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This study describes a survey conducted with undergraduates, graduates, and alumni of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill during the Spring semester of 2010. The study investigates race-based cyber-hate within online social networking sites with a particular focus on that of online social networks that allow anonymity from its users.

The study examines the beliefs and experiences of the respondents as it relates to racism within American society as a whole as well as within online social networking sites. While 33.45% of the respondents reported that they have been exposed to racism of some sort on online networks, the percentage of minorities who responded was much higher.

Headings:

Anonymity

Cyber-hate

Internet Content Regulation

Online Social Networks

Privacy

Racism

THE FUTURE OF RACISM: A LOOK INTO THE WORLD OF ANONYMOUS
ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

by
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of the School of Information and Library Science
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Approved by

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Introduction

If an individual were to briefly look into the annals of history it would be difficult to find a time period in which race relations were not a concern. More specifically, it would be difficult to find a time period in which various racial groups were not entrenched in bickering in which words of hate, torment, and strife were being expressed towards one another. As societies have slowly turned the pages in the history book of time, we have slowly progressed towards a generation in which it would appear that hatred between racial groups has started to decline. In the aforementioned sentence it is important to highlight the words "it would appear" -- although the United States has elected its first African American president (which many would see as a progression in race relations), hatred and racism continue to be an issue that societies have chosen to ignore on perhaps the most influential tool of communication today, the internet. Race-based cyber-hate is on the rise particularly within online social networking sites (Solomon 2009). . While the internet has afforded individuals to communicate across geographical boundaries, the internet has also allowed for the transmission and dispersal of racist messages. Anonymity on social networking sites, such as College Anonymous Confession Board (www.collegeacb.com) and Juicy Campus (no longer available on the internet), have provided a means for the dissemination of messages that promote racism

which individuals may not have the insolence to express within their face-to-face interactions. In saying this, I believe that requiring users to log into online social networking sites with an identifiable user-id will reduce race-based cyber-hate within these sites. Furthermore, I believe that some regulation of internet content can reduce the breeding grounds for which racism is becoming expressed in modern society.

<div align="center">**Literature Review**</div>

Anonymity vs. Privacy

If I were in grade school and I were asked to think of a synonym for the word private, anonymous would have been one of the first words that would have come to mind. Today, that is not necessarily the case. However, I believe that a lot of individuals hold the same idea that I held while I was in grade school. While on the surface this may not appear to be important, if you were to dig a little bit deeper and focus on the time period in which we live, it would be a lot easier to determine that the words private and anonymous are in fact not synonymous. This is especially the case when discussing the internet. Based on statistics compiled by Internet World Stats group, there are approximately 1.75 billion internet users around the world which is a 380.3% increase in internet users since the year of 2000 (Internet World Stats). The large percentage of growth for internet users clearly illustrates that more and more people are moving towards using a resource that makes communication easier. However, an important question to ask is "Do internet users equate anonymity with privacy?" I believe that a large percentage of the 1.75 billion internet users are led to believe that private and anonymous are the same which is not the case on the internet. Privacy as defined by the Oxford Online English Dictionary is described as being "a state in which one is not

observed or disturbed by others." Alternatively, the Oxford Online English Dictionary defines anonymous as being "not identified by name; or being of an unknown identity." Based on these two definitions it is somewhat easy to see that privacy is a greater degree of anonymity. In acknowledging the aforementioned statement, an individual can be anonymous in a setting, but it does not necessarily mean that the individual has privacy. In a world that it is becoming more and more internet literate, it is important to recognize that privacy and anonymity are not the same thing.

An Overarching History of Online Social Networks

One of the places in which the line between anonymity and privacy is often blurred is within the scope of online social networking sites. As defined by Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison, an online social network is a web-based service that allows individuals to accomplish the following three goals:

> (1) Construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system.
> (2) Articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection.
> (3) View and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (Boyd 211)

Online social networking sites have been slowly growing in their popularity as more and more users continue to connect to the internet. Web technologies of this nature inherently are aimed at allowing users to communicate with one another in some form or fashion. Oftentimes, online social networking sites allow users to connect and communicate with individuals who are complete strangers. The first online social networking site to accomplish this goal was developed in 1985 by Stewart Brand and Larry Brilliant when they created a website known as "The Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link" or "The WELL" as it is more commonly known. At the time, Brand and Brilliant created

The WELL as a means to allow "dialog between the fiercely independent writers and readers of the Whole Earth Review" (Learn about the WELL). While The Well was not popular among many internet users, other social networking sites would eventually emerge on the internet that would have millions of users.

SixDegrees.com is credited by Boyd and Ellison as being the first major online social networking site when it launched in 1997 (Boyd 214). This website "promoted itself as a tool to help people connect with and send messages to others" (Boyd 214). Other individuals began to take notice of SixDegrees' popularity and in the early 2000s the online social networking fad hit its stride as dozens of websites were operating as online social networking communities. During this stretch of social networking growth, it was not uncommon to see one website take over in terms of popularity as another website ceased to exist. Many of the social networking sites ceased to exist due to the inability to keep their users happy. One of the exceptions to the previous statement is that of Friendster which was launched in 2002 to allow individuals that were "friends-of-friends to meet" (Boyd 215). This website was largely popular due to the fact that it allowed individuals to connect with one another based on the assumption that users would have more in common since they were friends-of-friends. Nonetheless, Friendster would reach its demise to the fact that its "servers and databases were ill-equipped to handle its rapid growth" (Boyd 215). Today, Friendster continues to exist, but has lost its momentum in gaining the interest of newcomers to the online social networking phenomenon. From this point forward, a variety of online social networking sites were established with "true communities" in mind. Examples of these types of sites include AsianAvenue, Migente, BlackPlanet, MySpace, Facebook, and Juicy Campus. Sites that

emphasized the concept of true communities have since taken rise over websites that simply allow for communication between friends. Online social networking sites such as the aforementioned boast memberships that exceed over 100 million users and that number continues to expand each and every day.

Cyber-Hate

Geographic barriers continue to fall due to the invention of the internet, however it appears as if there is a wedge being driven between communication and understanding between users on the internet. Although we have made great strides as a country and as a world in building relationships between people of various religions, sexual orientations, and racial backgrounds in the physical world, hatred between individuals is on the rise within the internet. Messages of hate that are transmitted via the internet have been commonly defined as "cyber-hate." According to Chip Berlet's article entitled "When Hate Went Online," the first message of cyber-hate occurred on the internet in 1984 when a "small computer bulletin board system (BBS) carried online articles denouncing Jews and Blacks" (pg. 1). Berlet later went on to say that during this time period "few people noticed" (pg. 1). However, 25 years later since the first reported cyber-hate message was transmitted, people have begun to take notice of hate speech and its transmission on the web.

Theresa Howard reports in her USA Today article "Online Hate Speech: Difficult to Police…and Define" (2009) that "the Anti-Defamation League, which monitors hate speech on the Web, says complaints are up this year more than 200% through July, to 1,512 complaints." Additionally, a research study conducted by the Simon Wiesenthal Center illustrates that "there was only one hate Web site in 1995, but more than 10,000

exist today" (Solomon 2009). Statistics of this magnitude strongly suggest that hate

speech on the internet is growing at an alarming rate and it illustrates that something

needs to be done to curtail the rise in hate speech as more people gain access to the

internet. One of the reasons why cyber-hate is so rampant today is that the internet is a

communication avenue that allows for the easy transmission of its message with the press

of a button to anyone willing to listen. Furthermore, rather than having to print

pamphlets and brochures in order to recruit members, the internet allows for the

transmission and dispersal of messages at a much cheaper cost. According to a 2005

article by Adams and Roscigno:

> The Internet represents one of the newest and more easily accessible media
> outlets, where websites can act as an introduction to a particular group, in addition
> to providing legitimacy and access to extensive resources for those already
> involved. The Internet itself, along with various chat rooms, bulletin boards, and
> E-mail distribution lists, fosters a sense of community by providing "contact
> between previously disconnected people" who often share similar interests, while
> incurring few social costs. (8)

The quote above is just one of many examples of how and why the internet has been

turned to as a means to disseminate propaganda that maintains hatred towards an

individual or racial group. As stated by Indhu Rajagopal and Nis Bojin "organizations or

individuals who sponsor these sites that contain racists' images and narratives, may also

contribute to the legitimacy of racist causes, and facilitate public consumption."

Rajagopal and Bojin's statement acknowledges the idea that a person that does not

typically have access to blatantly racist propaganda in their physical world, can easily

access such information by a simple search on the internet.

　　"The Internet reaches into places where hate groups have never gone before:

homes, offices, schools. Attractive Web sites can drape fringe ideas with a certain

respectability. The medium is particularly well suited for reaching angry social outcasts"
(Rajagopal). Unlike its predecessors in the communication industry such as television,
and newspapers; the internet allows anyone with a minimum amount of skill and know-
how to create content that can be used to appeal to a wide audience. This is oftentimes
the case when referring to race-based cyber-hate. Some online social networking sites,
such as MySpace or Facebook, typically allow users an easier means of creating content
that is racist in nature because most of these sites have a template in place that does not
require a user to have knowledge of HTML in order to display information. Additionally,
online social networks allows users to take on alternate identities than the identities they
portray to the people they meet in their face-to-face interactions.

Anonymous Online Social Networks

In taking the idea of users being able to create an alternate identity one step
further, there are online social networking sites that allow users to post messages and
other information "anonymously." Drawing on my earlier discussion of anonymity
versus privacy on the internet, we have seen that an individual can be anonymous without
being private. Although a user may post a message to a site anonymously, it does not
mean that the message posted is being viewed in private. However, since the message is
not being viewed in private and the message is "anonymous," a user is able to freely
express himself or herself without the repercussions of being reprimanded for his
sentiments in the way that he would be in public. Anonymous online social networking
sites differ from typical online social networking sites in that they allow users of their
web services to post messages under a veil of invisibility such that the public cannot trace
or determine who they are. For the sake of this research, I have operationally defined the

word "anonymous" as meaning to have no visible cues as to the person's physical identity." For an individual that is looking for a means to promote his hatred of an individual, not only can he post the information online, he also has the ability to do so anonymously.

One of the first anonymous online social networking sites that come to mind is that of Juicy Campus. Juicy Campus was created by a Duke University alumnus in August of 2007 as a means to allow its users to post the "juiciest campus gossip." The website slowly grew from a user base of 59 college and university campuses to over 500 campuses within a five month time period ranging from May to October of 2008. Although the website contained a terms of use agreement that stated that users "agree not to post anything "unlawful, threatening, abusive, tortuous, defamatory, obscene, libelous, or invasive of another's privacy," (Morgan 2008) users continued to post information that was oftentimes racially abusive. Matt Ivester, the creator of Juicy Campus, even posted a note on his blog that stated "hate isn't juicy" although he did nothing to curtail the instances for which race-based cyber-hate was used on the website that he had created (Morgan 2008). One such discussion board that I came across maintained the following thread title "Sub-Human Nigger scum senselessly murders UNC Student President, Eve Carson." The thread had generated more than 20 responses within a couple of hours of its original post. The original post sparked a plethora of racist comments towards people of varying racial groups. One of the responses to the original post contained the following message: "sub-human white trash posts about UNC murder on JuicyCampus.com ... see above for details." Messages as illustrated above were just one of the many threads that contained race-based cyber-hate messages within the constructs

of the Juicy Campus site. In addition to the racially based messages of cyber-hate, the

website was criticized on several occasions for its lack of governance when it came to

cases of libel, slander, and defamation. High Point University and Tennessee State

University went as far as blocking the site so that it could not be accessed from within its

networks (Nelson 2008). Juicy Campus founder Matt Ivester, attempted to sue Tennessee

State University on the grounds that it violated its students constitutional right to the

freedom of speech as guaranteed by the first amendment. Amid all of the turmoil that it

caused, Juicy Campus finally closed its website on February 5, 2009. Ivester released the

following statement:

> In these historically difficult economic times, online ad revenue has plummeted
> and venture capital funding has dissolved. JuicyCampus' exponential growth
> outpaced our ability to muster the resources needed to survive this economic
> downturn, and as a result, we are closing down the site as of Feb. 5, 2009 (Juicy
> Campus).

In my opinion, Juicy Campus' venture capital began to disappear due to the fact that

investors did not want to be involved with a website that bred racism and hatred towards

individuals.

Just when it appeared that a victory had been claimed by those abused by the

website of Juicy Campus, another anonymous online social networking site took its place

as being the primary site for college gossip, racial hatred, and defamatory comments. On

the very day that Juicy Campus ceased its operations, the College Anonymous

Confession Board sprung up to revive the hopes of the individuals that were looking for a

means to disseminate their messages of race based cyber-hate. In a February 5th, 2009

press release, the developers of the site, Andrew Mann and Aaron Larner, made the

following statements:

> The Anonymous Confession Board, or the ACB, is quickly becoming the central hub of college campuses around the country, giving students the freedom to voice their opinions and ask questions about any facet of college life. (CollegeACB)

Additionally, the developers stated that:

> The College ACB or College Anonymous Confession Board seeks to give students a place to vent, rant, and talk to college peers in an environment free from social constraints and about subjects that might otherwise be taboo. (CollegeACB).

Based on the two previous quotes provided by the site, it is apparent that the developers were trying to leech onto the success of anonymous message threads that was developed by Juicy Campus. Furthermore, it is apparent that the site hopes to continue to provide an area were individuals are not restricted by their right to the freedom of speech. In a similar manner to that of Juicy Campus, it did not take long before race-based messages of cyber-hate began to appear on the site. A brief search of the site yielded 41 results in which the word "nigger" had been used within the site's discussion board. An additional search of the word "Jew" yielded results with messages such as "How do you fit 100 dead babies into a car. Ten in the trunk, ten in the back seat, and the rest in the ash tray." Messages of the aforementioned nature are blatantly disrespectful toward individuals that are of Jewish descent, yet the message has been on the site for over a month now. Although the site claims that it will not tolerate hatred on its site in the way that Juicy Campus did, the site administrators seem to be doing very little to restrict the messages of racism that it is allowing to be displayed on its site.

As more and more internet users catch onto the anonymous online social networking phenomenon, I cannot help but wonder will sites of this nature be the breeding grounds for the future of racism on the internet. While we have made great

advancements in dealing with issues of racism in our physical world, it appears that legislation is slow to catch up with the ever-growing and always changing landscape of the internet. The cloak of anonymity that technology now allows internet users to maintain has largely been hidden by a lack of government intervention. In 1963, the United States Supreme Court handed down legislation that ended the legalized discrimination and racism; yet 27 years after the greatest communication tool, the internet, was invented there still remains to be little legislation in place to aid in the fight against racism and cyber-hate.

Pros of Regulating Internet Content

Part of the problem in regulating internet content is that we have yet as a society to determine who will be responsible for the regulation of information that is made available on the web. Another part of the problem is that since the internet spans across a plethora of countries, it is difficult to regulate content on the internet because every country would more than likely have a different set of guidelines for the regulation of the content produced within its borders. Even with the two previously mentioned statements being acknowledged, I think that there can be some good from regulating internet content. John Weckert states in his article "What is so Bad about Internet Content Regulation?," that "As activities shift away from other media and to the Internet, if there is no regulation of the Internet, then there is a diminishing of regulation" (105). In saying this, Weckert is alluding to the idea that if we cannot regulate what is accessible on the internet, then who are we as a people to decide what should or should not be regulated in other forms of media such as the television, radio, or printed articles. In my opinion, it is impossible to maintain regulations for one form of communication without

regulating all forms of communication. For instance many countries contain regulations against Adolf Hitler's autobiography <u>Mein Kempf</u>, yet if an individual looked hard enough, I am certain that the content of the book can be found online. In saying this, it is evident that one form of regulation without the other form of regulation serves no real purpose. As more and more users continue to swarm to the internet, there will be less need for regulation in the future if we do not begin to regulate the internet now. I realize that it is difficult to regulate content on the internet; however, it is even more difficult to just sit around and watch as hate and racism is spread on one of the world's most popular forms of communication. The longer that we idly sit around without creating effective alternatives, the larger the monster becomes that may one day bring a halt to the internet.

The regulation of the World Wide Web would reduce the amount of hatred that is allowed to circulate online. As illustrated earlier by the statistics provided by the Simon Wiesenthal Center if we continue to allow individuals to have free reign on the internet, then websites that promote hate will only continue to grow. We have seen what doing nothing does as the Simon Wiesenthal Center acknowledges that in 1995 there were was only one identified hate site on the web, but 14 years later there are more than 10,000 sites dedicated to hatred of some form or fashion towards individuals (Solomon 2009).

There are already laws that state that libel and slander are illegal in printed matter, yet those same laws are loosely tied to content on the internet. For instance, in the 2004 court case of Doe v. Cahill, the Supreme Court adopted a standard "that appropriately balances one person's right to speak anonymously against another person's right to protect his reputation" (Internet Cases). In this court case a councilman from Delaware, named Patrick Cahill, noticed that there were rumors being circulated about him on a

message board that he deemed to be detrimental to his reputation. The messages on the site were posted by an anonymous user, yet the court dismissed the case because the messages were seen as being nothing more than opinion. In cases of this nature, it can be easily argued that race-based cyber-hate messages are nothing more than opinion although they may be harmful to a person's well-being in nature. I believe that the regulation of internet content is needed to eradicate the thin line between opinion and blatant hatred being expressed towards an individual or group of individuals.

Majority of the current legislation that is on the books within the United States has to do with that of protecting children such as the Communications Decency Act which protects children from the exposure of images that are deemed to be obscene (Bradley 1995). Along the same lines, I think that it is necessary to have some form of legislation that protects individuals from being able to post information that degrades individuals based on their race. If there were legislation of this nature, and the penalty for doing so was more than just a slap on the wrist, I think that users would be deterred from posting such information on the internet. Additionally, this would allow users of the internet to carry on with their normal lives without having to worry about whether or not someone is going to type a message about them that could be harmful to their reputation.

Cons of Regulating Internet Content

While I am pushing for regulation of internet content, I do realize that this is no small task. To begin with citizens of the United States of America are protected by a huge piece of legislation that is very difficult to navigate around. That piece of legislation is none other than the first amendment right to the freedom of speech. This

"inalienable right" allows an individual to freely express him or herself as long as they do not engage in instances of slander or libel against another individual. In regards to online social networking sites, individuals are expected to govern themselves using a self-policing mechanism. In her article "Philosophically Based Limitations to Freedom of Speech in Virtual Communities," Miranda Mowbray states that "If a community has freedom of speech this will deter people (especially public officials) from wrongdoing" (Mowbray 124). Tactics of this manner are equivalent to social shaming within the physical world in which we live; however, I think that this argument does not stand in situations where the individuals cannot identify one another such as within anonymous online social networking sites.

Another argument against the regulation of internet content is that it is not needed. The following quote is important to this discussion as several civil groups such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation and American Civil Liberties Union are against the regulation of the internet.

> Civil libertarian groups like the Electronic Frontier Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union oppose government regulation of the Internet arguing that such regulations are unconstitutional. These groups maintain that new laws are not needed to regulate speech on the Internet. The executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union in Florida equates the Internet to a public forum where the First Amendment is applicable. Users who find certain information objectionable should avoid those sites on the Internet. (Bradley 2005)

The argument seeks to make internet content regulation different from that of the television in saying that users have the ability to simply not be a part of or navigate away from the content that they find to be offensive. Laura Leets states that "unlike users of previous media, those on the Internet have the power to reach a mass audience but in this case the audience must be more active in seeking information" (Leets 2001). Along the

same lines Mowbray proclaims that "the extent and nature of the restrictions should be made clear to potential and actual members, so that they can make an informed choice as to whether or not to join, or remain in, the community" (127). Mowbray sees the regulation of the internet as being a violation to a user's social contract with the government. Based on Mowbray's reasoning, a user inherently agrees to not post messages that promote race-based cyber-hate or any other hate in exchange for the ability to freely express themselves without the fear of being regulated for their actions on a website.

Methodology and Analytic Techniques

For the sake of this study, I utilized an online survey as a means to gain knowledge about individual perceptions of race-based cyber-hate. The online surveys consisted of multiple choice questions and the primary variables that I analyzed included online social networking usage, view of racism, thoughts on freedom of expression, and view of anonymity on the web. Additionally, an online survey was an easy method of ensuring that the data was formatted and easy to comprehend. Since the survey was online it was also economical to distribute it widely. Finally, utilizing an online survey allowed the participants to express their "true feelings" on racism on the internet in a manner which they may not have felt comfortable discussing in a face-to-face setting.

Besides questions regarding the users' race, age, and education level, I relied heavily on responses that incorporated the Likert scale. The sample populations for this study consisted of a convenience sample of students and alumni of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The only requirement for participation in this study was

that the respondent must be a member of an online social networking site. Respondents

to the online survey were cautioned not to complete the survey more than once.

Respondents were also made aware prior to initiating the survey that any information

they provided would be kept anonymous. After the data were collected via Qualtrics, it

was imported into Microsoft Excel in order to analyze responses.

Survey Instrument

The respondents' views and perceptions were recorded using software known as

Qualtrics which was provided by UNC's Odum Institute for Research in Social Science.

The invitation to participate in the survey was sent as a mass informational email to the

campus listserv in mid-February 2010 (Appendix B). The survey ran for approximately

three weeks and garnered 366 responses. Of the 366 responses, 267 of the responses

were complete for a completion rate of 76%. Due to guidelines set forth by the

Institutional Review Board, respondents should be given the ability to skip questions for

which they do not feel comfortable answering. This may help to explain why the other

24% of the respondent population did not complete the survey. The survey (Appendix A)

consisted of 18 questions; however, due to the wording of Question 3, the results for this

particular question were omitted because of the confusion it caused survey respondents.

<div align="center">

Results and Discussion

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The results presented in this study are not organized according to how they were

asked on the actual survey, but are presented in a more logical order. The answer to each

question is illustrated in a figure, and the figure is labeled according to the question asked

and its respective question number on the survey (i.e. Qn). In addition, the number of

respondents to a question is listed as n=x. I will begin by discussing the overall

demographic information of the respondent pool followed by their beliefs and
experiences.

Figures 1-3 provide details regarding the individuals that responded to the survey.

Figure 1: What race do you identify yourself as? (Q15, n=260)
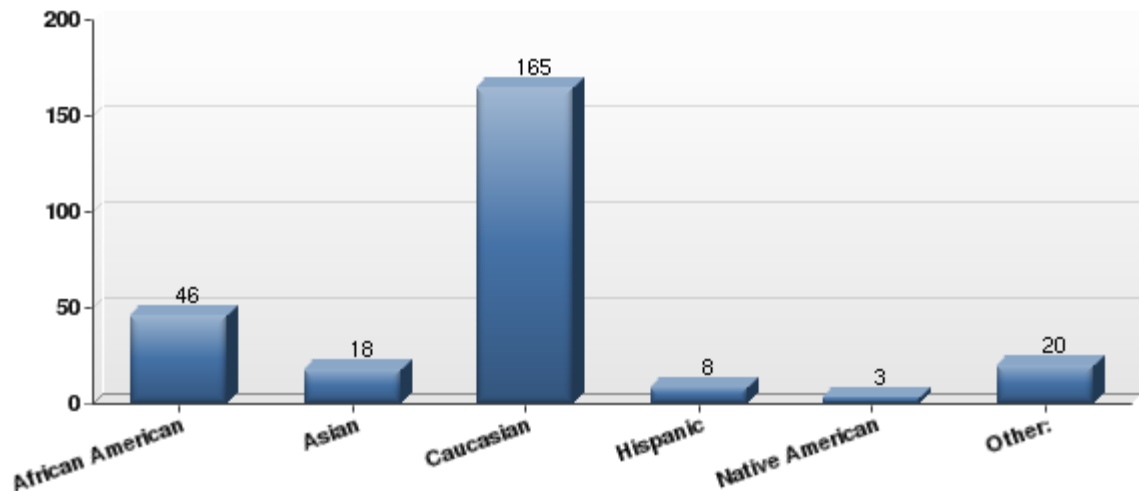
As illustrated in Figure 1 above, the largest respondent group was that of Caucasians

which constituted 63.46% of all of the responses received. The second largest group was

African Americans at 17.69%, followed by Asians (6.92%), Hispanics (3.08%), and

Native Americans (1.15%). The group that is listed as other are individuals that are Arab

Americans (n=2), and individuals that identified themselves as being multi-racial. The

respondent pool somewhat reflects the racial composition of the University of North

Carolina at Chapel Hill's student body.

Figure 2: Which of the following best represents your affiliation with UNC? (Q16, n=247)
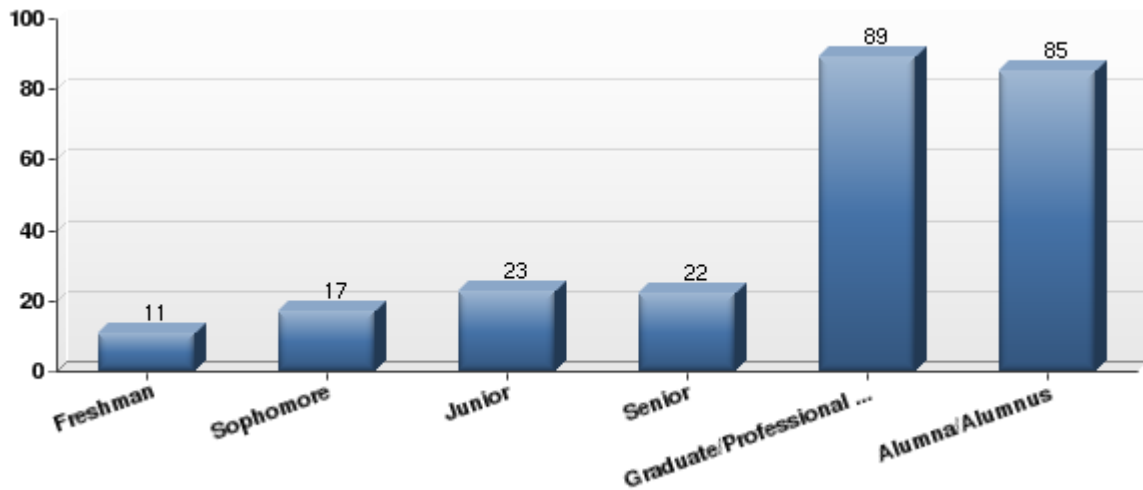

Figure 2 illustrates the education level of the individuals that responded to the survey.

Graduate/Professional students and Alumni of the university accounted for approximately

70.44% of the respondents while undergraduate students comprised the other 29.55% of

the respondents. The lack of responses from undergraduate students may be attributed to

their lack of interest in graduate level research; however, further study may be needed to

truly understand why their response rate was significantly lower than that of the

Graduate/Professional students and Alumni.

**Figure 3: What US state/territory were you born in? (Q17, n=246)**

Answer		Response	%
North Carolina		94	38.21%
Born outside of the United States		15	6.10%
New York		13	5.28%
Virginia		12	4.88%
Pennsylvania		10	4.07%
Georgia		10	4.07%
Ohio		9	3.66%
Florida		8	3.25%
South Carolina		7	2.85%
California		6	2.44%
New Jersey		5	2.03%
Texas		5	2.03%
Illinois		4	1.63%
Oregon		3	1.22%
Alabama		3	1.22%
Wisconsin		3	1.22%
Michigan		3	1.22%
Iowa		3	1.22%
Connecticut		3	1.22%
Arizona		2	0.81%
Colorado		2	0.81%
Arkansas		2	0.81%
District of Columbia		2	0.81%
Maryland		2	0.81%
West Virginia		2	0.81%
New Hampshire		2	0.81%
Tennessee		1	0.41%
New Mexico		1	0.41%
Northern Marianas Islands		1	0.41%
Puerto Rico		1	0.41%
Rhode Island		1	0.41%
Massachusetts		1	0.41%
Nevada		1	0.41%
Kentucky		1	0.41%
Indiana		1	0.41%
Guam		1	0.41%
Louisiana		1	0.41%
Maine		1	0.41%

Nebraska		1	0.41%
Delaware		1	0.41%
Minnesota		1	0.41%
Missouri		1	0.41%
Total		246	100.00%

Figure 3 illustrates that the majority of the respondents were born in the state of North Carolina. Although the large percentage of respondents born in North Carolina may be attributed to the fact that UNC-Chapel Hill is a state-funded institution, this sample is more diverse than the student body. Further study may be needed within other institutions in different states to depict a more accurate picture of what the United States public truly believes regarding racism within online social networking sites.

Now that we have a general understanding of the demographics that made up the respondent pool, I will provide more details about their beliefs as it relates to online social networking sites, racism, and freedom of expression on the internet. This information will be depicted in Figures 4-8.

Figure 4: Do you think racism exists within online social networking sites? (Q1, n=272)
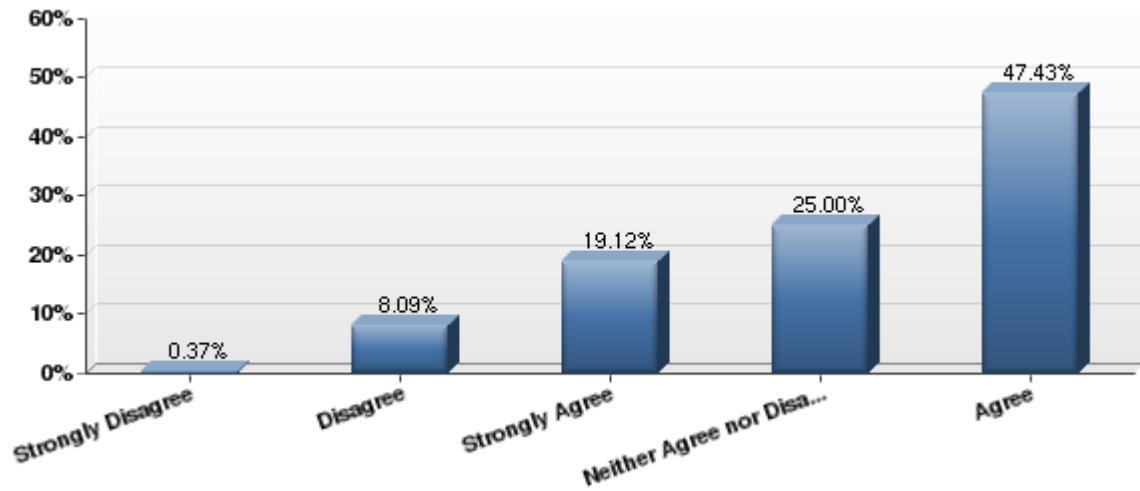
Based on the statistics illustrated in Figure 4 above, 66.55% of the respondents either strongly agree or agree that racism exists within online social networking sites. Comparatively, only 8.46% of the respondent population strongly disagree or disagree that racism does not exist within online social networking sites. The difference between the audiences is alarming in the fact that only a small percentage of the population has reason to believe that racism exists within online social networking sites.

**Figure 5: Do you think racism will ever disappear? (Q2, n=269)**
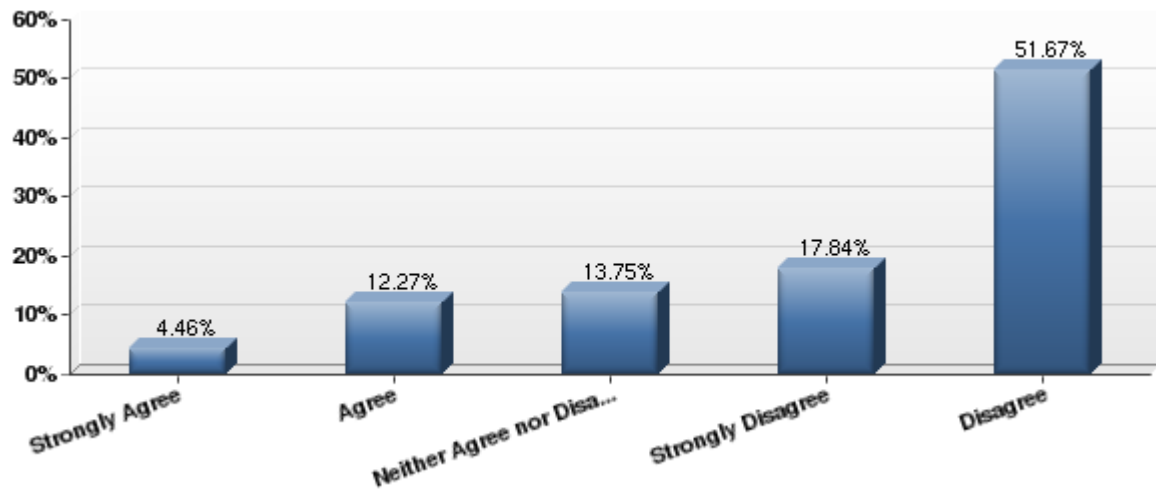
When the respondents were asked if they believed racism would ever disappear,

approximately sixty-nine and a half percent of the population believed that racism would

never disappear. Contrarily, only 16.73% of the population maintained hope that racism

would one day not be a problem within society.

Figure 6: How do you view the current state of race relations in America? (Q8, n=265)
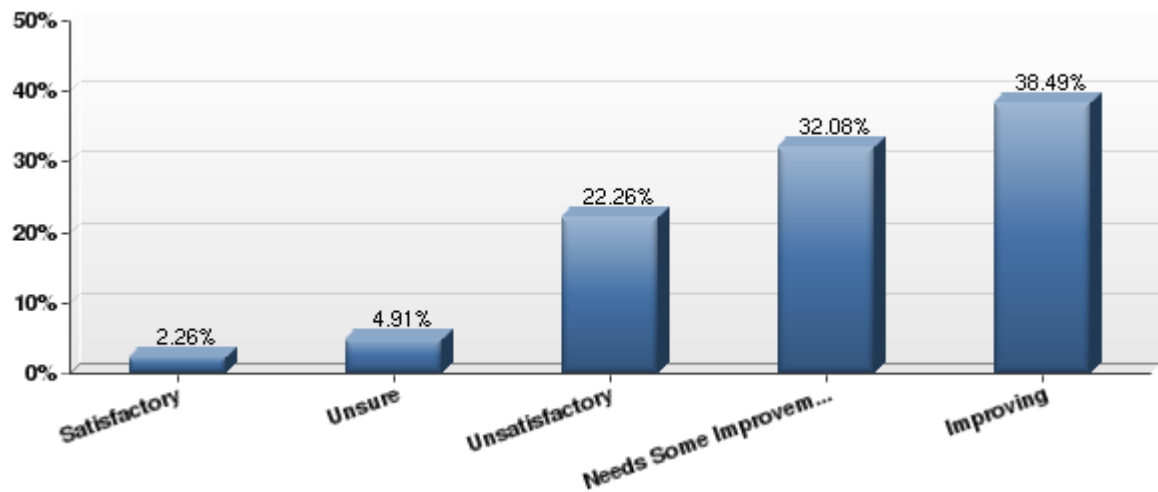

Of the respondents to the above question 102 of the respondents viewed race relations in America as improving, while 144 respondents stated that race relations were unsatisfactory or needed some improvement. It is important to note that only 6 respondents within this population found race relations within America to be satisfactory. The fact that the prior number is so low illustrates how much further we have to go as a country in order to truly help everyone feel as if they are accepted within the United States of America.

Figure 7: What is your view on the importance of freedom of expression on the Internet? (Q11, n=267)
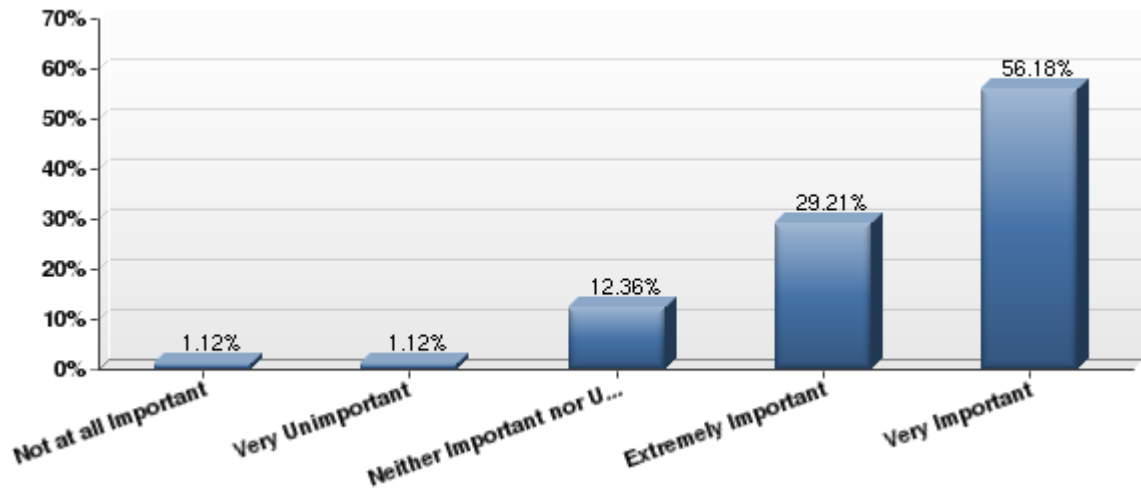
As Figure 7 illustrates, an overwhelming majority of the survey respondents valued their ability to freely express themselves on the Internet. This statistic could point to the idea that the general public does not believe that internet content regulation is necessary. The fact that so many people value their freedom of speech may prove to one day jeopardize race relations further as more individuals begin to freely express themselves on the internet without regard to whether their comments are hurtful or demeaning to other races. Further study will be needed to test the validity of such statements.

Figure 8: What is your opinion of online social networking? (Q9, n=263)
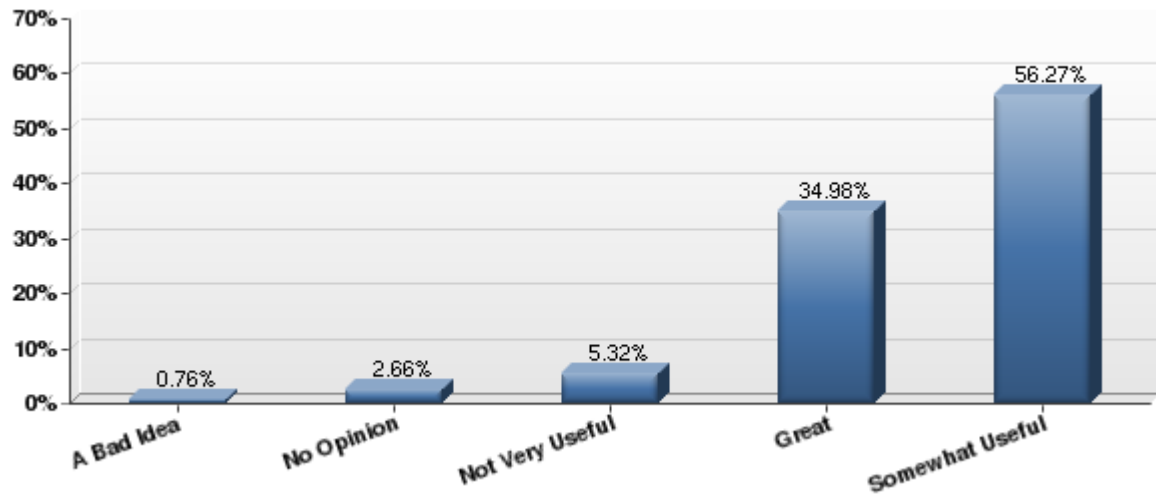
Based on the responses to the survey, the majority of the respondent pool believed that online social networking was great or somewhat useful. Only 7 respondents expressed no opinion of online social networks, while 14 respondents believe that online social networking is not very useful, and 2 respondents think of the creation of online social networks as a bad idea.

Figures 9-17 will provide information about the survey respondents regarding their experiences with online social networking sites, racism, and racism within online social networking sites. Figures 14-17 will more specifically examine anonymous conditions within online social networking sites.

Figure 9: Have you experienced racism on a social networking site? (Q4, n=272)
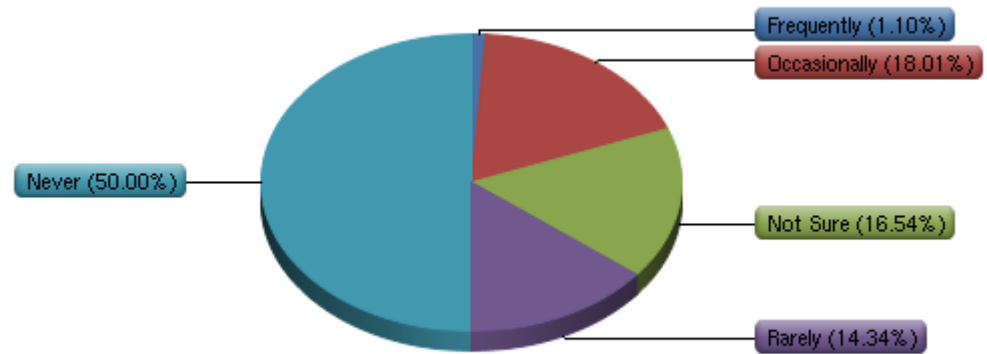

The above pie chart provides data regarding the frequency of experiences with racism within online social networking sites. While 50% of the population reported that they have not experienced racism within an online social networking site, 33.45% (n=91) of the population reported that they have been exposed to racism of some sort (i.e. frequently, occasionally, or rarely) within such online networks.

Figure 10: How often have you encountered racism within an online social network? (Q10, n=265)
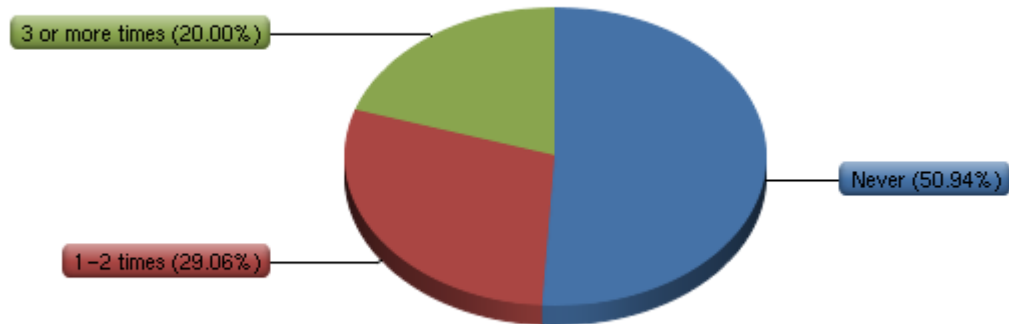
While both Figure 9 and 10 both explore the same question, Figure 10 seeks to provide a

numerical value to the number of times that the respondents were exposed to racism

within online social networking sites. Nearly a third of the respondents had been exposed

to racism within online social networks at least 1-2 times while a fifth of the population

had been exposed to racism 3 or more times.

Figure 11: Do you contribute comments or wall posts to online social networking sites? (Q5, n=273)
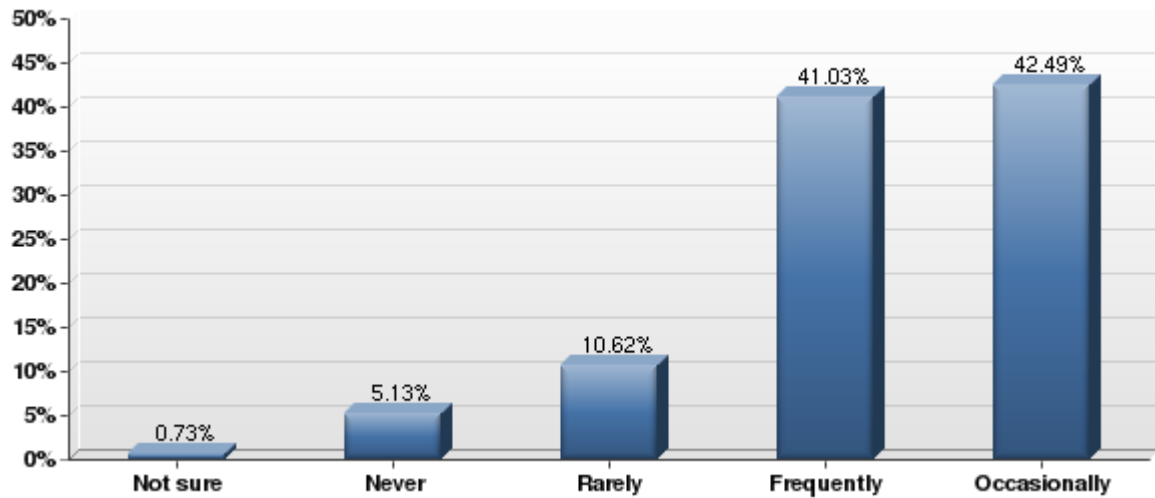
The above figure illustrates that approximately 94.14% of the respondents rarely,

frequently, or occasionally post comments to online social networking sites. Statistics of

this nature illustrate that the respondent population are active users of online social

networking sites and that they are constantly interacting with others within these social

networks. Only 14 of the 273 respondents stated that they never contribute comments to

online social networking sites.

Figure 12: Have you ever been exposed to racism on the following social networking sites? (Q7, n=127)
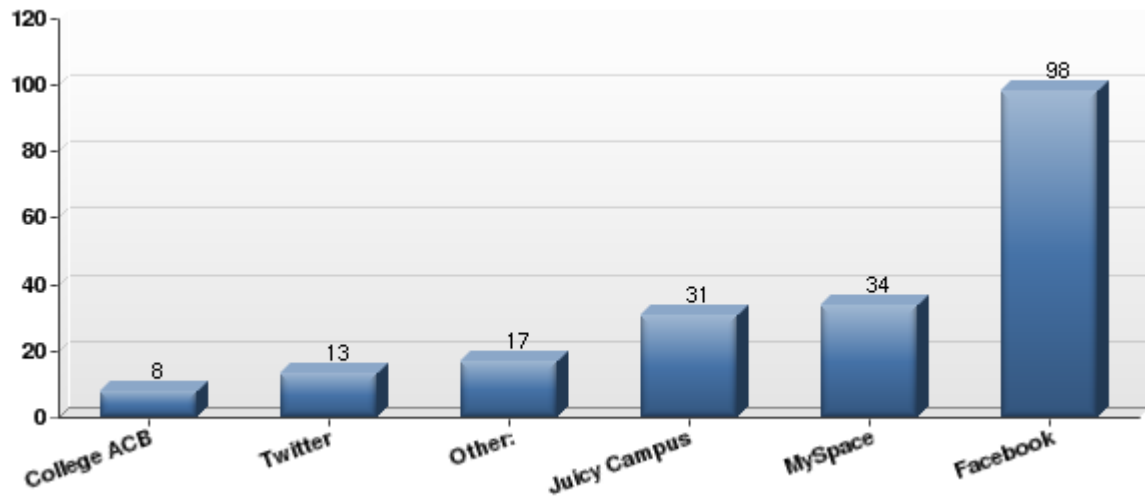
For the question represented in the above Figure 12, respondents were given the opportunity to check all of the online social networking sites for which they had experienced racism on. 127 respondents made 201 selections. This is consistent with responses reported in Figures 9 & 10, showing that 50% of subjects reported that they had not been exposed to racism within an online social networking site. Among the social networking sites that allow anonymity either completely or to some extent are Juicy Campus, College ACB, and Facebook (Honesty Box application). Respondents to the survey report that they have encountered the most racism on Facebook. College ACB may have the fewest responses because it was one of the newer online social networking sites at the time of this study. Among the choices that users listed as being a part of the Other category are YouTube, BlackPlanet, and 4Chan among others.

Figure 13: How often have you encountered racism in face-to-face interactions? (Q12, n=262)
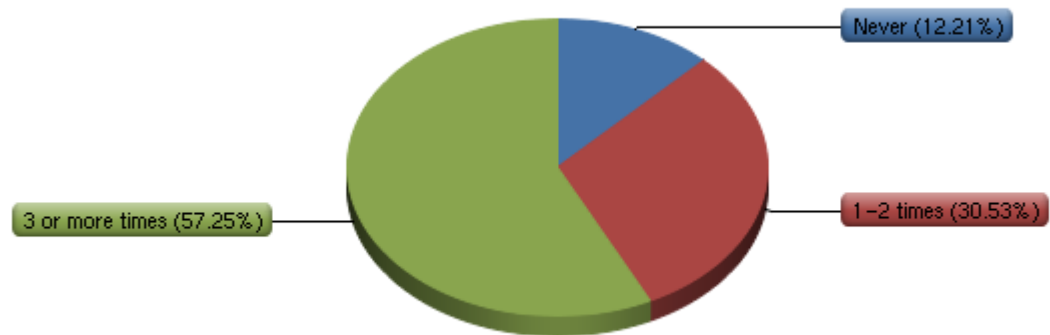
Figure 13 has been added to illustrate how racism in face-to-face interactions compared to that of racism within online social networking sites (Figure 10). Based on the statistics in the above figure, only 12.21% had never been exposed to racism in their face-to-face interactions with other races. This statistic may suggest that there is a stigma associated with making racist comments directly to a person's face as compared to making racist comments towards an individual that is miles away.

Figure 14: Do you identify yourself when you make comments on social networking sites? (Q6, n=266)
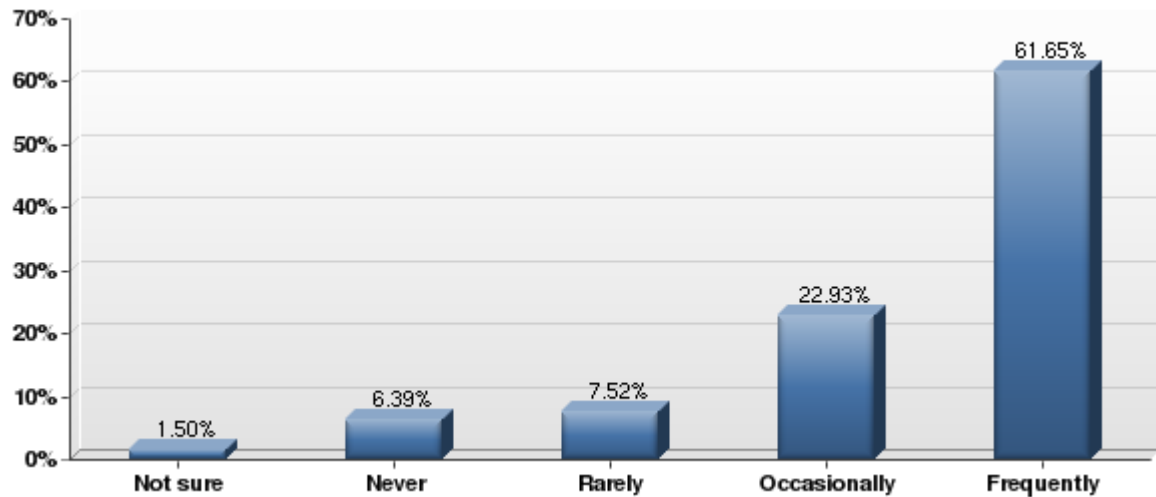
Figure 14 illustrates that the majority of the respondents to the survey identify themselves

in some way (name, picture, or alias) when they make comments within online social

networking sites. However, 6.39% of the respondent population stated that they do not

give any visual cues as to their identity which would indicate that they are

communicating within online social networking sites anonymously which is of

importance to this particular research study. Anonymous communication within online

social networking sites allows users to hide under a veil in which they cannot be

identified.

Figure 15: Have you ever viewed a "racist message" online in which you could not identify the person that wrote the message? (Q13, n=260)
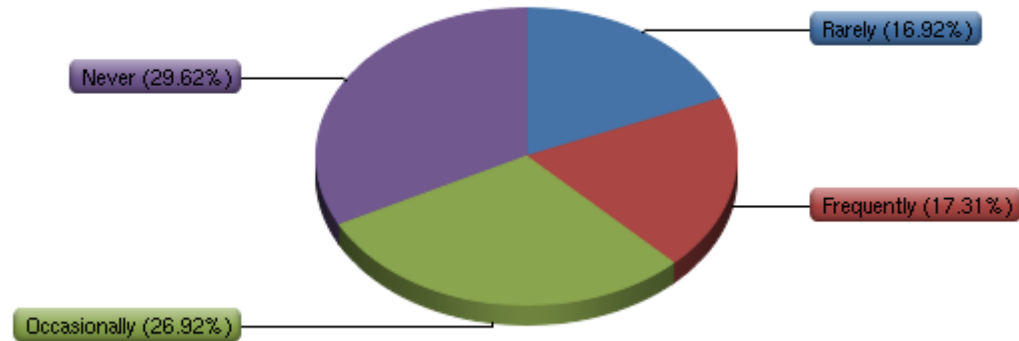
In the figure above, 61.15% of the respondents stated that they have (either frequently, occasionally, or rarely) encountered a comment they deemed to be "racist" in which they could not identify the person that wrote the message. The fact that there not any identifiable information near the comment indicates that the message was posted anonymously. 9% of the respondents stated that they were unsure of whether they had viewed a "racist message" in which they could not identify the person that wrote the message.

Figure 16: Do you use the Honesty Box application on Facebook? (Q14, n=262)
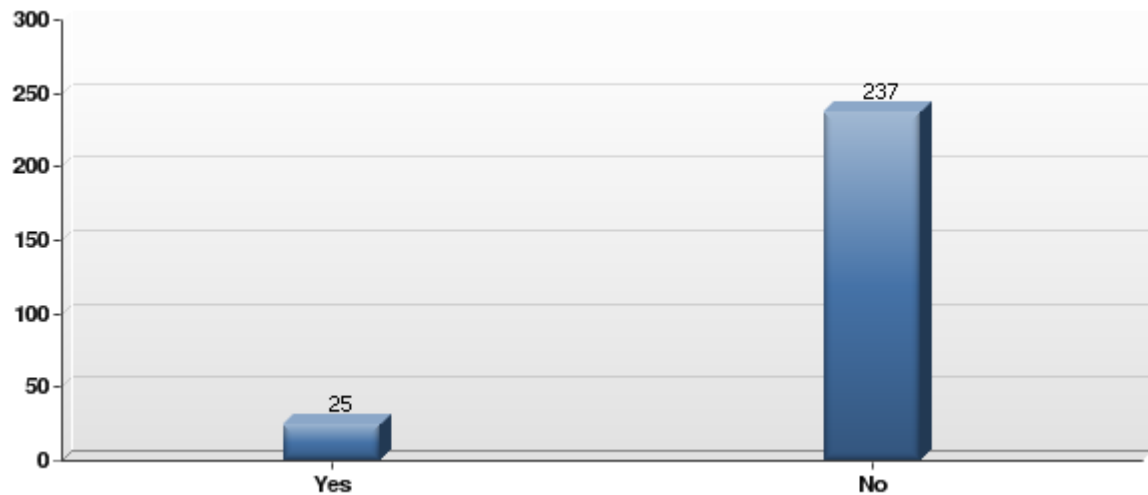
When asked about the usage of an application on Facebook that allows users to send messages to one another anonymously, 237 of the respondents stated that they have not used the application compared to only 25 respondents that have used the application. This question utilized skip logic whereby if the respondent answered yes to the question, they were immediately displayed another question for a follow-up response. The results of the follow-up question can be seen below in Figure 17.

Figure 17: If yes, have you ever received a racist comment from someone? (Q14a, n=23)
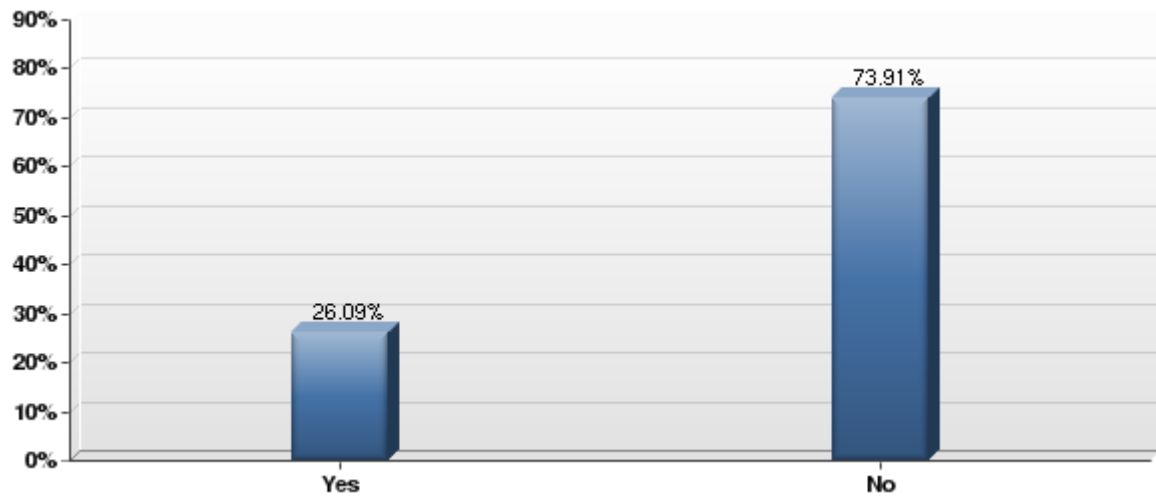
Of the 25 users that stated that they had in fact used the Honesty Box application on

Facebook, 23 of the users chose to respond. Of the 23 users that responded, 6 of the

users stated that they had received a racist comment from someone in which they could

not identify the sender of the message.

Discussion

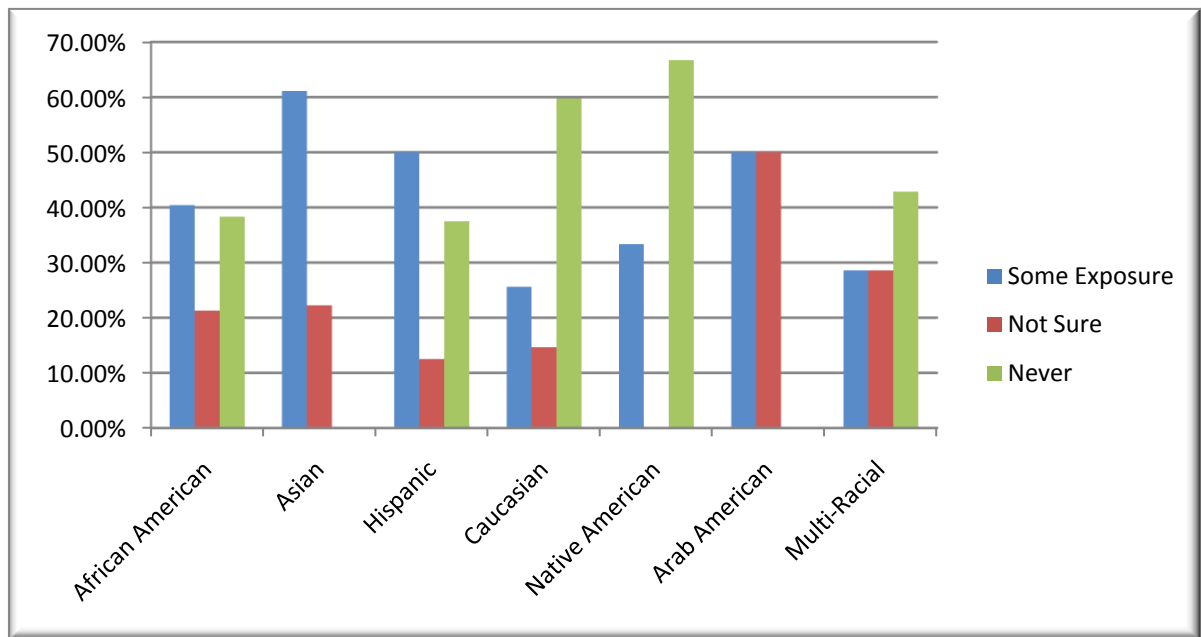**Figure 18: Exposure to Racism within Online Social Networking Site by Race (n=272)**

The above Figure 18 provides a breakdown by race of the statistics provided in Figure 9.

The y-axis represents the percentage of respondents that either have some exposure to

racism within an online social networking site (meaning they answered frequently,

occasionally, or rarely to the question illustrated in Figure 9), have never been exposed to

racism within online social networking sites, or are unsure if they have been exposed to

racism within online social networking sites. Based on the figure above it is easy to

notice that the races that have been exposed the most to racism within online social

networking sites are African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics. Caucasians, Native

Americans, and Multi-Racial individuals are the only groups reporting that their

experiences of never being exposed to racism within such networks outweigh their

exposure to racism.

Figure 19: Exposure to Racism by Online Social Networking Site (n=127)
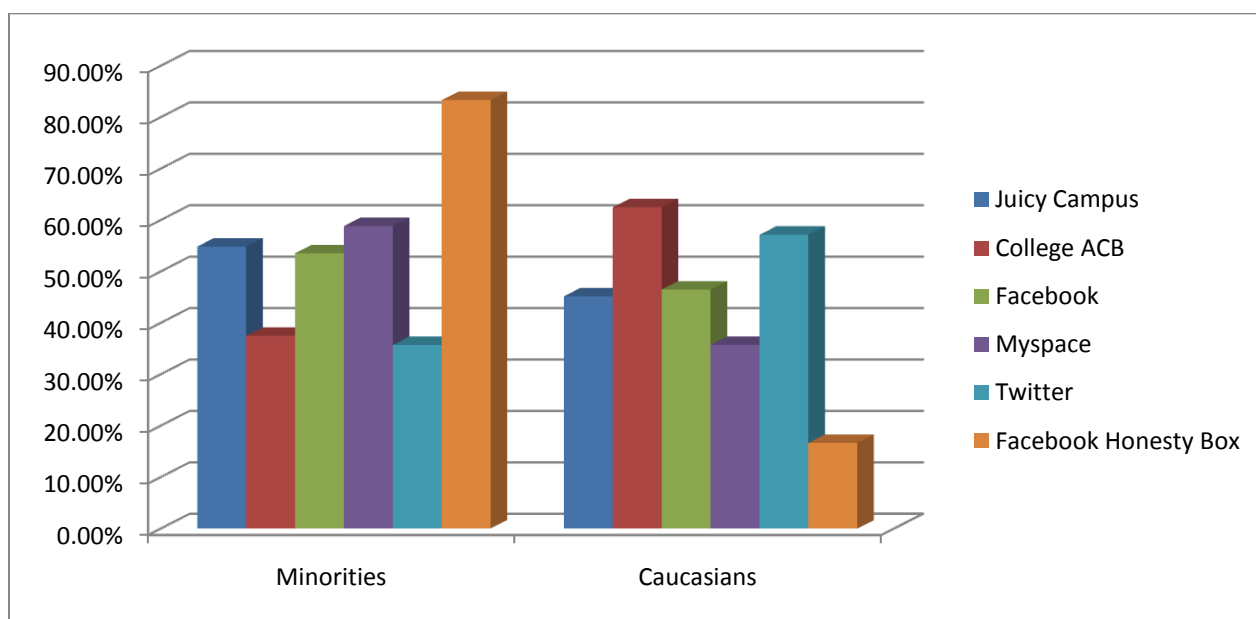
Figure 19 provides a close-up look to the data that was discussed in Figure 12 and Figure 17. In particular, this graph allows us to see how minority responses compared to that of Caucasians. For the sake of this graph, minorities are defined as everyone who did not answer that they were Caucasian. The exposure to racism was higher for minorities on Juicy Campus, Facebook, MySpace, and within the Facebook Honesty Box Application. Of the 26% of respondents that stated they had used the Honesty Box Application, 5 out of 6 of the users were minorities who said they had received a racist message from someone. Based on the figure above, Caucasian respondents posted higher rates of exposure to racism than minorities only within College ACB and Twitter. The fact that minorities generally posted higher rates of exposure to racism may indicate that there is some level of insensitivity by Caucasian audiences that may warrant further study.

My initial assumption was that online social networking sites that allow users to make comments anonymously would have higher percentages of racism than online social networks in which users were forced to identify themselves. This statement

appears to be somewhat true based on Figure 19 since the anonymous social networks of Juicy Campus, College ACB, and the Honesty Box application within Facebook have some of the highest percentage totals of the respondent population. MySpace and Twitter also posts high percentages of sites that have high exposure to racist content. These data may indicate that users are more familiar with the two previous online social networks than with online social networking sites that allow anonymity.

Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?

While there is no easy solution to dealing with race-based cyber-hate on the web and in particular sites that allow users to post messages anonymously, legislation is one option for the country. The United States has long been regarded as being one of the premier countries to take a stand in acts of civil rights; however "One hundred sixty-five nations, including Germany, have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination that calls on states to ban racist activities outright. The United States has not" (Timofeeva 2003). I believe that if we take a stand, then other countries will follow suit and will enact similar guidelines. My first proposal would be to have all online social networks enact policies where users that wish to make comments or send messages must first register with the website and provide a valid form of contact. In doing this, the website will be able to monitor the users activity even if the user is granted permission to post messages anonymously. Furthermore, this will allow users to think about the messages they are disseminating rather than being able to freely post offensive material without the fear of being admonished for their actions. However, I do realize that this policy will be a difficult one to enact due to the complexity of the internet. The

internet expands across country borders and in order for previously mentioned measure to be effective, all countries will have to adapt similar policies.

In addition to regulating the content within the internet, I believe that more research must be conducted in order to truly understand how this trend in social networking is transpiring. The research that combines racism and anonymous online social networking sites is few and far between. I believe that until there are more people taking a look at this phenomenon from a variety of perspectives we will not truly be able to understand how race-based cyber-hate within anonymous online social networking sites is affecting the users within such sites.

While we are a long ways away from reaching a consensus on the debate regarding freedom of speech on the internet, I do believe that we must take action sooner than later in order to prevent racism from spreading on the internet even more so than it already has. We must first educate users that anonymous online social networking sites are a proven haven for individuals that hope to maliciously attack individuals of various races with messages of cyber-hate. If we do not act soon, the struggle of individuals around the world to obtain justice from practices of racism would have been in vain. Today we stand on a plateau that allows us to stare into the future of racism and it undoubtedly is a future that will be much worse to deal with than any form of racism that we have dealt with as a society in the past.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Online Survey

Q1
☐

Do you think racism exists within online social networking sites?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
○	○	○	○	○

Q2
☐

Do you think racism will ever disappear?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
○	○	○	○	○

Q3
☐

Do you think that online social networking helps or hurts race relations?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
○	○	○	○	○

Q4
☐

Have you experienced racism on a social networking site?

Frequently	Occasionally	Not Sure	Rarely	Never
○	○	○	○	○

Q5
☐
Do you contribute comments or wall posts to online social networking sites?

Frequently	Occasionally	Not sure	Rarely	Never
○	○	○	○	○

Q6
☐

Do you identify yourself when you make comments on social networking sites?

Frequently	Occasionally	Not sure	Rarely	Never
○	○	○	○	○

Q7
☐

Have you ever been exposed to racism on the following social networking sites? (Check all that apply)

Juicy Campus	College ACB	Facebook	MySpace	Twitter	Other:
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q8
☐

How do you view the current state of race relations in America?

Satisfactory	Improving	Unsure	Needs Some Improvement	Unsatisfactory
○	○	○	○	○

Q9
☐

What is your opinion of online social networking?

Great	Somewhat Useful	No Opinion	Not Very Useful	A Bad Idea
○	○	○	○	○

Q10
☐

How often have you encountered racism within an online social network?

Never	1-2 times	3 or more times
○	○	○

Q11
☐

What is your view on the importance of freedom of expression on the Internet?

Extremely Important	Very Important	Neither Important nor	Very Unimportant	Not at all Important

Unimportant

○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Q12

☐

How often have you encountered racism in face-to-face interactions?

Never   1-2 times   3 or more times

○   ○   ○

Q13

☐

Have you ever viewed a "racist message" online in which you could not identify the person that wrote the message?

Frequently   Occasionally   Unsure   Rarely   Never

○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Q14

☐

Do you use the Honesty Box application on Facebook?

    Yes   No

    ○   ○

Display This Question:

If Do you use the Honesty Box application on Facebook? Yes Is Selected Edit

Q14a

☐

If yes, have you ever received a racist comment from someone?

Yes   No

○   ○

Q15

☐

What race do you identify yourself as?

African American	Asian	Caucasian	Hispanic	Native American	Other:
○	○	○	○	○	○

Q16

☐

Which of the following best represents your affiliation with UNC?

Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate/Professional Student	Alumna/Alumnus
○	○	○	○	○	○

Q17

☐

What US state/territory were you born in?

Alabama ▼ Click here to edit choices

Appendix B – Informational Email

Subject: Participate in a Study on Racism and Online Social Networks

I, Shawn Guy, a Master's Student in the School of Information & Library Science at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill is seeking participants for a research study on racism within online social networking sites. This research is being conducted for my master's thesis. Online social networks are web-based networks that allow users to express ideas and share information with one another such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, and blogs. You must have used one of these or other online social networking sites to participate.

Participation will only take **10-15 minutes** of your time and will involve completing a short online survey. The survey can be accessed via the following link: http://uncodum.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1WT7siXGFhbHXdG&SVID=Prod .

This research study was approved by UNC's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research. The IRB approved number for this study is 10-0188.

Thank you for your assistance,

Shawn Guy

Appendix C – Information about the Study and Consent to Participate

Social Networking & Racism
Primary Investigator(s): Shawn Guy, sguy@email.unc.edu, 252-382-0162)
Research Advisor: Deborah Barreau (barreau@ils.unc.edu, (919)966-5042)
UNC School of Information and Library Science

Thank you for your interest in this study conducted by a School of Information & Library Science master student regarding racism within online social networking sites. You have been selected for this study because you are a current or former student of UNC-Chapel Hill. Please do not complete this study if you are not a current or former student of UNC-Chapel Hill and you are not a part of an online social network such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.

About this study:
What's involved: The survey consists of 17 multiple choice questions. It should take 10-15 minutes to complete. At this point I am unsure of how many people will participate in this study, but I hope that approximately 50 participants will take part in this study.

Risks: This survey poses no more risk than minimal risk.

Benefits: You may experience the satisfaction that comes with aiding an individual in research, but you will not benefit otherwise from this research.

Your privacy: By clicking to enter the survey, you are giving permission to use your data in this study. The results of this study will be published in a master's paper at SILS, but the paper will not contain information that will identify you. Your data will be anonymous. All the information you provide will be used responsibly and will be protected against release to unauthorized persons. Please be sure that you take steps to safeguard your privacy as well. Choose a place that allows you enough privacy to comfortably complete the survey.

Protection of survey data: The Qualtrics system maintains data behind a firewall, and only the owner of the survey, who must provide password and user id, accesses the data. All pieces of data are keyed to that owner identification and cannot be accessed by anyone other than the owner or, by the owner's request, technical assistance staff. Technical assistance staff includes server administrators at Qualtrics who will respond to hardware or software failures, or Teresa Edwards, the UNC administrator for the Qualtrics Software Agreement. Ms. Edwards has completed Human Subjects Research certification at UNC-CH, and will only access survey data at the account owner's request.

Payment: You will receive no payment or compensation for participating in this study.

Your rights: You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact the researchers listed at the top of this form. All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a

research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Voluntary participation: Your decision whether or not to participate in this study is voluntary and will not affect your standing at SILS, or at UNC. You may choose not to be in the study or to stop being in the study before it is over at any time. This will not affect your class standing or grades at UNC-Chapel Hill. You will not be offered or receive any special consideration if you take part in this research. Additionally, you may choose to skip any question for any reason.

If you click on the button below and submit a completed survey, you are indicating your agreement to participate based on reading and understanding this form. If you have any questions, please contact an investigator identified at the top of this form prior to completing the survey.

If you do not wish to participate in this study, please navigate away from this web page.

Based on the information above, I agree to participate in this study by clicking the "Next" button below.