). With the discursive strategies of dominant discourses framing and representing subjugated peoples and knowledges in problematic ways, CDA contributes by illuminating how certain practices help to 'obscure and therefore perpetuate what is taken for granted' while also identifying alternative pathways of action. Thus, it serves the end goal of promoting social change through action, in particular, 'the way that people talk' (Wood and Kroger, 2000: 13 – 14).

While hardly a monolithic qualitative research tool, at its core CDA's approach is premised upon a commitment towards tracing how all 'ahistorical' and naturalized discourses are historically fabricated (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), making it a methodologically sound approach to scrutinizing how resistance discourses are shaped by and in turn attempt to shape society through unmasking the ideological power relations that are constructed and naturalized through language. In addition, as '[contexts] not only feature personal knowledge and opinions… but are based on socially shared knowledge and beliefs' (Titscher, *et al.*, 2000: 24), there was a need for a qualitative research method that bridged the micro and macro levels of discourse, to see resistance not just at the individual level, but also taking into account the wider societal context. There was also the need to know how language is being wielded to further or dismantle particular existing social power structures ascribed within 'laws, rules, norms, habits, and even a quite general consensus' (Van Dijk, 2001: 354 – 355).

CDA highlights the discursive nature of social relations of power as actioned by texts and everyday talk (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997), making it a useful tool in mapping the processes behind the production and consumption of texts and the social conventions that these relate to. It also helps us determine how the power relationships in texts are 'both socially constituted and socially constitutive' (Bishop and Jaworski, 2003: 246). To that end, Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional approach proved to be the most applicable, as it extends beyond a mere textual interpretation to analysing texts at the discursive and societal levels as well. In practice, this occurs through an 'interpretation of the relationship of the text and interaction', and an 'explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context' (Fairclough, 2001: 91), which were woven through the analysis.

Certain criticisms have been levelled against discourse analyses and CDA in particular, with scholars like Deacon *et al.* (2007: 138) arguing that the methodology is not just unsystematic as compared to other research tools, but also overly subjective, and prone to being adversely affected by researcher bias. While later sections outlining the research design will make the case for CDA not necessarily being an unsystematic approach, here the challenges surrounding the subjectivity of the researcher's own position will be addressed. Rather than avoiding subjectivity entirely, the researcher has chosen to be continually vigilant on the matter of her own opinions and biases. In the interest of full disclosure and reflexivity, this researcher is a person of colour who has studied in a Western country for four years, facing racial microaggressions on multiple occasions, within an educational setting as well as in public, both in her country of residence as well as when travelling to other Western countries. These encounters disturbed and distressed her even before she had a name for them. This background led to her interest in researching this particular topic. Awareness of the researcher's subjective position was particularly useful during the stages of corpus collection, sample selection, and discourse analysis. Rather than being drawn almost exclusively to the stories that were similar to her experience, the exercise in reflexivity led to a concerted push for a wider range of discourses, with the samples eventually being picked via a more randomized method. There were also conscious efforts made to identify common themes existing in the corpus through a thorough survey of its content, before applying them to the chosen sample during the analysis, in a bid to avoid reading her preferred meanings into the text as Deacon *et al.* warned against (2007: 139).

Ethical Considerations

Beyond considerations of researcher bias, there were also important ethical concerns to address. Given the sensitive nature of the subject of study, there was a need to be extra mindful, both in the selection of the corpus, as well as during the analysis. There was also the need to question what counted as the public domain on the Internet, as compounding the issue was the fact that few posters of content online 'have considered that it may be used by researchers' (Farrimond, 2013: 181). To that end, only posts made available on unlocked blogs were considered during corpus collection, and only posts with at least 250 'likes' or 'reblogs' were selected to form the corpus. Some of the posts were made anonymously for the express purpose of sharing; hence, they were considered part of public discourse online. Given the sheer number of posts available, to seek permission for each and every post was considered unfeasible, and there was also the fear that only choosing posts from those who agreed within a certain time period would falsely limit the corpus to a smaller pool of posts – previous experience on Tumblr showed that users were far quicker to respond when they were uncomfortable than when giving permission.

To that end, a dedicated account was set up on Tumblr, with a single post giving a brief description of the research project undertaken (See Appendix B), as well as instructions for how those who were uncomfortable with their posts being used for academic purposes could opt out. The public blog was then used to follow every single site from which the vast corpus was collected, allowing their moderators to view the post when they clicked through to see the new follower. In the five months that the post was up, zero blogs opted out. A later concern was that some of the posts had originally come through a long chain of re-blogging from sources outside of Tumblr. Ultimately, given that most of these posts had been liked or shared on Tumblr at least 250 times, with further commentary downstream, it was decided that they could also be considered part of the social network of discourse on Tumblr itself.

Corpus Collection and Operationalization of Analysis

The corpus was collected by trawling through tags on 'race', 'microaggression', and other related terms like 'white privilege', 'casual racism' and 'everyday racism'. An effort was also made to follow inter-blog links, to explore what the Tumblr users themselves saw as related content. So long as the text post covered racial microaggressions and fit the minimum criteria of at least 250 likes or 're-blogs', it was added to the corpus. In order to allow for as diverse a sample as possible, no arbitrary discrimination was made against the nature of the posting,

whether they discussed just one instance of racial microaggressions, ranted about a lifetime of microaggressions, focused on an act of resistance, or included no acts of resistance whatsoever. Every counter-narrative was considered. Over 100 posts were collected by the cut-off date of 1 June, 2014. From these posts a first reading was made with the overarching research question and three framing questions in mind, to identify major themes and trends.

The four major themes identified are:

1. Barriers to learning resistance;
2. The (in)ability to resist across physical and online spaces;
3. Competing constructions of 'them' and 'us'; and
4. Burden of resistance/Compelled to resist.

After that, a first round cull was performed, with the shortlist consisting only of posts with at least 500 likes or 're-blogs' at the time of collection, in order to analyse posts that had a wider reach. From there, the posts were sorted by type: Single-Incident (Conversation), Single-Incident (Narrative), Compound Microaggressive Incidents (Narrative) and Miscellaneous Other Posts. Given the varied lengths of each post, a decision was made for the sample to have ten texts. Two each of Miscellaneous Other Posts and Compound Microaggressive Incidents (Narrative) were randomly selected. For Single-Incident (Conversation) and Single-Incident (Narrative), samples were randomly drawn until there were three instances for each type, and within each type no two were of the same race in the interests of greater diversity. Rather than reading too much into each post and to draw out intertextual similarities and differences, a simple coding was applied across the selected sample, coding for descriptions of resistance, descriptions of racial microaggressions, descriptions of self (self-constructed and contested), descriptions of community, descriptions of perpetrators of microaggressions, and descriptions of location, which can be viewed in Appendix A. Based on these annotations and the themes identified from the wider corpus, the analysis was undertaken.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Barriers to Learning Resistance

Resistance does not come naturally, but is a learned behaviour – before resistance can be successful or even happen, those who are subjugated must first be able to ascertain for

themselves that resistance is necessary, and be willing to act. As Fairclough argued, 'the effectiveness of resistance and the realization of change depend on people developing *critical consciousness* of domination and its modalities, *rather than just experiencing them*' (2001: 3, emphasis added). While all the posts were necessarily written by those who have developed some form of understanding of the existing social order in which they feel subjugated, some also explicitly acknowledge the fact that resistance is neither automatic nor easy (See Post G, Post I). The social groups that control the most influential discourses have the best chances of shaping the minds and actions of others (Van Dijk, 2001: 355), and with the expectations and assumptions behind 'common sense' so rarely made clear or questioned as part of a hegemonic 'opacity of discourses' (Fairclough, 2001: 33), these particular beliefs help foster a degree of social control.

The existence of 'systemic constraints' (*ibid.*: 61 – 62) that dominance places on the form and content of discourse, as well as the relationships and identities performed and performing them, have long term repercussions on social ideologies and knowledges. For one thing, they serve to limit the subject positions that POC are allowed to occupy. Dominant discourses on race generate fear on the part of POC, of being seen as 'a bad minority' (Post I, 2013) – a 'good' minority would not think to complain, and resistance is seen as overstepping the bounds that are acceptable for those in minority positions. The use of socially undesirable terms like 'no sense of humour', 'too sensitive', 'so annoying' and 'uptight' (*ibid.*) to describe those POC who do speak out, act as a deterrent to future action, while also working to cast doubt on their protests. Ridicule for political correctness (Williams, 1995) is nothing new, and helps to police responses by making it easier to go with the flow rather than risk being ostracized. As noted by one poster, 'What I meant when I said "I don't mind": I *don't want to be laughed at*.' (*ibid.*, emphasis added). Even when instances of racial microaggression lead to discomfort, the desire to fit in and the fear of repercussions from upsetting the status quo can override any desire to resist, and lead them to suppress or ignore their sense of unease. The use of 'become desensitized' and 'made yourself blind' (*ibid.*) highlights the conscious efforts made not to acknowledge the problem, until there is no longer awareness that there is any need to do so.

The subtle nature of racial microaggressions also affects the recognition of these episodes as negative and requiring counter-action, complicating the learning of resistance. The construction of acts of racism as 'extraordinary' events within dominant discourses works against the calling-out of microaggressive actions as clearly racist. Claims like '*It's just a joke*' (*ibid.*) and 'All I wanted to do was touch her hair… trying to be *nice*' (Post E, 2012, emphasis

added) on the part of perpetrators work to discursively normalize microaggressive behaviour, and show how the incidents appear harmless and innocuous from the side of the perpetrators. Describing such behaviour as a mere bit of 'fun' or an apparently 'nice' gesture on their part, and always with no racist feelings intended, can also work to make it more difficult for POC to see the racist content implied in these actions. Paralleling Kissling's (1991) work on the street harassment of women, it becomes necessary for those subject to microaggressive behaviour to allow themselves to learn to read and mentally separate what is problematic from what is not before responding, as even ostensibly 'complimentary' remarks often encourage essentialism.

Furthermore, the recognition of microaggressions as racism is continually challenged by the refusal of perpetrators to take it and victims' feelings seriously. Foucault asserted that 'Once certain "intolerables" are revealed… a struggle has been created' (Pickett, 1996: 454), but within an entrenched hegemonic discourse, these revelations are all too often obscured once more, through denials and the imposition of competing interpretations. Statements made by perpetrators like 'What's the big deal… She should be happy I asked to touch her hair' (Post E, 2012) serve to negate the anger and offense communicated by POC. Any upset feelings on the part of POC are constructed as irrational since the incident is ultimately inconsequential to the perpetrator, and even more unreasonable when contrasted with what they considered ought to have been the appropriate response.

The (In)Ability to Resist Across Physical and Online Spaces

Construing microaggressive episodes as 'attack(s)' (Post G, 2013) brings in further elements of violence to the discursive understanding of microaggressions, and underscores the antagonistic features of such affronts. Little about an 'attack' would be seen as harmless, and the use of this term sets itself in opposition to the view that microaggressions are not hurtful. The event is no longer innocuous and easily ignorable ('micro'), but a decidedly hostile social confrontation. In certain posts, such a construct has been used concomitantly with vocabulary evoking battle to describe resisters and acts of resistance: resisters require 'strength' and 'courage' (Post I, 2013) in order to 'fight back' (Post G, 2013). It is within this idea of micro-aggressive meetings as combative that Post I (2013) employs a 'strong'-'weak' binary to differentiate between those who choose to resist at their own social peril and those who stay silent, or even concede to the continued perpetration of microaggressions, out of fear ('I want to laugh with you; I don't want to be laughed at'). In this particular subjective

position, whether resistance occurs or not, is entirely down to agency, and depends on the strength of the individual victim.

Similarly, implying that the ability to resist is an individual virtue is Post F (2014), which constructs the male resister as a vigilante champion of the oppressed, coming to the rescue of his wife and the female poster by putting the White male aggressor in his place. Describing the resister as a 'legend' (Post F, 2014) tellingly gives all the credit to the individual who acted. The further use of dramatic statements like 'I will always love that stranger' (*ibid.*) acts as a means of persuading the reader of the significance of the heroics performed – great enough to warrant remembering for 'always'. The actions taken by this man in confronting the aggressor were constructed as brave and commendable for sure, but unconsciously, the discourse about the event also point to it being exceptional in more ways than one. In stating 'IT WAS THE *MOST* BEAUTIFUL AND PROFOUND THING IVE (sic) *SEEN IN MY LIFE*' (*ibid.*, emphasis added), the hyperbole is indicative of just how uncommon such instances of successful resistance are in real life.

While acts of resistance are quite straightforwardly seen as a 'good' step to take, discourses of silence are more complex. In Post I (2013), silence is associated with an understanding of 'passiveness, impotence' (Ephratt, 2008: 1910), and the same negative features are to be found in those who enable perpetrators to continue their victimization of others through their tacit acceptance. Those who say 'I don't mind' (Post I, 2013) and have internalized oppressive hegemonic discourses are even more complicit in the persistence of microaggressions ('you will be championed as a representative of an entire race… Your words… will be used as an example, to put down countless others'), contributing almost actively to the harm felt and potentially felt by those they are ostensibly close to – family, friends, lovers. Interestingly though, across the rest of the diverse spectrum of other localized discourses of resistance, quite a number of posts recounting microaggressive incidents involve some form of real-life silence from the victims. Even when unable to fight back in that space though, not once do any of these texts construct the incident as happening through some fault of their own. Rather, they focus on discrediting the attacks and/or their attackers, while pointing to the innocence of the victims, and the sense of injustice felt, anchored by this real-life silence.

One form of silence is as the result of being involuntarily rendered unable to react ('Stunned silence' Post B 2013; 'Made me feel stunned' Post C, 2014), the shock from the microaggressive incident leaving the victim frozen, hard pressed to find the words to express themselves. Other posts also point to additional negative emotions at play as a result of

microaggressions, rendering the victims temporarily incapable of responding ('angry, hurt' Post C, 2014; 'speechless with anger' Post E, 2012). Here it is neither passiveness nor acceptance precipitating silence, but a fury or hurt so overwhelming no words can express it. Silence can also be a learned response, but one that is compelled through the reinforcement of negative experiences. Post H discusses the poster's childhood experiences, where her silence was the result of multiple factors all working to negate her ability and desire to resist through speaking out. What desire there was for resistance was affected by feelings of low self-worth resulting from compound microaggressive events, leading to the idea that any kind of attention was 'bad and humiliating and hurtful' (Post H, 2014). The reflection 'i was sure no one would care' (*ibid.*) additionally underscores the feeling that resistance was pointless and futile, because the issue did not warrant attention. The ability to resist is also affected when an adequate means of expressing an understanding of the issue is lacking, both on the part of the victim, as well as potential allies: 'i couldn't express what (the aggressors) were doing to me and (adults) couldn't understand me' (*ibid.*).

Whether silence or resistance occurs is therefore understood not just a matter of personal agency, but is also in part determined by where the microaggressive event happens, as well as the impact of existing hegemonic discourses on the performance of social relations. The nature and form of discourse are shaped by social conditions (Fairclough, 2001: 16), with contexts affecting power relations at play. Of the microaggressive incidents that occurred in a place of employment ('At work' (Post C, 2014); 'at headquarters in Washington, D.C.' (Post A, 2014), education ('primary school' Post H, 2014) or both ('conducting an observation at a high school' Post B, 2014)), most of them ended with silence on the part of the victim. As Kendall and Tannen have noted, school or work settings affect the type of discourses that can be used through a variety of situational constraints that limit the type of interactions deemed appropriate (1997: 81), while peer pressure and socialization can further circumscribe speech. Given the discursive privileges persistent in contemporary constructions of race, pointing out racism is made even more difficult when the action of speaking out against racism is itself construed as an aggressive, even racist act (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). In one post, verbal resistance is met by the perpetrator calling the resister 'racist' (Post G, 2013). Given the systemic barriers to resistance that promote silent and inaction, real-life acts of resistance cannot be taken for granted.

Online, acts of resistance through the posting of counter-narratives appear more widespread. While there are arguably no truly 'safe' spaces online for POC given the prevalence of racism on the Internet, the same anonymity or pseudo anonymity provided by the structure of the

Internet that provides a layer of protection for those who engage in racist discourse, also works for victims of racism, allowing them to speak out and vindicate their positions, with less fear than they would in real life. For all its ills, the Internet is still 'considerably less prejudiced in favour of elites than traditional print media' (Mautner, 2005: 816), providing a more hospitable environment for POC to communicate opposition to the pervasive and powerful influence of dominant racial discourse through mediated self-representations. Real-life 'safe spaces' for the discussion of racism within educational contexts have also been criticized for ironically being places where the safety of white individuals from 'judgment, alienation, isolation, and intimidation' has been prioritized over that of POC (Woolley, 2013: 293; Leonardo and Porter, 2010: 147), forcing POC to create 'safe' spaces of expression for themselves.

The Internet has provided a platform for this, serving as a means of reaching out to a wider audience, and forming alternative, complementary networks of support. The setting-up of Tumblr pages dedicated to highlighting experiences of racism (See Microaggressions, Angry Asian Girls United and This is White Privilege among others), as well as the generation of networks of commonality through the usage of similar tags like 'casual racism', 'microaggression' and 'white privilege', are akin to the real life 'counter-spaces' studied by Solórzano *et al.*, created by POC to prioritize their own experiences when no one else will, where 'deficit notions of people of colour can be challenged and where a positive… racial climate can be established' (2000: 70).

Competing Constructions of 'Them' and Us

Dominant racial discourses have been constructed based on differences within oppositional binaries, and 'these concepts invariably imply relationships of superiority and inferiority, hierarchical bonds that mesh with political economies of race, gender and class oppressions' (Collins, 2000: 78), resulting in systemic exclusion and inequity. The experiences of each victim may differ, as might the specific historical contexts surrounding their individual discourses of oppression and resistance, but the heart of the challenge remains the same across the board: contesting a wider historic construction of race that has not been self-produced, through invoking the right to speak on their own behalf. The mediated self-representations of POC relating to discourse on microaggression are necessarily rendered specific and highly politicized in order to make statements in a public dialogue about race. Using their experiential authority as POC to speak against the white gaze and contest politics of representation on the Internet (Leung, 2005: 166), alternative ways of seeing and

mobilizing race and ethnicity have been constructed that are far less readily available on other media platforms (*ibid.*: 167). Two main challenges have been identified, against dominant constructions of naming and belonging.

Naming practices map delineations, marking out categories of distinction and relations of power differentials. Through interpellation (Althusser, 1971), the application of certain expressions ideologically interpret individuals as particular subjects, forcibly representing them through historically-charged terms and serving as conduits for hegemonic power and the reproduction of ideology. The use of 'bitchy black women' (Post E, 2012) by the white microaggressor to describe the poster and others like her plays on a 'prevalent racist American stereotype that black women are bitches' (*ibid.*), pre-dated by various historical controlling narratives of the enslaved Black woman as the biggest Other in US society (Collins, 2000: 79 – 83). All these work to assault black womanhood (hooks, 1992: 120), devaluing their status in society and coding them as negative and marginal. In a similar vein, using 'CHING' and 'CHONG' to identify East Asian customers on a receipt, not only treats Asian bodies as interchangeable, but is also a performance of a historical discourse of blatantly marking them as foreign and decidedly other through the demeaning of Asian language (Ono and Pham, 2009: 104).

Self-representations are aimed at combating these discourses. By taking the power of naming for themselves, POC can determine their own representational codes. The use of a first person narrative in Post E (2014) serves a persuasive and ideological function through inviting the reader to look at the situation from her own perspective, constructing herself as a considered person rather than an irrational 'bitchy black woman'. By elucidating the manner from her point of view and clearly stating her own preferences and justifications for her actions ('I don't really like people touching my hair, period. I don't care who you are'), her assertions of personhood and its accompanying implications of autonomy over her own self are underscored. In the case of the denigrated customers, stating that using 'ignorant language' to 'describe people is UNACCEPTABLE' (Post D, 2012) undermines the racist stereotype on two counts – calling it out as problematic, undesirable and highly objectionable, while also appealing to a universal 'personhood' to deny its denigrating effects.

Such interpellations can also drive behaviours that are able to communicate objectifying and dehumanizing messages, which are correspondingly disputed. In attempting to touch the hair of the author of Post E and feeling offended when denied, the perpetrator unconsciously communicated ideas of ownership and superiority over the author in assuming she had the

right to access the body of the author as she wished. The author further historicized the discourse, comparing it to a slave-owning 'missus' saying 'Isn't our coloured woman's hair cute?' (Post E, 2012). Later, stating that the author was 'not her dog!', and ought not to be treated as such, highlights the sheer dehumanizing nature of the episode even as its claims are contested. That the words were spoken by children of the victim is all the more significant as it insinuates how young children of colour are able to better understand basic principles of humanity and see what is wrong with existing hegemonic discourse and practice better than White adults can. Calling someone your 'favourite Asian' (Post J, 2013) is problematically objectifying as well, given the way 'Asian-ness' has been constructed in dominant ideology reproduced by the mass media: 'Asian' is seen as a mass-consumer product ('a variety of handbag', 'bubble tea', 'that Buddha keychain you bought in Chinatown'), an unusual hankering for plastic surgery ('double eyelids and aegyo-sal'[2]), selectively sexualized or desexualized bodies ('geishas', 'seductive women and androgynous men') and a highly limited way of viewing the Asian continent ('Harajuku and Seoul'). Contesting these representations with a self-understanding of 'Asian' that is far more complex and diverse shows how shallow and faulty dominant understandings are.

Dominant impositions of Otherness come into play in the politics of belonging as well, excluding those not discursively understood as part of 'us', even if these ideologies are self-contradictory. The sheer irony of the construction of 'Others' as those coming into the country to take jobs away from 'real Americans' by the microaggressive perpetrator in Post C (2014) is made apparent when it turns out the poster is Native American. The persistence of hegemonic discourses even in the face of confronting its own fallacies cannot be underestimated though. Even when the truth is revealed of which 'something' the poster happened to be, the perpetrator continued to not see her as a 'real' American, just extending the bounds of their conception of Otherness to include those that 'didn't come here' as well (*ibid*.). At times, belonging with the dominant group is constructed as contingent on a degree of identity erasure and invisibility. The ethnic identity (Last name 'Barajas') of the author of Post B (2014) is constructed as not worth remembering ('Ahh, that's why I forgot'), and he is not really made 'welcome', until a key part of his self is denied in favour of a forcibly imposed bland, white-washed identity ('Class, he said Smith right? Please welcome Mr. Smith'). In both cases, the entire counter-narrative serves as a means of resistance through exposing the

[2] "Eye-smiles", the procedure to create a certain type of puffy eye bags that will allegedly make the person undergoing surgery look younger and happier

callous disregard those comfortably rooted in the privilege of the dominance discourse have for the feelings of the oppressed.

Resistance discourses on Tumblr challenge the subjugated place POC hold in dominant binaries, with more affirming representations of their individual and collective selves, contesting histories of marginalization and exclusion, but whether these oppositional self-constructions of identity can successfully become the new normal still remains to be seen.

Burden of Resistance, Compelled to Resist

For all that the act of resistance has been celebrated, it has also been discursively constructed as being an encumbrance to perform. Though they are the victims, the onus remains on POC to have to explain themselves to perpetrators of microaggressions. 'I felt irritated at having to explain that yes, I am a REAL programmer' (Post A, 2014) very simply indicates the frustration felt at having to prove what should be patently obvious to a perpetrator who didn't see it because of held assumptions about the capability and worth of the Black, female poster. 'She wanted to objectify me and have me go along with her request, a request that smacked of racial superiority and privilege. But when I didn't like it, I became (sic) the problem' (Post E, 2012) further showcases how the problem is also a structural one rather than a necessarily individual pathology by voicing the wider problem of POC being seen as creating problems through the indication of their discomfort in a given racist scenario, when the White perpetrator believes everything to be fine (Dericotte, 1997: 146). With participation in public dialogues of race leaving POC 'vulnerable to assault on many fronts' (Leonardo and Porter, 2010: 140), fighting the same fight over and over again is akin to being in the trenches. That POC repeatedly find themselves trapped in the position of facing racial microaggressions and having to defend themselves against it is construed as a regrettable thing: '*sadly*, I'm sure this will not be the last time I have to say, no, you can't touch my hair' (Post E, 2012, emphasis added). Having to take on the burden of proof not just against one particular individual, but multiple individuals across time all steeped in a hegemonic discourse that has prejudiced itself against the victim, is not a desirable task.

But though resistance is not understood as simple or easy, the discourse also strongly points to it being a necessary act. The practice of resistance, whether through growing the body of counter-discourse online or speaking out offline, is an active attempt at changing social reality. Although each discrete act may seem lost amidst a wider structure of systemic inequality, they remain 'conducive to critical change because countering everyday racism is

contesting the racial inequalities at large' (Essed, 2002: 214). Reasons are clearly provided to justify just why resistance is so important – the validation of resistance is an explicit exercise rather than a subtle one. They identify three main issues that need addressing: the self-autonomy and rights of the individual of colour, the need to protect a wider community of POC, as well as continued dissatisfaction with existing relations of dominance and subjugation embodied by white micro-aggressors. At the individual level, assertions of self-ownership are used in contrast with experiences where this self-autonomy is threatened ('this is my body' Post E, 2012). At the same time, the discourse also includes clear rejections of implicit White claims to ownership over the coloured body: 'I am not YOUR property', 'We are not yours… We are not your anything' (Post J, 2013). All these work to drive resistant actions, through playing up the constant threat of losing this claim over the self. The use of simple language in highlighting the necessity to act, the lack of special jargon that might make the issue difficult to understand, and the use of universalizing language ('we', 'my'), all serve to indicate that there should not be any form of exclusivity to action.

An understanding of how racism affects not just individuals but communities serves as further motivation for the exercising of resistance. '[My] body extends out into the bodies of everyone in the world who looks like me… protecting myself is never enough' (Post G, 2013) shows an awareness of damaging cultural stereotypes potentially being applied to any and all bodies of colour if not stopped. Not only is there a need to protect the self so the same ideologies do not affect other minorities, there is also the need to protect other minorities to hopefully secure the self against similar microaggressions in the future. Post G (2013) goes further in justifying this need to resist ('That's why I make it my business to confront people doing that shit') for the community's sake, through an emotional appeal to the reader. 'I thought of the times I saw people treat my mom the same way' places a close familial figure in the position of the victim, and brings the wider body of POC into a closer relationship with the individual by conflating them with their own loved ones, making it all the more vital for them to resist. The victim is no longer a stranger but akin to the reader's own mother, making resistance their 'business'.

Recalling also 'the ways people treated me when I was just a helpless Asian kid' highlights those who are in positions of greater weakness than the self, and the need to protect them. Placing the vulnerable younger self in that position of victimhood encourages the reader to empathize with that position, thereby also inspiring them to act. The need to resist lastly points directly at the heart of the issue, the privileged discursive position held by White people within society. Their continued ability to term POC's minority identities a 'something'

(Post C, 2014), and casually objectify and use dehumanizing language that denigrates the existence of POC, stems from the internalization and non-questioning of racist hegemonic discourses. Post G states 'it's necessary to point out their whiteness, because white people believe they can be race-less when it comes to facing the repercussions of their assholery, meanwhile depending on and emboldening their sense of white supremacy when attacking people of colour'. Uncovering the power relations inherent in the naturalized position of racelessness of White people to show the power and privilege ('white supremacy') underpinning it is an essential step that must be taken, in order to shake the foundations of dominant discourse.

CONCLUSION

On a whole, the discourses of resistance available on Tumblr express a desire for respect, an end to the everyday indignities of racial microaggressions, and a more inclusionary vision of 'universalist' thinking, which current dominant discourses have barred them from. Much like the hegemonic processes they oppose, resistance is a highly complex and diverse practice, speaking against contemporary constructions of racist ideology from different levels in a way that is dependent on both individual and social context factors. Though predominant ideas of race may have come to be seen as worthless and even poisonous to society (Gilroy, 2000), resistance discourses are still strongly structured around racial terminology as racial identities remain a 'powerful way of organizing community as a strategy of resistance' (Caliendo and McIlwain, 2011: 101). What is different, however, is their competing construction of racial identity, which is opposed to the negative and shallow stereotypes imposed upon them by dominant discourse.

While the Internet has been able to accommodate a more diverse range of racial and ethnic representations than mainstream media, the reproduction and enactment of dominant social power on a daily basis has forced current conceptualizations of resistance against microaggression to continue orientating itself around existing hegemonic representational practices. Though they have similar concerns, specific individual, social and historical contexts place different POC in various positions across the wide network of power, and it is perhaps this that has rendered a vast majority of resistance discourses to express mainly individual experiences, rather than engage in the construction of a community response. Rather than speaking to each other, resistance discourses still speak on a whole to their

individual situations, and to the particular dominant discourses that have directly affected them. At the very most they mention resistance at the community level, but community responses are still lacking. Their counter-hegemonic arguments mainly seek to make modifications to specific current understandings rather than constructing an entirely new way for all. Resistance still takes the form of constructing binary oppositions, albeit with a different orientation to existing hegemony.

Chester Pierce expressed a sincere hope over four decades ago that 'the day is not far remote when every black child will recognize and defend promptly and adequately against every offensive microaggression' (1970: 280). Even to this day, the agonism between opposing discourses on race has yet to reach a point where resistance discourses occupy anything more than a marginal space. While the collection of discourses online provides a potential space in which POC can learn from each other's experiences and support each other in their resistance efforts, the fact remains that a level of privilege is still needed to even be able to access these resources. Still, there is a renewed hope that the Internet is a platform that can reach a far wider audience than before. As more POC learn about the necessity of resistance and equip themselves and each other with ways and means of performing resistance identities, the day Pierce longed for will hopefully arrive.

This study has contributed to existing work by expanding upon the empirical pool in which research on microaggressions can be done, showing how the Internet now acts as a repository for counter-narratives that have hitherto not been so widely available for study in their predominantly verbal format. The study undertaken shows but a slice of the multitude of subjugated discourses available online, and in covering posts only between 2011 and 2014, captures only a moment in time. With the ever-changing nature of discourses, it will be interesting to note how discourses have evolved over time. In addition, this study has purposely shown only one particular subjective viewpoint in order to provide a platform that underprivileged discourses have traditionally lacked. To that end, in the future, it would be worthwhile to track threads of discourse rather than individual posts, to see how various Internet users react to or even reconstruct a certain discourse over time and based on their own positionality within structures of social power. This would perhaps better showcase the social and contested nature of discourse and place discursive acts of resistance within a wider context.

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