EXPERIENCES OF RACIALIZATION IN ONLINE UNDERGRADUATE CLASSROOMS

A Dissertation in Higher Education

by

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ABSTRACT

Racialization, the process by which society's systems and organizations build and reassert hierarchies through the social construct of race, is deeply embedded in society. Educational systems in the United States, influenced by these socio-cultural practices, are rooted in racialization. Higher education literature indicates that students of different races experience the college climate differently (see Harper & Hurtado, 2007) and that colorblind and color-evasive environments reaffirm hurtful practices of racialization (Jayakumar, 2015). Online education is often viewed as a color-evasive environment because physical interactions are absent, yet studies show that other online spaces are not immune to racist behaviors. The growth in online education makes it necessary to study how racist systems and ideas influence the technology-based educational environment and understand student experiences of racialization. Racialization in the online classroom was conceptualized as formed by the general campus, academic and racial climates, created by racial perceptions and expectations of faculty and students in the class, and salience of racism to student respondents.

This mixed-methods case study collected data from sixty-four student surveys and hundreds of documents. Document analysis was supported by interviews with professional staff and faculty. The study utilized Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as the conceptual framework to analyze individuals' experiences and is bounded by the activity system in one college at a major research university. Student survey responses indicated positive perceptions toward the general campus, academic, and racial climates. Documentary data analysis revealed a color-evasiveness environment in the sub-system of online education. The color-evasive environment did not serve to protect students of color from harmful experiences, as an assimilationist standardization was expected. This study revealed students’ experiences of racialization are based on technology-based anonymity in a color-evasive environment. Students
can develop strategies using anonymity, but these practices should not remove institutional responsibility of creating safe learning environments for online students. The virtual campus provides a college experience unlike that of in-residence which requires institutions to think differently about the connections and disconnections of online students to campus. Tools can be modified to decrease the system-level anonymity for online students, bringing them closer to the campus and increasing the sense of belonging, if the system is motivated to do so. This study serves as an example for administrators about the need to interrogate how color-evasiveness is replicated into the sub-systems of their online offerings and contribute to students’ racialized experiences.

*Keywords*: online education, racialization, Cultural Historical Activity Theory, survey, mixed methods case study
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(L-R: Dad, Scooter, Emily, and me at the Shrine, circa 1986)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

More than four million students were enrolled in online education in the United States in 2015 (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Online education can reach students worldwide. The removal of the physical boundaries and barriers through online education increases the range of students' educational opportunities, improving the reach and create a more diverse student body.

Distance education, or education with a physical separation between the student and the instructor, has a long history (Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Von Prummer, 2000) and a sizable body of research literature. The earliest forms of distance education utilized mail correspondence which was slow. Now the speed of communication with online education changes how we understand learning and modifies distance education literature's applicability to online education. Gunawardena and colleagues (2009) write that the new "type of learning [that] Web 2.0 technologies are facilitating is challenging existing learning theories primarily because the theories were developed when wide-ranging online communication between people of different races, locations, and viewpoints was not possible" (p. 5). Because of this change, currently held ideas about student experiences necessitate expansion to accommodate these new technologies. With the popularity of online education and increasing enrollments, the body of research literature about online education is also growing. However, little about how the virtual educational environment changes and impacts students' experiences is understood, particularly as those experiences occur within a diverse student body.

Technology and online environment research relay pertinent information about how socio-cultural influences extend into the virtual environment. Technology is a cultural artifact and influenced by socio-cultural practices, including harmful practices related to racism.
Racialization, a term that refers to the creation of hierarchy with "structural relations of differences" (Dixon-Roman, 2018, p. 1), is based on social constructs of race. The Internet is a prolific breeding ground for racism (Jakubowicz, 2012) because it spreads and reasserts ideas of racialization quickly and inexpensively without concern for physical barriers (Bliuc, Faulkner, Jakubowicz, & McGarty, 2018). Racialization leads to practices that perpetuate inequities through the development of policies and systems found in educational settings.

Race is thought of as a social construct strongly informed by individuals' physical appearances (Tatum, 2008, p. 16). Racialization, or the process in which systems are built mainly upon race, is ingrained into our socio-cultural lives. Much of the literature exploring racial differences in college settings is conducted with a physical presence of a college campus. The physical presence does not translate readily or straightforwardly to the online environment and raises the question of what happens to students' experiences when there is no physical setting? People experience racialization in other online spaces, such as social media platforms and blogs, so an assumption can be made that it may also happen in the online classroom. However, the online classroom has been welcomed as a colorblind environment (see Enger, 2006), which may instead promote racial disparities. Racial disparities are likely to be normalized and continue unless we question the inequities that lead to racial disparities (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015).

Context and Background

Landscape of Online Education

For over one hundred years, distance education has provided educational access to those who would otherwise not be able to attend college (Von Prummer, 2000). The development of
online education as a form of distance education offers unparalleled access to higher education, never seen before in the history of higher education. According to Allen and Seaman (2017), there are over 4.9 million students enrolled in some form of undergraduate distance education, including those in online education. The online student population is multi-generational, with thirty-nine percent between the traditional college ages of 18-24, about forty percent between the ages of 25-39, and twenty-three percent aged 40 and older (Aslanian, Clinefelter, & Magda, 2019, p. 51).

Figure 1-1: Distance education enrollment trend

Source: Graph produced by the author with data presented in ED NCES, 2017, Table 311.20 & 311.22

51). The Online College Students 2019 survey study showed 37% of undergraduate students were African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American, and other minoritized backgrounds (Aslanian, Clinefeter, & Magda, 2019, p. 54). Online education enrollment continues to increase while general enrollment patterns in higher education decrease (Allen & Seaman, 2017); in particular, Hispanic student enrollment in online education has
steadily increased and is on trend to continue (Aslanian, Clinefeter, & Magda, 2019). One-third of all college students take at least one course online (Lederman, Rasmussen, & Hoffman, 2019).

In part, growth in online education enrollment likely comes from the expansion of Internet access. From 2000-2018, Internet usage increased by over 1,000% worldwide, increasing in North America alone by 219% (Internet World Stats, 2018). The Digest for Education Statistics collects data about enrollment in various forms of distance education, including students studying partially and exclusively online (see Figure 1-1). The enrollment data from the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (ED NCES) also shows that students of color are choosing to attend online courses and programs (see Figure 1-2).

Figure 1-2: Enrollment of students by race and ethnicity in online classes.
Source: Graph produced by the author with data presented in ED NCES, 2017, Table 311.20

Only a few higher education institutions hold the majority of enrollment in online education; nearly two-thirds of all online enrollments come from only “10% of all higher
education institutions” (Allen & Seaman, 2016, p. 19). The concentration of enrollments to a handful of institutions is noteworthy as smaller institutions are no longer placing online education into their strategic plans (Allen & Seaman, 2016, 2017). This trend pushes enrollment in online education to larger institutions. It may prove significant as the use of contracts with Online Program Managers (OPMs) for content delivery, infrastructure, marketing, and other hosted services continues to expand. OPM contracts can generate large sums of institutional revenue while leaving questions about academic authority and ownership unanswered (see Hall & Dudley, 2019). Third party partnerships matter to this research because they potentially expand the divide between the institution and their online students by allowing OPMs to serve as the intermediary agent, possibly decreasing direct contact with faculty and limiting institutional awareness of student experiences. As institutions mortgage their future in the online education space, the impact OPM contracts have on the quality of online education (see Carey, 2019; Hall & Dudley, 2019) and ability to handle nuanced student experiences remains unknown.

**Development of a Colorblind Environment**

The original development of online education began in the United States and was subsequently implemented worldwide (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). When computers and the use of technology increased during the 1990s, corporations led by white males dominated the development and deployment of machines to schools. The Internet of the early 1990s provided a "pure, democratic, cerebral form of communication…a utopia…where human interaction can occur … 'uninfluenced by the rest of it'" (Nakamura, 2000, p. 15). The "rest," Nakamura argues, meant "race," and was disregarded as necessary in the online environment (Nakamura, 2000). Commercials and promotional campaigns expressed that removing physical boundaries -- including gender, race, ethnicity, and age -- benefited users (Nakamura, 2000). These original
campaigns claimed the Internet would solve social problems because it would erase the need to acknowledge diversity and promote equality online.

The foundation of the Internet imagined a utopian society where race and ethnicity, age, or gender did not matter, which steered the idea of a colorblind environment. This colorblind notion from the early days of the Internet has carried over to online education; online education "offers a color free environment where students are less likely to be judged by race and treated more equally as this is one of the benefits of online education" (Salvo, Shelton, & Welch, 2017, p. 12).

A foundational piece on the development of online education, *Building Learning Communities in Cyberspace*, written by Palloff and Pratt (1999), offers ideas, concepts, and strategies for institutions to think about when designing and building online education. Palloff and Pratt's work is important because it addressed the emerging pedagogical process for online education and highlighted how humans bring their whole selves to their online interaction and practice. "[E]lectronic communities are essentially human" (Palloff & Pratt, 1999, p. 42), meaning we are still human when working online. People do not shed their identities because they are mostly physically and audibly invisible to others online (Kolko, Nakamura, & Rodman, 2000). Identity creation in online spaces may happen differently from face-to-face environments but still carries similar and important purposes and consequences (Marwick, 2013).

Palloff and Pratt's (1999) book includes some socio-cultural components, like psychology and ethical behavior, but does not include race and ethnicity as influential factors for online students. The online classroom was promoted as providing the same environment for all, nevertheless, students have different experiences, particularly based on race (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003), irrespective of the modality.

Early developers of the Internet were influenced by social conditions (Feenberg, 2017), and as such, influenced technology. The language for and of the Internet was English, promoting
a "cultural homogenization" (Warschauer, 2000, p. 167). Also created was the "netiquette" or custom and practices of the Internet based on the dominant white culture (Silver, 2000). A form of technological capital emerged, and white corporate America became the gatekeepers and controllers.

Andrew Feenberg's (2017) work in critical theory of technology expresses the kinds of influence from society and culture embedded in technology design by those who design it. Technology, he argues, is not void of the social world but rather a different type of social world. When online education is designed to be a reactive pedagogy only, students are decontextualized and removed from campus (Feenberg, 2005). Alternatively, online education is a process that can open a different type of social world that is "morally continuous" of the institution (p. 61). What this phrase means is that online education can be an extendable arm of the institutional community if the development of online education is treated as a new educational space and not simply as "computerized" learning (p. 61). The history and influence of the Internet have only developed over the previous twenty years, relatively recent history. Instead of recognizing the development of a connected campus environment, online education seems to have followed Feenberg's decontextualization argument. Feenberg (2005) writes that this decontextualization process rips students from the college campus context and treats the online space as if socio-cultural influences do not control it. A danger exists in maintaining a decontextualized relationship with online students, especially when layered with society's racialized practices.

Students' perceptions of their college campus can be expressed as "campus climate." Although attending online, students have perceptions about their college campus based on their own experiences within the online environment. Irrespective of the type of classroom, students want to feel a sense of "connectedness, cohesion, spirit, trust, and interdependence among members" (Rovai, 2002, p. 201). In a study on the community in online classrooms, Rovai and Wighting (2005) found that ethnically diverse students who felt social isolation and the sense of
"normlessness" in real life had a "weaker sense of learning community" in the online space (p. 106). This finding suggests that the online environment can reflect students' lived-lives and is not immune to the influences of racialized practices and beliefs. The "[r]acial climate is composed of students' observations of their experiences as racial minorities on campus" (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003, p 264), which is seemingly not limited to the physical campus. The presentation of the college experience reflected in marketing, website, syllabi, student services, and myriad other examples extends to students enrolled in online classes and shapes the perception of online students.

It is time to reassess the idea of "colorblind" online classroom environments. The term colorblind creates a false comparison between the ability of blind people and ignorance, yet blind people are not ignorant (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017). It also gives rise to a "virtual veil" (Palacios & Wood, 2016) as justification for the visual separation of people through technology. The detriment and danger to the practices of promoting colorblindness in online spaces cannot be stated strongly enough; there is no case for "everyone will be treated fairly if race [is] discounted" (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017, p. 154). The socio-cultural influences of racism persist, even when removing sight (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017). A more appropriate term is "color-evasive," representing the apathy and purposeful disregard of racialized practices and norms. Enger (2006) explains that online education does not require students to make the "cultural adjustments" as traditional higher education does and that "each student comes to the learning experience individually, without the pressure of peer group norms" (p. 6-7). These statements negate any experience of racialization that may be harmful to the online student while excusing color-evasiveness in an online learning context.

Technology is embedded in our cultured lives, and learning is deeply rooted in our culture (Glassman, 2001; Nasir & Hand, 2006). Thus, technology is now part of our learning. The increase in online education makes it essential to our educational culture and creates a different
kind of connected, social world for the rest of campus (Feenberg, 2005, 2017). This advancement requires a critical look at how technology and online education are reasserting harmful racialized practices.

**Statement of the Problem**

The original intent of distance education, or education in which the student and instructor are physically separated, was to provide access to students otherwise unable to attend traditional college. Women, unable to leave the home space, and children were first enrolled in distance education in the form of correspondence coursework through the postal mail system (Von Prummer, 2000). In this sense, distance education provided a more democratic and equalizing educational experience for students (Guri-Rosenbilt, 2005). The history of distance education verifies that providing an alternative method for obtaining a college degree matters to those unable to attend a conventional setting (i.e., the physical college campus). This same concept is largely retained today with online education. Online education has been shaped over the years by social contexts however, and may have lost that original promise of a democratic and equalizing form of distance education. Instead, online education, like other forms of education, reflects socio-cultural influences.

American society has long-held institutionalized racist practices (see Diangelo, 2018; Kendi, 2016), and scholars argue that a state of whiteness exists. Whiteness provides normed socialization and requires assimilation (Goldberg, 2005). When organizations, such as colleges and universities, are racialized to a white normative status, "habitual actions" are formed favoring white rules and structure for resources, agency, and change processes (Ray, 2019, p. 37). These "habitual actions" will ultimately be favored and incorporated into all aspects of organizational function, including online classroom development and management.
Over time and through legal, social, and cultural dominance, white Americans do not see themselves as being of a race. Instead, Whites consider race as something for "others," and "[fail] to acknowledge that whiteness conveys internal meanings" (Cleaver, 1997, p. 157), leading to the concept of colorblindness. Although, as noted above, there is no such thing as colorblindness. Instead, there is an assertion that whiteness is the norm, and because race and ethnicity are physically hidden in the online classroom, the system is free from the historical and cultural significance of the American racialized experience (see Palloff & Pratt, 1999). The idea that colorblindness and whiteness are normed in online education may be why most studies conducted do not consider race and ethnicity in student demographics and may be perpetuating racial disparities in online education.

As defined by the social practices of society, the history of our educational systems comes from a predominantly white view and through assimilative tactics in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), which reproduce notions of whiteness (Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Whiteness is the normed cultural experience in American educational systems and is often supported behind colorblind practices in PWIs. The deep-rooted beliefs of racial and ethnic prejudices are justified for endorsing negative group traits and stereotypes (Fredrickson, 1997) when the behavior is outside of the normed practices. Peckman (1995) wrote: "A constellation of linguistic and cognitive codes mark students according to their class origins," and education seeks to provide experiences rooted in "egalitarianism" (p. 272). When the online environment promotes a colorblind environment, it creates a falsehood that "egalitarianism" exists.

Issues of racial disparity exist inside the classroom even though a diverse classroom promotes benefits to all students and enhances learning outcomes (Jayakumar, 2015). In traditional physical classrooms in PWIs, students of color might feel isolated, perceive their environments to be "hostile," or feel the need to "prove their intellectual abilities" (Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015, p. 16). Literature dedicated to the study of racial marginalization
focuses on the development of campus climate, co-curricular environments, and community building but assumes a physical presence (Quaye et al., 2015).

There is some evidence that marginalization occurs in the online classroom (see Dee, Baker, Evans, & John, 2018; Ke & Kwak, 2013; Rovai, 2002; Shih & Cifuentes, 2003). For example, the instructor and designer influence pedagogical choices in an online environment and are not culturally neutral (Killion, Gallagher-Lepak, & Reilly, 2015). Electronically focused and delivered instructional methods require us to think differently about the ways online students might experience racialization. The damage colorblindness and normed whiteness bring to students in face-to-face classrooms is well documented and researched, so it is reductive to assume the opposite for online students. When researchers, instructors, and practitioners assume a colorblindness perspective in online education, student support and experiences can be homogenized and minimized.

The disregard of racial differences, or assuming a colorblind environment, promotes and perpetuates racism today (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). With this racial ideology of disregarding racial differences pervading education, it cannot provide equitable or fair learning experiences for all students (see Jayakumar, 2015). Instead, privilege will continually go to white students, and students of color will continue to experience racial harm, creating stratified academic attainment and affirming that "whiteness" is the norm. Rovai (2002) found that students of color felt isolated and a sense of not belonging in their online learning communities. These feelings can lead to lower engagement and academic success.

Research shows students of color in online environments have lower graduation rates and lower GPAs (Baker, Dee, Evans, & John, 2018; Li, Wang, & Campbell, 2015; Palacios & Wood, 2013; Richardson, 2010, 2012; Stanley, 2014; Xu & Jaggars, 2014), but the reasons for these disparities in outcomes are unclear. Richardson (2010, 2012) suggests achievement differences are based on discriminatory practices, and that race and "[e] thnicity per se is almost certainly not
the effective variable influencing students' academic attainment. Rather, it is a proxy for other factors that have yet to be identified" (2012, p. 405-406). Richardson claims it is insufficient to assume that students with lower GPAs perform at lower academic quality while ignoring those who assign the grades and other "discriminatory policies and practices" (2012, p. 401). Although the online student is physically invisible, it does not remove biases found in grading, instruction, and course design. These biases are created and reinforced in society and culture and influence how we experience technology.

An imbalance in education exists when the standards of practice are rooted in whiteness and supported by the concepts of meritocracy and colorblindness. The educational systems exert control and power with rewards for those students who meet those expected outcomes. The basis for rules and norms from the dominating class that also set educational rewards does not change because of educational modality.

It is no longer enough to say that race matters in educational systems; instead, "how" race matters must be asked (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). How race matters in online education has not yet been fully investigated. Some studies offer insight into how race matters by looking at learning outcomes, enrollment patterns, student satisfaction, and academic outcomes (see Boston, Ice, & Gibson, 2011; Ke & Kwak, 2013; Li, Wang, & Campbell, 2015; Nadsen & List, 2016; Wladis, Conway, & Hachey, 2015; Wladis, Hachey, & Conway, 2015). Few studies ask students what their experience is like, especially as it relates to racialization (see Hall, 2017; Hopson, 2014; Tucker, 2014). This dissertation seeks to explore how students experience racialization in online education.
Purpose of Study

How racialization is perceived and experienced by students in an online classroom is an under-researched area of higher education and requires additional attention. Without exploring this phenomenon and addressing the findings, institutions of higher education run the risk of creating “another form of unintended educational segregation” (Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010, p. 1230). A better understanding of how students experience racialization in the online classroom will help reduce negative experiences. Additionally, as online education enrollments continue to increase, it is necessary to attend to online students.

This dissertation used the theoretical framework of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). This framework was an appropriate way to research this topic as it created a holistic view of the activity system of the online classroom experience. The analysis from the theoretical framework provided an understanding of how collectives are motivated by and move towards a shared goal. CHAT helped examine how the individual level response fit within the specific context of an online campus climate. The electronic survey instruments asked students about their experiences with general campus climate, academic climate, racial climate, and colorblindness perceptions. Documents and supporting interviews with faculty and staff created a descriptive narrative to explain the activity system. Together, these pieces of data helped me contextualize the online environment. Many issues associated with racist practices in the American higher education system endure, and this dissertation does not address all of them. Instead, it offers a holistic view of undergraduate student experiences, attending one PWI. This work aims to extend the research necessary to address issues of racialization in the online classroom environment.
Guiding Research Questions

Students go through an educational system and have personal experiences with its processes and practices, irrespective of modality. The United States’ educational system was built by and mainly maintained by Whites. Educational experiences in these systems have been shaped by the traditional classroom, leaving the socio-cultural connections to online education underexplored. With an increase of enrollment in online education, including students of color, and with the projected growth of Hispanic students enrolling in college (Grawe, 2018), it is timely to investigate how race and ethnicity matter to student experiences in online education.

The guiding research question for this study is:

What are the classroom experiences of racialization of undergraduate students attending college online?

This topic explored how students experience racialization in a so-called “cultural void” and challenged the concept that a colorblind environment is beneficial. Online students should receive the same quality of education and support services as face-to-face students (Chen, Lambert, & Guidry, 2010; Kuh, 2009). Much like the literature related to racialization in face-to-face (F2F) educational environments, understanding experiences of racialization in the context of an online classroom is needed.

Significance of Study

This dissertation research expands the literature of higher education by investigating student experiences of online education. This study offers increased awareness of the online student experience to develop and extend support for student success. Two reasons exist for why this study about online education deserved a targeted investigation and research: 1) online
education has reshaped the landscape of American higher education in ways that are unrepresented in the current literature; and 2) online education is unlike other forms of education and should be explored in context.

First, online education has changed the access and use of higher education. The unparalleled access to online education empowers students to earn their college degrees unlike any other time in our history. However, when educators create an educational process unaware of online environmental issues, particularly about race, they place students at a greater risk of educational failure. Online education offerings continue to increase (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2015, 2017), so it is time to expand the research on this section of higher education. Studies such as Ware and Stuck (2010) suggest that qualitative work in online education is needed to understand better how statistical relationships explain differences in academic success for students studying online. For example, personal stories allow for the interrogation of educational systems for functional changes and increased understanding (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Institutions may erroneously continue to assume online education provides a high-quality learning space, unaffected by students’ race and ethnicity, unless the student experience is fully explored.

There are pervasive assumptions that race and ethnicity are not crucial to online education students (see Enger, 2006; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Salvo, Shelton, & Welch, 2017) which impedes progress in supporting online students. The adverse effects of racialization on learning and society should be approached with purpose. Harper and Quaye (2015) argue that it is not enough to gather a diverse student population and assume “students will naturally learn about their peers simply by coming into contact with those who share different views, experiences, and identities” (p.7). Instead, institutions must make intentional and conscientious decisions about services with long-term strategies (Harper & Quaye, 2015). Harper and Quaye’s work focused on physical campuses. A parallel need for intentional and strategic approaches for online students arises. This study offers perspectives of the online college student experience of racialization.
Analyses based on data collected through student surveys and documents explored these perceptions and allowed for extensive interpretation of their online educational experience. These experiences will help institutions better understand student needs and guide in decision making for future supporting mechanisms for students attending online education.

The second reason online education deserved targeted investigations is that it shares too few characteristics with other distance education programs. The various distance education modalities require separate and distinct consideration, so more nuanced information about the experience, needs, and institutional responses can be identified. Studies often mix or interchange distance education and online education, confusing the unique experience of studying online. A study conducted by Koch (2005) highlighted the distinction between these modalities. This study investigated how students of different races and ethnic backgrounds experience one-way video with two-way audio-conferencing classes in a shared physical space. The author made two points relevant to this dissertation: bias in distance education and education modalities determine participation. Online instructors cannot see their students but can make assumptions from names and voices about race and ethnicity, which may play a part in either intentional or unintentional bias (see Baker, Dee, Evans, & John, 2018). Additionally, differences in modalities matter. Koch (2005) explained that the shared physical environment with other students might create a “chilled classroom atmosphere for minority students” (p. 48). The sharing of physical space is typically not part of the online student experience. However, it is unknown how online education produces a similar “chilling” feeling.

This study by Koch (2005) used the term distance education to describe the modality. Yet, the similarities in delivery, communication, and student-to-student interactions with online education students are few. The term distance education as a descriptor for education in which the instructor and student are physically separated made sense until online education. Nevertheless, using the term distance education as a synonym for online education confuses the
specificity of education. The literature related to the student experience through *distance education* provides minimal help with online education investigations. Online education is uniquely different from *distance education* because it is delivered asynchronously and is unlikely to share a physical space. The plethora of *distance education* literature makes it seem as if there is more research about online education than there is. This study adds to the growing literature specific to online education.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Campus Climate** is the essence, perception, and feeling of the college campus environment (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Campus climate refers to how the individual students interact with the campus (Hart & Fellabaum, 2008) and how students are affected by established structures from external parties and internal influences from socio-historical factors (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998). The campus climate for online students is seemingly more abstract than that of traditional colleges and universities, as components of the external and internal influences are not immediately accessible. For example, the physical campus will have had buildings erected during the founding days of the institution and now carry decades worth of institutional history in renovations, look, and usage. Campus climate will be used to describe the “context” or the setting in which the online classroom is taking place and does not mean the campus climate is located within a server or a website. Instead, climate represents the essence of the actions, connections, and feelings associated with attending online education and its institutional home.
Colorblind is the term used to describe the notion that by not seeing a person’s race, there is equality in treatment and that racism no longer exists. Colorblindness is often confused with being neutral about race and not to seem racist. This false assumption extends through the “virtual veil” (Palacios & Wood, 2016) of online education. The term colorblindness creates a false comparison between those people who have limited sight and ignorance (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017), and used to convey the physical separation between the instructor and students in which the physical cues of race are removed. This term helps discuss online education but should not be confused with an unawareness of color, which is often the case in literature. Colorblindness assumes that students’ race and ethnicity online can be discounted in online education and is often promoted to benefit online students (see Enger, 2006). Colorblindness disconnects the systems and conditions of the social context of race and suggests racism only happens when there is an ability to see someone (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017). The term can serve as a “silencing mechanism” (Vue, Haslerig, & Allen, 2017) to people of color.

The term “color-evasive” is more accurate, as promoted by Annamma, Jackson, and Morrison (2017). It places race at the forefront of an active willingness to “obliterate” the idea that racism still exists (p. 155). Colorblind is used in this dissertation for three reasons: 1) researchers and authors of included literature use this term, and it is kept to acknowledge the work of others; 2) the idea of seeing and hearing class members and instructors is a critical part of the differences between online education and F2F; and 3) the scale is entitled the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale. I acknowledge there is a difference in terms and will use color-evasive in my writing and analysis and believe it is a more appropriate term.

Culture is a set of shared norms, values, and behaviors of a group of people (Yosso, 2005). Culture can subculture into different layers of society with a localized classroom culture to city
culture and national culture. How individuals learn is embedded in culture and is influenced by how society uses artifacts.

**Ethnicity** is often used along with the term “race” and refers to social grouping by nationality, ancestry, language development, cultural practices, and religious observations. Ethnicity can be defined as the “distinction between groups of people based on behavior and culture” (Edwards, Fillingim, & Keffe, 2001, p. 134). Ethnicity, in part, is influenced by socialization and the psychological development of a cultural understanding that comes from that process (Helms & Talleyrand, 1997). Like racism, ethnicity is a social construct and is sometimes shaped by a shared history of oppression and control (Gunaratnam, 2011). Ethnic groupings are unstable; they change over time through “social processes and individual experiences” (Gunaratnam, 2011, p. 6). Race and ethnicity warrant distinct separations in educational research, especially when investigating languages, cultural practices and religious observations. Race and ethnicity are often combined and confused in census and frequency counting. This dissertation reflects on students’ perceptions of colorblindness which does not differentiate between race and ethnicity, and a lot of the literature included in the second chapter also combines race and ethnicity. Thus, this dissertation will not separate race and ethnicity.

**Distance education** is typically used as an umbrella term to describe non-traditional classroom settings in which the instructor and student are physically separated. This definition poses problems as several different forms of distance education are included in one term, with online education being one. The term distance education is used purposefully in this dissertation as the broader umbrella term and not a synonym for online education.
In-residence instruction, also labeled as Face-to-Face (F2F) instruction, requires the physical location where the educational activity takes place to be the same for both the students and instructor. This setting is also considered traditional education in a college or university.

Online education is the delivery mechanism for computer-based learning and credentialing. Students are not typically in close physical proximity to one another and are only connected through electronic technology-based communication. Much of online education is experienced as asynchronous learning with minimal audible or visual interaction between peers. Allen and Seaman (2016) classify online education as having 80%, or more of the course content delivered electronically with no in-person meetings.

Race is a social construct (Tatum, 2008) and creates damaging categories for how humans separate people (Koko, Nakamura, & Rodman, 2000). Starting in the middle 1600s, white Europeans were declared as the first race and used as the standard by which all other races were compared (Kendi, 2016). Those in power and authority used and propagated a false biological science to uphold self-interest, racist ideas, and social hierarchy (Kendi 2016) throughout history, creating racial discrimination and led to ignorance and hate (Kendi, 2016). Racial discrimination provides privilege and power to white Americans in the United States and systematically withholds that power from people of color (Diangelo, 2018). Racism is systemic and will continue to be problematic in the United States until laws and institutions undo racist-based influences and policies.

Virtual veil is created by the visual, auditory, and physical separation created by technology. Palacios and Wood (2016) also include asynchronous delivery of materials. The virtual veil creates anonymity through technology.
Chapter 1 Summary

Participation in online education is growing and promoted as a beneficially colorblind environment valuable to students. Nevertheless, racialization is firmly rooted in our socio-cultural practices and thus extends to our use of technology. Education and technology as products of our society reaffirm whiteness as the hegemonic and normed practices. The intersection of education and technology manifests as online education and cannot be void of racialization. Online students have varied and multiple identities, previous life and educational experiences, and diverse race and ethnic backgrounds that do not disappear when attending online classes. Although "distance learning often is 'sold' as a mode of learning that makes gender, race, and national origin irrelevant" (Koch, 2005, p. 48), socio-cultural influences make this impossible. This study intended to understand students' experiences of racialization while participating in online classrooms.

A literature review is provided in the next chapter to help frame what is already known about students' experiences of racialization in an online classroom. The theoretical framework of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is presented and used throughout to help analyze the included literature. Studies including racialization in higher education provide evidence that this phenomenon has been studied before with college students. Next, literature dedicated to the racialization of online spaces and cyber-racism helps reroute the idea that technology is a colorblind environment. Last, studies related to how race and ethnicity have been studied in online education are reviewed.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This dissertation explored the intersection of higher education and technology within a racialized socio-cultural context. This literature review seeks to answer the question: what does the current body of literature say about the racialized experience of students studying online? After the theoretical framework, three significant topics provide relevant context to this question.

First, I present the theoretical framework, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), with an overview and history. CHAT is a useful tool because it provides a complete view of the system to analyze how subjects, tools and artifacts, objects, division of labor, community, and the rules, roles, and norms through which students move. I explain what constitutes a contradiction and disturbance of an activity system and ground technology as a cultural artifact. Next, I use the literature on racialization in higher education and the literature about cyber-racism and racialization in other online spaces to explore how related topics are studied. Although the literature dedicated to studying experiences of racialization in online classrooms is incomplete, these two topics help frame the socio-cultural influences of racism, how racism in online spaces is studied, and that technology is not colorblind. Last, the studies related to race and ethnicity in online education are summarized. Through these components, I bring together current relevant pieces of how students may experience racialization in online classroom spaces.
Conceptual Framework: Activity Theory and CHAT

Lev Vygotsky said that humans are motivated by goals to perform certain types of activities (see Kouzlin, 2005; Vygotsky, 1934). Individuals may share the same motivation but perform different activities or may perform the same activities with different motivations. His original premise was that a person was motivated by something, a stimulus, and with a tool acted upon the stimulus to arrive at the response. This interaction creates an activity system or a shared process by a group of people. The activity system develops a shared goal (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) to which actions are focused. Vygotsky proclaimed that humans are socialized and are products of culture and thus, the tools used to achieve the full response were informed and cultivated by the social, historical, and cultural context of the tool. The tool took on the meaning and its use given to it by society. Later scholars, like Lewin and Leont’ev, expanded Vygotsky’s work, adding more socio-cultural influence to his notion of stimulus→mediated tool→response and, in doing so, created the second generation of what is now known as Activity Theory (Leont’ev, 1978). This second and subsequent third generation adds cultural-historical aspects to activity theory resulting in CHAT. It is not the goal of Activity Theory or CHAT to predict an outcome, but rather explain how someone interacts with and between the six components of an activity system, and with the help of mediating factors or artifacts, to arrive at an outcome (Benson, Lawler, & Whitworth, 2008). Because this theory offers a holistic approach in looking at a system, such as online education, I gained perspective about how the system creates a racialized environment and the nature of students’ experiences moving through that system.

CHAT, like activity theory, offers a flexible framework in which to view how actions, operations, and motivations create systems. For this dissertation, the activity system will be that of online education. I use an adapted version of Engeström’s activity triangles to conceptualize and model this system (see Figure 2-1). The activity triangle is a visual representation of the
interconnectedness of six elements to explain how an outcome is modeled. Each system is defined by the six elements and unique to the motivating goal or outcome of the overall system. While some systems may share an outcome, the six defining elements may not always be the same. For example, the division of labor for a teacher of F2F instruction will be different from the division of labor of an online instructor because responding directly to the student in person is not an option. Instead, the online instructor will use tools to create an audio, visual, or written response as the system moves toward the outcome of an educated student.

Figure 2-1: Online Education Activity System, (adapted from Engeström, Engeström, and Vähäaho, 1999).

CHAT contains six interactive and interconnective elements that constantly mediate parts of the system (Gedera, 2014). Defining the six elements is essential when applying this theory in a successful manner. Next, the six elements are defined in context to this dissertation and based on the work of Mwanza and Engeström (2003) and Engeström (2008).

- **Subject** is the individual or group who performs the mediated activity to achieve the object.

  For this dissertation, students and faculty will be considered as subjects. Individuals may find
parts of the activity system are more motivating than others and may make different meanings from the activity system, so it is unhelpful comparing persons from different groups when differences in motivations exist (Tharp & Gillimore, 1988).

- **Tools** are the artifacts, both physical and abstract, that assist the subject in achieving the object. Often in online education, the learning management system (LMS) is the tool, but other physical tools exist, like syllabi, websites, computers, etc. Cognitive and psychological tools are also used in learning.

- **Object** is the reason for the activity system and to which the roles, community, division of labor interconnect with the subject and mediating tool. The object can change depending on the subjects of the system. The object in this dissertation is the education of students through online education and the achievement of course or program stated learning goals, such as skill development or problem-solving techniques.

- **Community** is the group, external and internal, who influence the activity. For this dissertation, the community is the student population, faculty, staff, administrators, and those external to the institution. This constellation may look different for online students than traditional students as community is abstract in online and distance education.

- **Rules/Roles/Norms** are the normed behavior of the activity system. For this dissertation, these include institutional policy; constraints of the LMS and other technologies; and other interactions involving informal norms and communication, especially for those rooted in whiteness. For example, there are informal communication practices of posting comments on social networking sites that may not be considered appropriate for an online classroom discussion (see Deng & Tavares, 2013).

- **Division of labor** identifies which subject performs what actions within the activity system, such as the teacher providing academic content and the student responding to the content in
preordered ways. The division of labor is heavily regulated by the rules of the activity system (Engeström, 1987).

**Contradictions, Tensions, and Disturbances**

Changing one of the elements will change the activity system. The activity system does not create a hierarchy within the elements. Instead, the framework acknowledges that all the elements coexist in the system together. However, the system is not always in perfect balance and working as expected for all individuals involved in the system; rather, the activity system can be in a state of variability (Engeström, 2000). Tensions from these imbalances may arise in any of the elements that will create a disturbance and uncover a contradiction within the system. Disturbances can be such things as "obstacles, difficulty, failure, disagreement, or conflict" as influenced by personal relationships or interactions with the other elements (Engeström, 2008, p. 24). These disturbances likely look and feel different by individuals and take on characteristics of one of two types of disturbances. Disturbances are "critical" when there is a value-laden assessment needed to resolve the tension in the system. Critical disturbances often manifest in "substantive disagreements, fears, or other strong indications of systemic contradictions" (Engeström, 2008, p. 38). "Technical" disturbances are not value-laden. They only require a technical or work-oriented solution directed at a problem, not a surfacing or negotiation of values. Both types of disturbances lead to "deviations from the normal scripted course of events in the work process, normal being defined by plans, explicit rules and instructions, or tacitly assumed traditions" (Engeström, 2008, p. 24). Often, it is hard to determine if a disturbance actually occurred or was just expected to occur (Engeström, 2008).

The activity system is always defined by the six elements: subjects, objects, artifacts and tools, division of labor, community, and rules and norms. The links between these six elements in
the activity system are typically stable and have expected normed outcomes (Engeström, 2008). But not all subjects in the system will share the same experience, and this may be because a disturbance existed between two elements and thus changed the normed outcome (Engeström, 2008). Disturbances uncover the contradictions or the "clash" between individuals and the activity system (Engeström, 1987) or the tensions between two elements of the activity system (Engeström, 2008). Contradictions "are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems" (Engeström, 2018, p. 50). When contradictions are exposed, the activity system is more accepting to change (Levant, 2018; Tan & Thorius, 2019).

Contradictions often exist at the system level and "are a key to understanding the sources of trouble" in the system and provides an understanding for "the innovative and developmental potentials of the activity" (as cited by (Engeström, 2008, p. 27). Levels of contradictions exist within or in between elements in the central activity. Primary contradictions are found within the elements of an activity system between an activity’s exchange value and use value (Engeström, 2019). Exchange value is designated by society as a commodity assigned a price whereas use value maintains a physical utility; the item with high exchange value is likely to have low use value and vice versa (Eggert, Ulaga, Frow, & Payne, 2018). Whereas secondary contradictions exist between elements in the activity system, such as between the community and subjects (Engeström, 2019, Foot & Groleau, 2011). Tertiary contradictions are between the dominant motive and a new cultural motive (Engeström, 2019) and quaternary contradictions are between “the central activity system and neighboring systems” (Foot & Groleau, 2011, Quaternary contradiction, para. 1). Contradictions manifest because of tensions in the system.

Tensions are likely to be created and caused by the history and context of the system, which is brought to the system by individuals or sub-groups (Netteland, Wasson, & Mørch, 2007). Said differently, tensions reveal a mismatch between tools and purpose. The activity system creates a view of and focus on a local context, smaller than, yet nevertheless taking on,
characteristics of larger social and cultural systems (Levant, 2018). Tensions and contradictions related to "broader social relations" are often excluded in the analysis with CHAT (Levant, 2018, p. 103), but that is a limitation of prior studies. The hidden attributes of social systems, like patriarchy and white-centric practices, can be examined in local activity systems in different and discrete ways.

Engeström (1987) described the hidden attributes of systems with examples found in tribes. The expected labor based on physiological traits, like gender, were controlled in the system by rules and roles. This influence can be translated to an activity system of education. For example, in their case study work about inequities in mathematics education, Tan and Thorius (2019) found that the rules associated with two types of teachers impacted the ways in which the teachers performed labor. Tan and Thorius (2019) found that special education teachers' work was different from the work of general education teachers. The special education teachers were not considered "mathematics instructors" and subsequently excluded from curriculum and pedagogical discussions. This exclusion created a division of labor between the "types" of teachers, even though content and objectives were the same. Uncovering contradictions and exposing tensions related to racialization of the online education activity system will provide institutions with a place to start making changes in thoughtful ways (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Tan & Thorius, 2019).

**Third Generation of CHAT**

The Third Generation of CHAT includes at least two activity systems that interact when an object is shared and serve as the center of the analysis of the systems. The education of students, for example, is a shared object in which the activity systems of F2F and online education overlap (see Figure 2-2). The interactions between elements of the F2F and online
activity systems are not yet known. Murphy and Rodriquez Manzanares (2008) use third-generation activity theory to detail the differences between physical and virtual high school classrooms. The elements may be defined in similar ways in both activity systems, such as teachers as subjects, the definition, and interaction between mediating tools, division of labor, rules/roles/norms, and community change depending on the activity system. They found that using certain tools to check for understanding, such as “body language, visual cues, and facial expressions,” had to change in the virtual classroom. The contradiction between the systems forced a change to different types of tools.

In a study conducted by Bradshaw, Parchoma, and Lock (2017), two activity systems were conceptualized and modeled to investigate formal and informal learning in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). When the tensions of the formal and informal activity systems were mapped, it became clear that the two systems' shared objects existed and could be cultivated. The implications of this interaction are sizeable for instructional designers because, as this study suggests, the formal online educational environment can be coupled with informal educational learning opportunities to create an expanded educational experience. Bradshaw, Parchoma, and Lock (2017) organized their five themes with the CHAT elements in mind. For example, they found that rules relating to the structure of learning changed in informal learning situations because students have "flexibility," are without "limitations," and are not provide instructions (p. 45). Exposing this tension as part of the system helps learning designers expand the sharing
between formal and informal education experiences.

Figure 2- 2: Interacting activity systems, adapted from Engeström, 2018.

Tensions that uncover contradictions have transformative power in the system (Engeström, 2018; Murphy & Rodriguez Manzanares, 2013; Tan & Thorius, 2019). Murphy and Rodriguez Manzanares (2008) intersected the activity systems of F2F and virtual classrooms in a high school setting. They found contradictions existed in the ways in which teachers controlled the classroom and interacted with the students. These contradictions existed because the mediating artifacts of physical and visual cues differed from the F2F to the virtual classroom. Teachers had to adapt and change how they communicated with students; the availability of electronic messaging allowed for both private and public conversations to be held concurrently, which is not possible in the F2F classroom (Murphy & Rodriguez Manzanares, 2008). The two types of modality, F2F and online instruction, requires modification to the division of labor. If the modification does not happen, then a contradiction will manifest in the system (Tan & Thorius, 2019), disrupting the activity system. Contradictions that are "invisible" or "undiscussable," like uncovering the normed whiteness in the supposed culturally-void online classroom, are harder to identify but are "springboards for growth" (as cited by Murphy & Rodriguez Manzanares, 2013, p. 446).
The need for cultural diversity challenges the third generation of CHAT. Engeström (2018) identifies five principles that CHAT must address concerning "dialogue, multiple perspectives, and networks of activity systems" (p. 48). Also missing from the third generation are dynamics of social power, identity, and/or emotions of those involved in the activity system (Lee, 2011). However, the framework could support these additional elements (see Figure 2-3). These missing elements influence how the activity system functions and changes, especially in a society built on hierarchical dynamics and subsequent cultural structures of whiteness.

![Activity system inside influencing factors of power, identity, and emotions](image)

Figure 2-3: Activity system inside influencing factors of power, identity, and emotions.

Vygotsky originally claimed that biology does not strictly influence a person; people’s actions are meaningful because of culture and the development of tool use is rooted in social influences (Kozulin, 2005). The ways tools are used, both psychological tools and physical tools, take on contemporary meanings as they change over time (Kozulin, 2005). From the perspective of CHAT, the initial use and deployment of the Internet as a colorblind environment have changed since the inception.
Technology as a Cultural Artifact

The Internet holds social and cultural meaning, shaped by its history, and thus should be studied in context. A society gives meaning to the Internet and, by extension, online education. "We [must] create a tool which is specifically designed to create what we ultimately want to produce," which then becomes "inseparable from the activity of their development" (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 5). Online education was, in part, developed as a tool to produce educational offerings to those not physically located in the same space. Studies of online education are inattentive to social and cultural context, much like the practices in the early days of the Internet (Nakamura, 2008). Everything carries context because nothing can act in isolation (see Issroff & Scanlon, 2002), including online education; it is created, informed, and changed by people using the tool.

A significant intersection exists between the Internet and society as most people now use the Internet; the Pew Research Center states that 89% of adults in America use the Internet. In the beginning days of the Internet, most persons accessing the Internet were white. There is now a stronger online presence of Black and Hispanic Americans, albeit still a discrepancy across race and ethnicity; adult usage is reported as 92% white, 85% Black, and 86% Hispanic (Pew Research Center, 2019). Based on the concept that those who use the tool can change it, the changing demographics may challenge the Internet's original white-dominant culture.

Tools are the foundation of culture (Cole, 1998), shaped by the activity, and "through using tools, man [sic] changes himself and his culture" (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 6). This iterative process means that humans have changed culture because humans interact with and use the Internet. It does not mean that the Internet is strictly a physical tool; it is also conceptual and shaped over time by those who use it (Cole, 1998). The same can be said about online education. Much of the literature dedicated to online education studies consider the Learning Management
System (LMS) as the only relevant artifact or the outcome/product of education, such as retention and graduation rates. However, cultural tools and the tool-as-product develop in concert (Newman & Holzman, 1993), meaning there is no separation between the changing ways a tool is used and the expected outcome. Online education was developed in the Internet space, assuming that culture and social attributes did not exist or did not matter. Nevertheless, evidence exists that there is a connection between socio-cultural practices and beliefs and interactions within online spaces.

In a systematic literature review Bluic, Faulkner, Jabubowicz, and McGarty (2018) detail the research in which technology spreads racist ideas and practices. Online spaces now provide expansive places for racist behaviors because the "geographical limitations and other differences are irrelevant" as the online space has no physical limits to bring together or keep apart like-minded people (p. 82). Things like social media platforms, blogs, and mass emailing did not exist when the Internet was developed. These new technologies continue to multiply how racism spreads through online mechanisms, including "social creativity, re-framing of information and arguments, and humour [sic] [which] is especially worrying in a current global climate of tension between different cultural groups" (p. 83).

Stark differences between online racism and in-person racism occur. Technology can provide anonymity to those using it, a chief difference between online and in-person experiences and may boost racist activity online (Bluic et al., 2018; Keum & Miller, 2017). The ways racist beliefs and ideas spread online are different than in-person and are more "pervasive than offline racism" (Keum & Miller, 2017). Online racism is uniquely manifested in online activities and shared and transmitted in a variety of digital formats. Unlike face-to-face offline interactions, online racism is experienced in the form of texts, comments, memes, photos, or videos that exist in perpetuity and shared among many people (Keum & Miller, 2017, p. 311).
The pervasiveness of online racism extends to college campuses because of social media's extensive use (Tynes, Rose, & Markoe, 2013). College students use social media platforms daily to communicate and find entertainment (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013). Social media networks are considered a connecting factor for college campuses (University of Leicester, 2008) and, in some cases, extend the idea of education through the sharing of materials and experiences (see Deng & Tavares, 2013). A deep connection between cyber-racism and social media usage extends to the college campus and easily spreads "racial antagonism" throughout the in-residence student body (Gin, Martinez-Aleman, Knight, Radimer, Lewis, & Rowan-Kenyon, 2016, p. 29).

How cyber-racism intersects with online college level education is not yet known. Nevertheless, the association between racism, racialization, and technology is evident. The Internet initially started as a utopia is now a dystopia filled with easy and cheap ways to initiate and spread racist practices and behaviors. Technology use has been shaped and developed over time because socio-cultural factors influence the tool of technology. While instructors and classrooms, either physical or online, may not be intentionally promoting racist material, the use of technology suggests that the online classroom is not a cultural void or beneficially colorblind for students.

The study of online education needs to happen within the socio-cultural context of technology. CHAT provides a framework to examine the activities of people and helps locate the separation between individuals and the "collective" (Roth & Lee, 2007, p. 191). It is a useful framework to study the system of online education so that the activity is no longer considered in isolation from society. The interconnected elements of the activity system feature how the relationships between the student, the system, and the goals function, successfully or unsuccessfully, together.
Racialization in the Higher Education Literature

Race, especially whiteness, has shaped much of American culture, yet race has not been fully incorporated and analyzed with perspectives presented in Vygotsky's original work about culture (Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Vygotsky considered language to be a symbolic tool, influenced by culture, and not simply representing a material object. He believed language is the culmination of many things shared across generations and societies. In the case of the United States, language is rooted firmly in a white-dominant structure and "illuminates the process whereby whites learn to be white" (Leonardo & Manning, 2017, p. 17) in our educational settings. Dissection of racialization in our educational systems is warranted to fully expose the racial ideologies that keep students of color from reaching full potential and harmfully instill white students into false racial superiority notions (Leonardo & Manning, 2017). This context is critically important when working with CHAT because otherwise, the cultural nuances of systems are overlooked (Benson, Lawler, & Whitworth, 2008).

The following section highlights examples of how racialization in higher education has been studied. The first study is a case study that demonstrates how institutional processes can lead to a racialized environment, and the second study explores the development of racial identity in college. The third study shows how curriculum plays a vital role in reasserting whiteness. These studies show socio-cultural factors influence interactions between CHAT elements. When viewed critically, these studies can help address areas of contradictions ready for change.

In their book Engaging the Race Question, Dowd and Bensimon (2015) use CHAT as the theoretical framework for analyzing organizational learning in colleges and universities that carried out the Equity Scorecard action research process. The Equity Scorecard is designed to provide a sense of where an institution stands regarding equity through "data use, reflective practice, experimentation, and evaluation" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 17). It is a process that
reflects on institutional practices, artifacts, and community to dismantle institutionalized racism. The Equity Scorecard convened faculty, staff, and administrators as evidence teams to review artifacts and provide a "language tool for questioning cultural assumptions" (p. 21) that may lead to lower success rates for students of color. Rules, norms, and roles are specifically outlined to combat the social privilege of those involved in the process. In doing this, the Equity Scorecard mitigates technical disturbances, such as people leaving early from meetings while highlighting the critical disturbance of the value-laden institutionalized racism. The CHAT framework helped the Equity Scorecard team with analyzing the "lived experience of contradictions between democratic ideals and the failures of our educational institutions to function equitably" (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015, p. 48). The team members were often uncomfortable talking about race and tried to move the conversations by introducing more general terms and diversity. The language needed for conversations about equity is politicized and ambiguous, diminishing or hiding the actual problem about equity and fairness in education. Racial disparities are normed until the inequities in education are examined (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015), and only when the tension in the system creates a disturbance can change happen.

In a different approach, Cabrera (2012) explored what it means to develop whiteness as a racial identity in a study conducted with white males on a college campus. The study's theoretical framework used "liberatory praxis," or when a person’s actions are based on theory (Cabrera, 2012, p. 381). When I apply CHAT to interpret the findings of this study, the reproduction of racist behaviors and activities is shown through whiteness's normalization, creating the setting for how students move through their college experience. The study's white male participants opened up about how they saw their privilege in the community, rules and norms, and division of labor. This was shown through participants' narratives of media portrayals of Black men and the relationship created with the community. For example, a white participant was assumed to be the victim and not the aggressor in fights, which speaks to social norms rooted in whiteness.
The division of labor is reflected with the realization that racialization is the responsibility of white people to understand and not for people of color to educate white students. Cabrera wrote:

This project was initially intended as a means of analyzing White male racial ideologies and the collegiate experiences that influence them. Instead, the participant narratives illuminated the process by which White men engage and struggle with working through Whiteness. Their narratives tended to begin with racial cognizance development that was prompted through cross-racial contact and multicultural education (2012, p. 394).

From a CHAT perspective, the cross-racial social interactions happened in the community while the multicultural education served as an artifact; both influenced the outcome of the students' development of their racial ideologies. In other words, the participants uncovered the contradictions and exposed tensions between themselves and the institutionalized racist systems in American higher education. It is up to white people to disrupt the system based on racial inequities (Cabrera, 2012) and make visible what is currently "invisible to many Whites but [what is visible] to people of color" (Knight, 2006, p. 329). Whites must learn the "racialized activity system [is] driven by the white collective unconscious" (Leonardo & Manning, 2017, p. 24).

In her work of art teacher preparation, Knight (2006) focused on teachers' use of sight and the development of the "cultural eye" needed to teach art in a culturally responsive classroom and not from a white-only-orientation. Art education is not simply about aesthetics; it manifests socio-cultural influences represented in visual formations. Art requires a critical review of how power and hierarchy are symbolized (Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, & Knight, 2007). Knight (2006) points out that visual cues often define race, and art education relies heavily on sight; nevertheless, whiteness is invisible in the art curriculum. "White/ness in art education is out of sight/site/cite…[whereas pieces of art by Whites are]…disproportionately in sight/site/cite" (Knight, 2006, p. 330). White as a race is claimed to be the default race. Art education, heavily based on visual cues and the use of colorblindness in curriculum, teacher preparation, and classroom work, is evident and makes for an interesting contrast to the visually hidden nature of
online education. Although using sight in art education is as present as sight is absent from online education, colorblindness continues to pervade these educational settings.

In a study with online students training to be art teachers, Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, and Knight (2007) presented a lesson on personal values related to selected cultural artifacts. The selected objects "can reveal cultural narratives of power and privilege" through curated discussions (p. 20). As art instructors, understanding cultural artifacts' importance is key to helping dismantle the subtle messages of racist society practices. Even with a discipline dependent upon visual cues, such as art education, socio-cultural influences are not entirely hidden behind the virtual veil of being online. Meaning, cultural artifacts' socio-cultural significance still comes through the modality of online education, challenging the "colorblindness-as-a-benefit" argument in the online environment (see Enger, 2006, Salvo, Shelton, & Welch, 2017). Keifer-Boyd, Amburgy, and Knight (2007) concluded their study with this ideal:

[There are] are points of departure from dominant educational paradigms that enable … teachers to explore relationships between larger historic, social, and economic constructs, and the ways teachers and students are situated in positions of power and privilege. Gaining knowledge of both the positions [teachers] occupy and the positions from which we speak enables us to take responsibility for and transform our beliefs and actions” (p. 24).

Notably, this study included online students. While the modality was not central to the study, it informs the argument that irrespective of modality, the educational activity system is greatly influenced by those participating in the system and shapes by our collective socio-cultural history.

When CHAT is applied to these pieces about art education, the authors are challenging students to see how their culture influences the ways their interactions between the elements of the activity system are formed. Knight’s (2006) work relies on emotional responses and personal reflections, which the CHAT framework currently excludes. A tension exists between the “complicit--wittingly or unwittingly--in maintaining a cycle of oppression and race privilege in
their own teaching practice” in a system designed to hide whiteness and all the social benefits that come with it (Knight, 2006, p. 341). In the language of Vygotsky, society created whiteness as a symbol of culture that serves as an “intermediary between stimulus and response,” or the foundation for the learning process (Leonardo & Manning, 2017). Arguably, the foundation of education in the United States is built upon white-supremacy ideals and whiteness serves as the only mediating factor available (Leonardo & Manning, 207) in the activity system at large.

**Cyber-racism and Racialization in Online Spaces**

Technology is a reflective tool of society that allows for racist and racialized experiences to spread and, in some cases, prevail. The Internet allows for anonymity, leading to other forms of racism (Bluic et al., 2018; Keum & Miller, 2017). Social media users bring their own beliefs and experiences (Marwick, 2013) to online spaces. Online expressions of racism are more "pervasive," are "permanent," and are harder to remove online than in real life (Keum & Miller, 2017, p. 311). Nevertheless, social networks or online spaces in which people can connect directly with each other "now [play] a central role in campus life" (Tynes, Rose, & Markoe, 2013, p. 110). The studies included here help show how online behavior has an impact on the offline lives of users. The boundary between online and offline lives is blurred. Real psychological consequences happen to people with online interactions (Tynes, Lozada, Smith, & Stewart, 2018). These studies have also measured the effects through survey methods. The online environment’s context is included in these studies, underscoring the differences between F2F and online contexts.

In a qualitative study conducted in 2008, Kurubacak examined the use of blogs and found three types of racist behaviors; open and direct racist language and methods; violent-racism,
utilizing violence and fear; and covert-racism, which uses racist actions or words that may or may not be intentional (p. 416). Covert-racism replaces blatant racism, which can harm the "cyber-community" created in blogs and the socio-cultural connections to real life. The data collected from survey and interviews indicated participants agreed blogs can be used for covert-racism. As a result, the bloggers have a responsibility to produce material free of covert-racist language and ideas. This study aimed not to support censure but rather to provide a dialogue of support to the blogger community to avoid covert-racist practices. Said differently, the use of covert-racism in blogger communities could be seen as a structural issue of the system that requires changes to roles, rules, and norms.

People online can choose their identity and even change identities when needed in ways not possible in F2F situations (Marwick, 2013). The Kurubacak (2008) study is helpful as it calls for the blogging community to act. This study also acknowledges that the writers are real people with identities and experiences and not just anonymous, ambiguous posts. People's assertion that others have seemingly different identities online is no longer the case (Marwick, 2013). Our socio-cultural lives ingratiate technology to interact with people we know in F2F environments and easily do with small, always-connected devices (Marwick, 2013). This type of online racist behavior is growing and becoming a concern for mental health (Tynes, Rose, & Williams, 2010). The Online Victimization Scale (OVS), which was based on the Youth Internet Safety Survey I, was developed to provide strong "psychometric properties" that look at individual and vicarious racial discrimination online (Tynes, Rose, & Williams, 2010). This instrument is one way to understand the impact of online behavior on mental health. The four subscales of the OVS instrument contain online victimization, online sexual discrimination, individual online racial discrimination, and vicarious online racial discrimination. The OVS is an electronic survey for adolescents and strives to explore the relationship between online victimization and psychological effects. One study of OVS found females had higher scores for general online victimization. Ad
hoc testing showed that "Asian Americans and Biracial students experienced significantly more individual online racial discrimination than African Americans" and that Biracial students experienced more vicarious online racial discrimination (Tynes, Rose, & Williams, 2010, p. 8). Additionally, the researchers found that a year different in age played a factor in general online victimization; the 17-year-old students sensed more victimization than the 18-year-old students, as measured by this instrument. The OVS sought why the online victimization happened, and in doing so, the OVS blurs the boundaries between actions online and the reactions offline. In highlighting the affects between online and offline lives, technology can no longer be isolated from our socio-cultural selves; what happens online does not stay online. Instead, online action influences the mental health and wellbeing of users (Tynes, Rose, & Williams, 2010).

The OVS studies were conducted with teenagers and overall small samples (n= 222 and n=254, respectively). The results show the interactions between F2F and online environments have a seemingly symbiotic connection and that the barrier anticipated at the start of the Internet is not there. The findings also suggest that older students have different perceptions about their experiences online (see also Keum & Miller, 2018) and that students experience online racism differently. For example, the students identified as Biracial had the highest scores of individual experiences with online racism. The OVS bring F2F interactions to the online survey with questions around clothing and other questions that assume these students are going to F2F school together. Close physical proximity is not something likely to be experienced by online students who may never act together in person. While the OVS is not easily modified for an online education context, it shows that socio-cultural influences bridge the gap between on and offline lives.

In their work developing a survey tool, Keum and Miller (2017) explain that online racist behavior “is experienced in the form of texts, comments, memes, photos, and/or videos that exist in perpetuity and are shared among many people” (p. 311). Additionally, the nature of online
interactions and the pervasiveness exposes some people to racist stories and materials that they may not otherwise experience. This “vicarious” effect is not typically captured in studies about racism (Keum & Miller, 2017). These differences are important when compared to F2F experiences and require a different kind of measure.

Keum and Miller (2017) developed the Perceived Online Racism Scale (PORS) with three subscales specific to online experiences; Personal Experience of Racial Cyber-Aggression (PERCA) is exposure to direct online racial aggression; Vicarious Exposure to Racial Cyber-Aggression (VERCA) is observed aggression towards others; and Online Mediated Exposure to Racist Reality (OMERR) is contact with online content that reaffirms racist practices. The PORS is the first of its kind, “specifically designed to assess the unique diverse online activities through which people experience racism as they interact with others online” (Keum & Miller, 2018, p.1).

The measure’s items are rooted in literature, aligned to other types of scales, and edited for clarity. Experts and focus groups also contributed by helping to identify redundant and/or confusing questions. In the initial study (n=1,023 “racial minorities”), the authors found that the PORS links to mental health, like the OVS findings. While the PORS findings are like other online surveys, the PORS detailed the vicarious exposure (VERCA) had a greater effect than personal experience (PERCA). “The Internet provides convenient access to a vast amount of vicariously felt racism experiences that one simply does not encounter offline. The sheer volume of these experiences, therefore, may be the most potent racism-related stressor on the Internet” (Keum & Miller, 2017, p. 321). The subsequent study (Keum & Miller, 2018) tested invariance across age and gender and found younger students (18-24) have higher levels of exposure to racism than older people (25-39, 40-64) overall. The assumption is that younger people spend more time online than older people; yet 25-39 scored higher on the PERCA than the other age groups, indicating some personal experience with racism. This result is noteworthy as the average age for online students is within the 25-39 age range (Aslanian, Clinefelter, & Magda, 2019).
Additionally, Keum and Miller (2018) found that gender and age matter when perceiving online racism. However, while their findings show women have a higher perception of online racism, men reported experiences of racism more frequently.

These studies show that online racism matters for students coming to an online classroom because their experiences with online racist material and behavior may set expectations about an online classroom climate. Students who regularly participate in the anonymity of posting and reposting racist material may no longer associate socio-cultural cues of racist behaviors in the online classroom, making it easier to reassert racist behavior in an online classroom. Those students who may identify as victims of such behavior may already have negative feelings about online interactions, regardless of the college classroom climate. The rules, roles, and norms of using the Internet may already be in place for online students, and that cyber-racism is a critical disturbance of the activity system that requires thoughtful intervention. Racist actions take place online and studies like that of the PORS show how people are exposed to and experience online racism. While the PORS is valuable in determining that online racism exists, it does not help determine an individual’s personal feelings about racism.

In a different approach, Neville, Lily, Lee, Duran, and Browne (2000) developed an instrument to measure how unaware people are about racism and sought to “assess the cognitive aspects of color-blind attitudes” with the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS) (p. 59). The instrument underwent rigorous testing for reliability and validity and ended with three subscales: Unawareness of Racial Privilege, Institutional Discrimination, and Blatant Racial Issues. The CoBRAS was developed with other validated measures of social justice and racial prejudices, which provides one way to measure a person’s belief that society is just and fair (p. 59). The findings from CoBRAS consistently showed that students of color had lower levels of colorblindness than white students.
In an additional study, Tynes and Markoe (2010) used CoBRAS to determine if there is a relationship between online responses to racist material and colorblind attitudes. The Tynes and Markoe (2010) study surveyed college students and their use of social media networks. The authors sent electronic copies of the CoBRAS to college students (n=261) and combined qualitative data collection of open-ended responses to images of racist college party themes. The study found that students' public comments were less direct and confrontational than the private three-word descriptions in the open-ended response section. The CoBRAS also found African American students were more likely to think the photos were racially inappropriate than the European Americans. The higher the colorblindness score, the more "blind" students are to racial discrimination and practices; they offered a certain level of predictability for European American student reactions based on their score of colorblind racial attitudes. European American students were more likely to laugh at or like a picture, whereas "those low in colorblindness were vocal in their opposition to the images" (Tynes & Markoe, 2010, p. 10). The authors reference other literature relaying the worry that colorblindness leads to more discriminatory behavior.

When I think about the results of these CoBRAS studies (Neville et al., 2000; Tynes & Markoe, 2010) through the lens of CHAT, I see that the system shows a disturbance for the students with a low colorblind attitude. As whiteness dominates the education system, the white students' higher level of colorblind racial attitude could be imagined as the normed behavior. The low level of colorblind racial attitude creates a contradiction in the rules, roles, and norms. While overtly racist language is unaccepted in online spaces, pictures from racist party themes are a covert way to express racist views (Tynes & Markoe, 2010). Some students indicated that they would "defriend" others if they participated in activities like this (Tynes & Markoe, 2010, p. 10), which means it matters to the students in real-life. A contradiction highlights that this behavior is

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1 Tynes and Markoe (2010) did not classify European Americans within context of the study but I understood this term to mean white students.
unacceptable in F2F environments and should also be online, but the online space decreases sensitivity to this behavior. If the missing components of CHAT, power, identity, and emotion are added to this analysis, then differences among colorblind racial attitudes become more consequential as it uncovers a dysfunction in the system. The person's identity matters to how they perceive online racism, and their emotions will drive their actions, such as the "defriending" process.

The power to make a change in the system is a necessary role, as many people of color feel they are "silenced and powerless" to make changes to the system (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 214). As previously discussed, the norms, rules, and roles of education have been built and reasserted through whiteness and the activity system continues to function. However, if the levels of students' colorblindness in the online classroom are high, then the activity system is in a state of dysfunction. In this sense, the CoBRAS study exposed a contradiction in the system. The authors explain that Whites may develop colorblindness:

  to protect against recognizing racial inequalities in society and … to alleviate any conflict or dissonance that may arise from (a) believing that the United States is a country built on the principles of liberty and egalitarianism and (b) acknowledging that racism and racial inequality are present...[and] denial or obviousness may foster inaction which in turn helps to preserve the privileges many Whites…gain from the current system (as cited by Neville et al., 2000, p 69).

Colorblindness keeps the system in a functioning state for those in power while at the detriment and harm of others. While this instrument is not oriented specifically to online interactions like the PORS, the CoBRAS can help determine the extent to which online students bring a colorblind attitude in the online classroom.

The OVS, PORS, and CoBRAS studies show a connection between online behaviors and offline reactions, suggesting the physical campus cannot be immune to online racism. Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) used the General Campus Climate (GCC) to assess how race and academics influence students' general perception of campus climate. The three subscales, general
campus climate, academic climate, and racial climate, used student survey responses to measure perceptions and beliefs of the overall general campus climate. An electronic survey was sent to undergraduate and graduate students (n=920) with an oversampling for students of color. The findings showed that undergraduate students of color have a lower level of general campus climate perception and reported more experiences with racism than white students. While undergraduate Asian American students thought the University could do more to help with diversity initiatives, African American graduate students reported higher rates of racism. Overall, "[r]ace mattered most as a proxy for negative—ostensibly nonracial—academic experiences" (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 270). Students of color reported more racist behaviors than white students, including how they were treated by instructors. This recalls Richardson's (2012) call to examine the bias and/or racist practices of teachers during academic performance assessments and is consistent with Harper and Hurtado's (2007) nine themes of campus racial climate. Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) caution college campuses from taking the results of this survey to mean that racial tension on college campuses is either declining or not detrimental to students. Instead, they argue for colleges to do more to address the negative experiences, such as developing interpersonal interactions and promote racial diversity. The college campus and climate for online students is different than F2F campus in the Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) study. Still, the connection between academic performance and instructor interaction is central to students' experience, regardless of their educational modality.

Surveys like OVS, PORS, and CoBRAS provide evidence of a connection between activities online and offline. The previously discussed studies provide evidence that experiences of racialization exist while using and interacting with technology in online spaces. Online spaces are breeding grounds for both direct and covert racism and are just as harmful online as they are offline. Activities online reflect socio-cultural practices, like those seen in the CoBRAS study with the racist-themed college parties. Harper and Hurtado (2007) report that: "Researchers have
consistently found that racial/ethnic minority students and their white peers who attend the same institution often view the campus racial climate in different ways" (p. 208). When I analyze this through the lens of CHAT, the motivation of racism and colorblind practices seem to share the same goal, but the context of the activity systems is different between online and F2F educational settings.

**Race/Ethnicity in Online Education Literature**

In the previous sections, I introduced technology as a cultural tool and then explored the literature related to racialization in higher education and in online spaces. The intersection of these topics helps locate online education in society. Online education serves as an extension of the college (see Feenberg, 2015, 2017) but disconnects the physical attributes of the campus environment and thus is treated without regard to the context. The systems are socio-culturally influenced with a dialectic connection between our online and offline lives. CHAT is designed to interrogate the connections between the various elements associated with how humans interact with and move through different systems. For this reason, I utilize CHAT in the following section as a way to analyze extant findings. The online education activity system is informed by our socio-cultural views, of which race and ethnicity have institutionalized significance.

**Online vs. F2F Education**

Studies comparing online education to face-to-face instruction (F2F) help develop a better understanding of online education. Yet, online students have a different experience with instruction and do not necessarily follow the same enrollment pattern as traditional students. Inconsistent enrollment patterns make predicting persistence and retention difficult. Several
studies (Moore, Bartkovich, Fetzner, & Ison, 2003; Palacios, & Wood, 2016; Stanley, 2014; Wilson, & Allen, 2011; Xu, & Jaggars, 2014) compared online students and F2F student characteristics with the hopes to build predictive models and to better understand retention of online students.

The activity systems for F2F instruction and that of online education are not the same. The context of the activity system and the socio-cultural influences of the six elements create different interactions, even when the motivation of the system may be similar. Boston, Ice, and Gibson (2011) recognized the need to adapt a new definition of "retention" when working with adult students attending part-time in an online education program. Making this distinction matters as it changes thinking about online students moving through a college program. Online students do not persist in the same ways as traditional F2F students, changing the interactions students have with the activity system of higher education. For example, F2F activity systems maintain different rules and norms than a virtual campus can offer because of the physical separation. The following study tried to make a direct comparison of online and F2F students by comparing attendance measures.

Kupczynski, Gibson, Ice, Richardson, and Challoo (2011) stated: "it is logical to believe that learning would occur after physically entering the course via the learning management system [online classroom] and not before a student electronically stepped foot into the classroom" (p. 14). That is, logging into an online classroom is the same as stepping foot into the physical classroom. It is unclear whether the students were solely online students, but the authors clarified that the courses studied were exclusively online. This study examined the students' type and time of interaction in the online course. Unlike other studies conducted in the United States, the majority (59%) of students were Hispanic (n= 1613) (p. 145). The authors found no significant relationships between ethnicity and the session type or between ethnicity and the number of minutes spent in the online course. The authors found that while race and ethnicity "play a
significant role in success in face-to-face environments, [race and ethnicity] were not found to be significant in this study" (Kupczynski et al., 2011, p. 146).

The authors used activity theory as the framework for this study and assumed the frequency in which students interact with their classes influences students' success, but this may not have been an appropriate theory for this type of study. The authors did not locate or define the "activity," "action," and "operation," as is typically needed to apply this theoretical framework (Leont'ev, 1978). For example, this study used the action of logging into the online classroom as the action, however the authors fail to define and examine the other aspects of Activity Theory, the "activity" or motive of the individual and the "operation" or the material conditions (Leont'ev, 1978). Activity theory maintains that without sharing the "activity" or motive of the group, the actions taken cannot be considered the same. Students' motivation for participation may be to increase learning, develop a community, or simply fulfill the stated requirement of log-in frequencies to earn a better grade. According to activity theory, the students' motivations will differ between individuals and, as such, should not be simply equated to frequency counts and time spent in the course. Considering only the action of logging into the classroom and analyzing the time spent in the class does not provide any more information about students' participation and learning, related to race and ethnicity, any more than taking attendance in F2F courses.

The dissertation work by Stanley (2014) used national engagement survey data from Predominantly White Institutions (PWI's). He found, when comparing online students to F2F students, African American students are just as engaged online as their white classmates and have higher learning gains. Stanley suggested that online education is different enough from a F2F experience at a PWI, in part because lower amounts of cultural navigation are required in online education than in F2F, creating a "level playing field for the African-American student" (p. 114). Essentially, this dissertation supported the notion that online education provides an environment that is easier for students of color to navigate than a F2F classroom in a PWI. This concept is key
to understanding the student experience, especially as institutions continue to review and improve support services, expand their online offerings, and increase enrollment of students of color.

Stanley's work suggests that the colorblindness associated with online education is a function of the system. His work may show that the impact of racialization in online education is absent to the extent that the act of engaging in the online classroom is the only action that happens in the activity system.

Studies, such as Chen, Lambert, and Guidry (2010), found that students of color, and students attending part-time, are more likely to enroll in online education, although the reasons for this are unclear. Their study's guiding research questions focused on how course type changes or influences how students interact with available technology, what student characteristics predict online course enrollment, and how much technology in the course impacts student engagement. This study included and combined students taking differentiated modalities of instruction and give additional attention to the online students for more specific research in the future. The research questions did not directly reference racial differences and experiences in an online classroom but provided a warning of unintentional "segregation" through online education:

[T]he question that deserves further investigation is whether minority and part-time students take online courses more often because online courses offer better quality of education or because it is more convenient....then institutions must ensure that online students receive high quality instruction, support services, and other fringe benefits enjoyed by traditional face-to-face students...If online students do not receive the same quality of education and support as their traditional classroom counterparts, another form of unintended educational segregation may develop as increasing numbers of minority, part-time, and working students disproportionately elect to take online courses. (p. 1229-1230)

When I consider this statement through the lens of CHAT, the authors project the differences between the F2F and online activity systems are not functioning in equivalent ways.

Chen, Lambert, and Guidry (2010) call for institutional action based on technology influences and student characteristics related to racial differences. They highlighted the enrollment patterns of minority students enrolling in online education and question if this is
because of educational quality or flexibility. Or it may be for some other unknown reason, as Stanley’s (2014) dissertation suggests.

A study conducted at a historically Black college found students attending online performed better than those in F2F instruction. Wilson and Allen (2011) compared completion rates between courses taken online and F2F and found no real difference between the modalities; although a small study, there are interesting outcomes to this study. Using GPA as the driving predictive value, the researchers found that online students earned more credits than the F2F students. What is unsaid in this study are the students' characteristics, but an assumption that there were more Black students enrolled than would be typical at a PWI can be made. Assuming this to be the case, then comparing the online students to F2F students in which the dominant culture of the university does not default to white, then the student outcomes will likely show lower amounts of implicit racial bias. As Stanley’s (2014) work suggests, students would have less effort placed on cultural navigation and that activity systems are different when students attend online education at an HBCU and not a PWI.

**Colorblindness and the Online Classroom**

The notion of colorblindness and student outcome is found in the literature related to race and ethnicity in online education. The literature does not provide clear associations, and some pieces suggesting colorblindness is a benefit (Enger, 2006; Salvo, Shelton, & Welch, 2017), while others suggesting colorblindness is a detriment (Killion, Gallagher-Lepak, & Reilly, 2015; Koch, 2005; Ware & Stuck, 2010). Few studies of online education investigated how social and cultural influences may play a role in this phenomenon (see Ke & Kwak, 2013; Tucker, 2014).

Dee, Baker, Evans, and John (2018) found significant bias among instructors who teach Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). MOOCs are different than credit-bearing academic
programs, such as this study considers but still function in a virtual space without physical
presence. Using fake names associated with race and ethnicity, the researchers posted under the
assumed identities in over one-hundred MOOCs and investigated who responded and how many
times. This study is unlike other studies because it tested for bias within the classroom responses.
Findings suggested that students with male white sounding names received more teacher-led
interactions than students with racial or ethnic-sounding names. The results were even higher if
the instructor was also a white male. Irrespective of physical presence, the researchers found that
"online learning environments are still social environments in which identities can have salience"
(p. 23-24).

The dissertation work of Tucker (2014) interviewed eleven men of color about what they
need for success, what influences their success, and what they thought of the colleges' initiatives.
Tucker's perspective is that without identifying online students' needs, the dominant culture will
continue to create an unsuccessful environment for the students. She found that students believe
the online environment to be colorblind, and the students see this as a benefit with two major
conclusions.

First, the students' understanding of colorblind environments is the absence of racism.
Students believe instructors see their academic ability only because there are no visual cues
within the online environment and believed this created a "level playing field, an environment
free of discriminatory practices" (p. 88). The visual and physical cues about a person's race are
minimized online compared to F2F instruction and change the activity system between the two
educational modalities.

Second, Tucker found that students of color create a different reality to excel in online
education and thus ignored the larger social context of racialized behaviors. Tucker included that
students of color believe their academic success will help them "transcend racial dynamics
online" and are therefore "less tolerant of other male students who lag academically and expect
transcendence from them as well" (p. 179). This belief puts all the responsibility onto the students to find their academic success. The students were able to use the anonymity of online education to hide their racial identities, thus leading to the perception that colorblindness through anonymity benefits students of color. Tucker wrote:

Creating a colorblind environment requires males of color to invent an altered reality to succeed academically. In a color-blind environment, students must act as though race does not matter and ignore their reality to co-exist in society. Although a color-blind environment is an illusion, the perception of colorblindness creates an opportunity for males of color to devote their time, energy, and psychological well-being towards reaching their academic goals within the online environment without the threat of discriminatory practices (p. 179).

Said differently, students of color must believe that the lack of physical presence leads to a colorblind environment which will benefit them because only their academic ability will be judged. Tucker concludes that these students came to the online class with both a colorblind attitude and an understanding that society maintains racialized beliefs. This sample for this study was small (n=11) and so it is hard to determine the overarching impact this study has on racialized experiences in online classrooms. These findings were unique and new compared to other articles, yet also underscores a potentially significant factor to the individual online student experience and a possible hidden contradiction in the activity system.

Similarly, the introduction to the study conducted by Ke and Kwak (2013) included a message about the increase in students of color attending online education. They wrote:

"Students' pre-existing cultural dispositions associated with their ethnicity group or age status can influence their learning actions and thoughts, which [might be] in conflict with the regular online learning practices and environments...[and] minority and older learners may be disadvantaged online" (p. 43). These comments may lead to the belief a standard experience in online education exists. When students of color or students of certain ages enroll, they will experience a less than
an ideal learning environment. In this sense, the study's authors are pointing to potential disturbances or tensions between the six elements in the activity system.

The work done by Tucker (2014) begins to examine how students of color experience online education. Her work indicates that the systemic patterns of racism and power in educational systems in America include the online classroom and that students must assimilate to be successful. There were some findings in these studies related to how students of color felt while participating in their online courses. However, none studied the power dynamics between teachers and peers in discussion posts. These studies provided no indication that an analysis of what was being said, and to whom, and by whom, took place. The work by Baker, Dee, Evans, and John (2018) showed bias towards racially and ethnically diverse students in the online classroom, and the lack of instructor interaction may then yield feelings and emotions of discrimination. Certainly, if students are in a “chilly” environment (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002) in F2F instruction, their ability to succeed will decrease. The studies included here seem to indicate the same is true for online students.

Varying Results in Literature

The literature related to racialized experiences of online students concludes with varying findings. Most studies are quantitative and show that a relationship exists between enrollment decisions, academic success, learning outcomes and performance, and student satisfaction. From an educational equity standpoint, the suggested implications for these results are troubling.

Xu and Jaggars (2014) found a significant gap in academic achievement between white and Black students in their study. One of their recommendations was to limit access by screening students before enrolling in online education to ensure only the high-achieving students could enroll. This limitation of enrollment is counterintuitive to a major benefit of online education.
Additionally, this action will increase the achievement gap even more because those students who otherwise could not attend an institution of higher education would still not be able to do so. Palacios and Wood (2016) suggested something similar with an institutional warning about the recruitment of students of color into online community colleges.

Wladis, Hachey, and Conway (2015) warn against making such policies. In their research, they contend that previous students did not consider risk factors. They found that enrollment decisions increased as the number of risk factors increases, especially related to race and gender when it came to online enrollment in STEM-related courses in either two or four-year colleges. Students of Hispanic ethnicity were least likely to enroll in STEM-related online education. In another study, Wladis, Conway, and Hachey (2015) found that when students of color enrolled in online STEM courses, Black and Hispanic students "were no more disadvantaged than their White or Asian peers" (p. 155). When combined, these studies suggest that race, when defined as a risk factor, influences the decision to enroll in online education but does not disadvantage students from this type of academic success.

Li, Wang, and Campbell (2015) looked across racial and ethnic groups to investigate the effective use of a Computer-based Course Management (CMS) and first reminds readers with a review of literature that access to technology has not been equal in the United States. Their finding suggested that students engage in online education differently by race and ethnicity, partly because students of color did not have the same exposure to advanced technology as white students. The researchers used scholastic aptitude and computer-use behavior as the two constructs to determine what student factors were associated with LMS use for learning,

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2 Li, Wang, and Campbell (2015) used the term Computer-based Management System (CMS) in their study and listed several programs that are considered Learning Management Systems (LMS). The term CMS typically stands for Content Management System and serves as a database and library of content fed to the LMS and not something students engage with directly. While this does not negate the study, it does create a little confusion if the applications used are not labeled correctly. I applied the correct term of LMS when discussing this study.
determining grades, and the correlation with scholastic aptitude. The sample included all undergraduate students (n=774) from a public PWI located in the Midwest of the United States. The scholastic aptitude was based on the students' performance on the SAT; it should be noted that the SAT is often criticized for being racially biased, so using this metric to gauge scholastic aptitude may introduce additional layers of bias to the investigation. The researchers found that Asian students used the LMS more frequently than any other group and had the highest final scores. White, Black, and Hispanic students used LMS the same, yet white students had higher scores than others. They speculated this finding has something to do with how these students use the necessary technology, referencing quality over quantity of interactions. This finding is reminiscent of Gorski's (2009) work about the racialization and socio-economic influences of technology pedagogy or "digital equity."

Li, Wang, and Campbell (2015) also reported that Black and Hispanic students used the discussion posts more than white and Asian students but had lower final grades. This outcome is unexpected given prior research; previous studies indicate that students with higher levels of course participation tend to have better grade outcomes (see Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006). This unexpected finding may point to a contradiction in the activity system. It assumes that the more a student engages with their course, the more likely their academic success increases, as defined in this study by the final course grade. The researchers fail to consider how bias or discrimination may play into student discussion posts, a possibility raised in the study by Baker, Dee, Evans, and John (2018) and work by Richardson (2010, 2012).

Richardson (2012) considered how a racist society might impact the learning outcomes of online students. In his study conducted in 2010, he found white students were more likely to earn higher grades than any other ethnic group. He found that Asian students were half as likely and that Black students were a third as likely to receive good grades than white students (Richardson, 2010). He also found differences along racial groups with the type of learning:
Asian and Black students tended to obtain lower scores on stimulating education but higher scores on cooperative learning than the White students. Also, the Asian students tended to obtain lower scores on construction of knowledge than the White students, and the Black students tended to obtain higher scores on use of knowledge than the White students (p. 544).

In a follow-up piece and with nationally collected data, Richardson (2012) argued that previous research suggests that the difference in attainment (the "achievement gap") is because of the student-teacher interaction. Yet, this type of interaction is limited in distance education and cannot be the reason for the gap. He wrote: "Ethnicity per se is almost certainly not the effective variable influencing students' academic attainment. Rather, it is a proxy for other factors not yet identified" (Richardson, 2012, p. 406). Richardson places tensions on the activity system elements, with heavy stress on the division of labor between the instructor and student. In doing so, he brings the social and historical context of the online education activity system forward as part of the solution.

In another study about course completion, Nadasen and List (2016) used "course efficiency" or a ratio of course completion to study the persistence of student transfer from F2F community college to a four-year online institution. Course completion is based on student behavior instead of instructor response, such as final grade or GPA. The study found that Black students were more likely to persist than white students online. The authors suggested that Black students found the autonomy and flexibility of online education a good fit, but this is just a supposition of the researchers. The Nadasen and List (2016) study is different from other studies because it used student-based-behaviors as the metric instead of instructor-based-behavior as an indicator of student success.

Islam, Rahim, Liang, and Momtaz (2011) did not find that racial background had a significant relationship between race and effective e-learning. However, the study left the social context of the online environment largely untouched. They discussed the perceptions of men and
women to technology as a potential reason for why gender shows a significant relationship, but not about race; they stated that men are more interested in technology than women, so men will learn more than women in online education (p. 118). While this dissertation was not about gender, society’s concepts about certain students' abilities and the extension of expectations to the online classroom, resonated with investigating the racialized experiences of students in online education. History and culture shape and define the ways in which participation in activity systems takes place. For example, the essence in the study by Islam, Rahim, Liang, and Momtaz (2011), which took place in Malaysia, extends to the institutionalized racist educational systems found in American colleges and universities.

The literature presented here showed that some studies are more helpful than others when investigating student experience. It is clear from these studies that the interactions within an online classroom and student perceptions are important to student success. Most of these studies fail to include an online classroom context, which is critical to understanding the link between student experiences and online education. Studies report relationships between race and ethnicity and online student success from the available body of literature, yet the interpretation of this relationship varied within the studies.

Chapter 2 Summary

Technology and online education are billed as providing access to people who otherwise would not have access to a college degree and at the same time, "may be the situation where technology is driving, rather than ameliorating educational stratification" (Kim, 2018, para 4). The literature is inconclusive about this stratification and falls short in explaining why these disparities exist in online educational settings. However, the literature related to racialization in
higher education and cyber-racism provides additional information for understanding students' experiences of racialization in the online classroom. The studies of racialization in higher education show that college campuses are not immune to racist behaviors and practices, and social media usage is prevalent among college students. Studies also show that racism and racist activities online impact people in real life, including students on college campuses. The extent to which this translates to an online classroom is not yet known.

Many studies about online education decontextualize and ignore the idea that the online classroom is a social world where the interactions mimic the "real world" (Feenberg, 2005). The decontextualization of the online education activity system seems problematic because it obscures relevant literature about racialization in other spaces as unimportant to online education. Students studying online have a campus space, albeit virtual, that connects them to the institution, instructors, and other students and functions as the vehicle for delivering the curriculum. The essence of the online educational space cannot be ignored in research. It creates a social environment, a central place for interaction, and serves as a bridge between the campus and the student when the physical location is removed.

The inconclusivity and need for alternative studies for online education is summed well with the following:

Despite an abundance of literature demonstrating clear correlations between ethnicity and gender with persistence in the face-to-face setting, no such relationship was found [in this study]… As with the overall study, this finding needs to be the subject of research at other institutions with online programs. If this finding is generalizable, the significance for equity in higher education cannot be stated strongly enough with this finding related to retention in online courses (Boston et al., 2011, para. 54)

From this statement, it seems the authors expected to find similar disturbances in the activity system for online students as they did previously with F2F students, yet the disturbances were not revealed. It is possible that a different form of analysis was needed or that the authors did not consider the educational setting in context. The use of CHAT for this dissertation study will
provide a holistic analysis to explore student experience. The next chapter describes the methods used to do so.
Chapter 3

Methods

Technology is a cultural tool, and the interactions people have with others while engaging with technology are reflections of our socio-cultural environment. Likewise, education is an artifact of our society and is greatly influenced by deeply rooted racist practices. At the intersection of technology and education is online education. While the literature about online education is growing, few studies related to the online student experience of racialization exist. This leaves a gap in the literature.

The research question for this dissertation study is located at the intersection of racialization, education, and technology. The purpose of this study was to understand how perceptions of race in the online classroom influence students’ experiences. I analyzed this question through Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and used the activity system of the online classroom as the unit of analysis.

The guiding research question for this study is: What are the classroom experiences of racialization of undergraduate students attending college online?

This study of online undergraduate students took place in a single college (“College of Computers”) at a large research university during the summer and fall 2020. I collected data through a combination of validated survey instruments, open-ended, and interview questions, and documentary data. This chapter explains the survey design and administration, collection of curricular and programmatic documents, and details the quantitative and qualitative analyses used. I conclude the chapter with study limitations, positionality statement, and commitment to trustworthiness.
Research Design

This study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand online students’ experiences of racialization and is presented as a mixed-methods case study. I integrated data from an electronic survey, documentary data, and supporting institutional actor interviews. The data was analyzed through the theoretical lens of Cultural Historical Activity Theory. I conceptualized the climate and community of the activity system of the online classroom as influenced by the interacting systems of higher education institutions and the broader society, nationally and internationally, in a globalized web-linked world. Survey data were collected to understand students’ perceptions of colorblindness and of race and ethnicity in an online classroom; these perceptions are influenced by socio-cultural practices, such as racialization or the reaffirmation that promotes certain beliefs of racist practices and rewards based on the dominate race. The conceptualization of these interacting systems allows for the “internal activities [of the online classroom to be] … examined alongside the external activities [of U.S. society] as they transform into each other” (Bradshaw, Parchoma, & Lock, 2017, p. 36).

Racism and racist behaviors, including colorblind practices, are rooted in American society and are also enacted in the online environment. These online racist interactions merge with the real-life experiences of college students (see Keum & Miller, 2017, 2018; Tynes & Markoe, 2010). The racial tensions on college campuses are well documented and create negative perceptions of the climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). These racialized histories are key to understanding how the perceptions of the online campus climate and race influence student experience. Every individual has experiences and perceptions about race and climate that they bring to the online classroom space. These perceptions and personal experiences guide how the subjects interact with the various elements of the activity systems.
Instrumental Mixed Methods Case Study

Mixed Methods Case Study. This study uses a mixed-methods case study design. An approach is considered mixed-methods when data collection, analysis, and findings come from a combination and integration of quantitative and qualitative data (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). Case study analysis allows for many different types and forms of data to be collected and analyzed so that the phenomena can be explored in the context of the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). One approach used in this study was survey methodology. Gable (1994) suggested that the weaknesses and strengths of survey and case study analysis overlap in such a way that the end result is a stronger cross-validated study. Both survey and case study methodologies provide snapshots of the phenomenon in context with different types of data. The benefit of this mixed-methods approach is that while case study does not have controlled variables, a survey cannot provide an environmental context and thus increases the potential for subjective analysis (Gable, 1994). Gable warns that subjective analysis may “invite ethnocentrism” to the research (p. 8). The danger in using only quantitative data is that it decontextualizes the student from the college and discounts the social interactions in online education that mimic that of the real world (Feenberg, 2005). The climate of the online campus is a critical aspect for this study, as the online classroom can be considered an extension of the college campus (Feenberg, 2005), yet one that also has distinctive characteristics. The case study methodology allowed for exploration and definition of the context of the online environment which may have also helped reduce subjective bias.

Instrumental Case Study. This investigation, which is an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995), sought to understand students’ experiences of racialization. It was not meant to describe the typical experience (Stake, 1995) of all online students. Rather, this dissertation study explores how a sample of students, from a particular institutional setting, may have experienced racialization during their online education. These boundaries will create an environment specific
to online education and different from the typical experience of students from other areas and institutional types.

**CHAT Framework.** The combination of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a theoretical framework and case study methodology has been used before in previous research (e.g., Dowd & Bensimon, 2015; Leonardo & Manning, 2017). In both studies, the theoretical framework of CHAT was extended by coupling deeper social contexts of power, hierarchy, and emotion while studying racialization in an educational setting. CHAT identifies a system, the activity system, as the unit for analysis. For this study, the unit of analysis was selected as undergraduate online classes at a large research university. CHAT informed the decision-making for data collection, including the recruitment of student and institutional participants, and the sampling of programmatic and curricular documents.

The framework of CHAT is compatible with using a case study for two reasons. First, case study analysis provides a method in which multifaceted aspects of a system can be explored (Stake, 1995). The activity system modeled by CHAT contains six interacting components conceptualized as creating cultural practices and norms that actors employ towards a common goal but may not always be functioning in harmony for everyone. The use of a multifaceted case study data collection helped highlight those areas of contradictions and disturbances within the activity system. Second, the research question was not expected to have a straightforward answer which makes case study analysis a suitable way in which to investigate the phenomena (Stage & Hubbard, 2012). The goal of this study was to provide insight and understanding of the student experience of racialization in online education. No person experiences the same situation exactly the same as someone else.
Data Collection

Creswell and Poth (2018) highlight that “the researcher collects and integrates many forms of qualitative data” (p. 98) to create an in-depth case study. This study integrated quantitative data with the qualitative and is therefore considered a mixed methods case study. The use of CHAT and the defining six elements (tools and artifacts; subjects; rules, roles, and norms; community; division of labor; and object) underscores the need for many different forms of data. To address each element appropriately, mixed materials were collected and analyzed, thus taking “all relevant evidence” into consideration (Yin, 1994, p. 123). This study collected data through 1) an electronic survey; 2) university administrative systems; 3) a review of programmatic and curricular documents; 4) and supportive interviews (see Table 3-1). The use of these different forms and types of data yielded a rich data set.

Table 3-1: Data Collection Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument/Data Source</th>
<th>Data Represents</th>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td>Beliefs, personal experience, demographic information, behavioral interaction with online education components, attitude toward colorblindness</td>
<td>Summer, Fall 2020</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics with written and graphical representation; correlations; qualitative (deductive and thematic analysis) and graphical representation</td>
<td>1) IRB approval; 2) Coordinate with approved institutional liaison to identify and recruit an adequate sample of students and identify dates for survey administration; 3) Email recruitment survey to selected sample; 4) Send survey reminder to faculty; 5) Close survey and download data from an enterprise database system and notify lottery winners; 6) Analyze quantitative and qualitative data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Administrative Systems</td>
<td>Enrollment standing, academic intention, student characteristics and demographic</td>
<td>Fall 2020</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics with written and graphical representation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COC and GC’s public websites; institutional data reports; syllabi; RU policy</td>
<td>Curricular and programmatic data; discourse, policies, espoused roles and rules for the course and program participation</td>
<td>Summer, Fall 2020</td>
<td>Qualitative (descriptive and thematic analysis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and staff interviews</td>
<td>Beliefs, personal experiences, policy and practice descriptions, interactions with online education</td>
<td>Fall 2020</td>
<td>Qualitative (descriptive analysis)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The necessary paperwork for Penn State’s Internal Review Board was submitted and approved in April 2020 which endorsed my contact with the College of Computers liaison. Data were collected concurrently, following the outlined process in Figure 3-1. The curricular and programmatic data collected through the document review of the public websites, institutional data reports, syllabi, and RU’s policies helped me describe the context of the online educational
experience. The survey administration process was nearly identical in the summer and fall semesters, with slight changes to vocabulary, number of gift cards, and dates.

Figure 3-1: Flow of data collection.

The survey opened the last week of May and the first week of October 2020 (see Figure 3-2). The timing of the survey each term allowed for students to gain experience with their online classes and any enrollment adjustments due to students adding or dropping classes. I sent two reminder emails to faculty during the open survey time period and solicited their help with the supportive interviews.
The survey closed on July 1 and November 1, 2020. Survey results and the lottery drawing requests were downloaded to an Excel spreadsheet. The lottery drawing was conducted by assigning a number to each participant and using an online random number generator. Each winner received an email notifying them of the electronic gift card and thanking them for participating in the survey. The university administrative data was collected from RU’s student information system and provided by a campus liaison, as described previously. The curricular and programmatic data was collected while the survey was open during the fall from College of Computers and Global Campus websites, institutional data, syllabi from the selected courses, and Research University’s policy handbook helped describe the curricular context. The faculty, staff, and administrator interviews took place in the fall semester. All data were uploaded into NVivo for data analysis, as described later.

**Student Recruitment and Survey Data Collection**

The survey administration was a multi-step process and started with a pre-survey recruitment message to faculty (see Figures 3-1 and 3-3 and Appendix F) sent by the institutional liaison on my behalf. Because I had no existing relationship with these faculty and their students,
there was more trust instilled in the process and legitimacy of the survey if it came from someone with an already established relationship (Dillman, 2000). Faculty were asked for their help and support with the study. I attached a letter that contained a message from me and a link to the survey to be posted in the class (see Figure 3-3 and Appendices B and C). Follow-up and reminder messages about the study were sent twice to faculty (see Figure 3-2 and Appendix I).

Qualtrics, a cloud-based enterprise system designed specifically for electronic surveys and built with end-users in mind was used to administer the survey; Qualtrics has mitigated problems with visual representation and will provide similar viewing options regardless of Internet browser (Dillman, 2000). Because online students frequently use mobile devices (Aslanian, Clinefelter, & Magda, 2019), I gave attention to the layout of the questions when viewing the survey on a mobile device, as scrolling may impact the ability to answer questions (Peytchev & Hill, 2010).

The data collected through the survey were stored in the cloud, which meets RU standards of information protection. The survey remained open for at least 30 days and was closed so that the survey data can be downloaded as a Microsoft Excel file after it closed. The student sample, as described below, was recruited from the College of Computers, during two semesters, and enrolled in selected classes. All contact for this study was conducted by electronic means which eliminated costs for communication.
Initially, I solicited help from the institutional liaison from the College of Computers to send the first student recruitment message, through email or embed it in the online class (Appendix F). Recruitment or pre-survey messages like this have been shown to increase response rates (Dillman, 2000). This message introduced the students to the upcoming survey. While this
message is meant to serve as a “brief, personalized, [and] positively worded” introduction, (Dillman, 2000, p. 156), the survey link was included in the chance that the student decided to complete the survey immediately. The survey remained open for at least one month (30 days). Students did not have to answer questions on the survey to add their name and contact for the lottery drawing of a gift card (Appendix J), though they did have to click through to the end of the survey for the option to be presented.

Different concerns exist about providing incentives for online surveys. It is impractical to send material incentives with the recruitment messages, as Dillman (2000) suggests. The lottery practice for college students has evidence of success but does not confirm the amounts or types of incentives that work best for all students (Laguilles, Williams, & Saunders, 2011). The center dedicated to surveying research at RU suggested no incentive is necessary for this kind of survey (Director of Survey Administration, personal communication, 2020), and one study found that pre-paid incentives for online surveys increased female participation only (Parsons & Manierre, 2014). Yet, incentives do increase response rates (Dillman, 2000). A lottery system for incentivizing survey completion was selected. At the end of the survey, students were redirected to a separate Qualtrics survey for their name and contact information. An online random number generator (e.g. https://www.random.org/) was used to identify individuals each semester, for a seventy-five-dollar e-gift card to a retailer (e.g. Amazon). Two e-gift cards were emailed in the summer and twenty in the fall semester. It was the best part of the entire data collection process and even if the incentivization for online surveys does not increase respondents, it was fun and energizing as a researcher.
Study Population and Sample

Target Population. The target population for this dissertation was undergraduate students earning their college degrees in an online program from a large public research-focused university. Public institutions have the majority of enrollments in distance education (Allen & Seaman, 2016) so it made sense to select this sample. A nonprobability and convenience sample was used for this dissertation study. The sample is considered nonprobability because only students enrolled in the selected classes within a single college were asked to complete the survey, rather than the entire student population of the research university. This cross-sectional study took place over two semesters.

Sampling Setting and Strategy

Setting. The site location, which I refer to with a pseudonym, Research University (RU), is classified as a high-research, undergraduate, doctorate-granting institution by the Carnegie Classification which is located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States with an undergraduate student body of over 70,000. The institution is also classified as a Predominantly White Institution (PWI) with 68% of students identifying as white (ED NCES, 2019). Additionally, the United States context of racialization required the study of an American institution. RU maintains a portfolio of online programs that deliver 100% of the course content electronically. Students can earn their entire degree online or in combination with face-to-face (F2F) and online credits. RU has undergraduate, graduate, and non-degree offerings of academic programs online which will be referred to as Global Campus. The Global Campus enrolls over 8,900 undergraduate students. This dissertation study sought the experience of degree-seeking undergraduate students in the online campus in a particular academic college.
**Sampling Strategy.** This study includes online undergraduate students at a large research university in the United States. The students were enrolled in classes under the College of Computers and designated as Global Campus during the summer and fall semesters of 2020. Graduate students are excluded from the study. The sampling frame for this study includes a nested sampling design with three layers for sampling (see Figure 3-4).

![Figure 3-4: The sampling frame for the study.](image)

**College Sampling.** I utilized convenience sampling for two reasons. First, this study is exploratory and purposeful sampling would be too difficult to use as the defining characteristics are unknown. Second, the college administrators have an interest in and willingness to support this research, which makes access to students and data feasible.

The site location, RU, is a large university and includes a variety of colleges and programs. Students can enroll in courses outside of their academic-home college. This wide selection of enrollment options creates variations in curriculum, teachers, and disciplines across the entire university. Therefore, I surveyed students within a single college to sample students who experience a more uniform curricular and educational context. I refer to the selected college
by the pseudonym College of Computers (COC). Only students enrolled in the selected COC courses were recruited for this study.

**Class Sampling.** The College of Computers offers three degrees solely online; two bachelor’s degrees and one associate degree. Students who take these courses typically spend most of their time taking courses with the COC. The college hires faculty with professional training and develops staff specific to the needs of the college. A student majoring in and taking courses in COC will likely experience an organizational culture influenced by the professional training and socialization of COC personnel.

The student information system of RU contains the academic records and stated academic purposes for all students. Courses are assigned a campus designation code associated with the online campus and the academic college (see Appendix A). A liaison from the College of Computers helped me select courses to survey. Courses without the appropriate designation for the Global Campus as the “home campus” in the student information system were not selected to participate in this study. The research question focuses on student experience which expected students to have established a familiarity in online education; classes were selected at the 200 level or higher to ensure students had knowledge online classes. Thirty-three classes in total offered during the summer and fall semesters met these criteria and were selected for the study. Concern for duplicate enrollments between the two terms arose as there was no way to limit or remove students from the invitation. The selected summer classes (n=3) were capstone classes that typically enroll graduating students. This selection of summer classes limited the number of students that might enroll in the fall semester that met the same sampling criteria. The best option to minimize the chance of duplicate student sampling in the fall was to select fewer classes in the summer term.

**Student Sampling.** For inclusion in the sample, this study required students to be currently enrolled in selected classes and classified in undergraduate degree status. Students were
self-excluded from participation if they were not enrolled in the selected online class, were under
the age of 18, and/or were not physically present in the United States.

The student information system (SIS) is the official database of academic record for RU
and contains the student demographic information that was self-disclosed through the admission
process. A list of deidentified data from RU’s SIS was provided for student demographic
information such as birth year, gender, race and ethnicity, and other institutionally recorded
markers of enrollment (see Appendix G). These administrative data gave an accurate response
rate and description of students’ characteristics and enrollment status. A student’s enrollment
status can change throughout the semester if courses are dropped and/or added. Enrollment data
were collected after the drop-add period for the summer and fall semesters (see Figure 3-2). By
isolating the enrollment data capture in this way, I have a good representation of those students
who were enrolled at the time the survey was made available.

An institutional liaison provided an Excel file that consisted of all the students enrolled in
the selected classes for the summer 2020 and fall 2020 semesters that met the course sampling
criteria. The list included all students, even those students at the graduate level; classes at the 400-
level can count towards graduate study. Therefore, the survey I administered asked students to
self-certify they were undergraduate students. The administrative data showed a total of 1,028
headcount during the summer and fall semesters in these identified classes. The range of students
enrolled in each class was 25-141. Three courses had one section, eight courses had two sections,
two courses had three sections, and two courses had four sections.

Table 3-2: List of Courses and Sections by Term and Total Individual Students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Course Key</th>
<th>No. of Sections</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>COC 440W</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>CS 440W</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>COC 230</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The number of students in the study population was determined by the number of individual students in each of the thirty-three selected courses. Many students were enrolled in multiple classes in the fall, which left 735 unduplicated students in the selected classes. For analysis, I filtered out the graduate students and duplicated students. The original intent was to only survey students who had the Global Campus as the “home campus,” which is defined as the campus location of record. However, the pandemic increased the participation of students who maintain a different home campus and thus changed exclusionary practices for analysis. Both Global Campus students and students who only took the selected online class were included. The winnowing of the study population left 647 unique cases, of which, 543 students had Global Campus as their home campus in the administrative data (see Appendix J).

**Representativeness of the Sample**

The sample for this study is a convenience sample and not assumed to be representative of the enrollment of all online education. Still, the site location for this study at Research University (RU) is an appropriate place for a study like this because the online student enrollment
mirrors national demographic trends. The online enrollment of students of color in RU’s global campus increased over the past four years (see Figure 3-5) but remains low compared to white students (see Figure 3-6). This enrollment pattern is proportionally similar to data collected by the federal Department of Education (ED), as previously in Figure 1-2, that white students make up the majority of enrolled online students.

Figure 3- 5: Five-year enrollment trend of students of color in RU’s Global campus.
Source: Data obtained from "Budget Office," 2020.
Figure 3-6: Students enrolled in RU Global Campus by race and ethnicity.
Source: Data obtained from "Budget Office," Fall 2020

This site location is a public university whereas previous studies were conducted at community colleges (see Hawkins, 2012; Nadasen & List, 2016; Palacios & Wood, 2016; Stanley, 2014; Tucker, 2014; Wladis, Conway, & Hachey, 2015; Xu & Jaggars, 2014). Therefore, the results from a sample of RU students will address a gap in the literature and add to the understanding of the student experience within public universities.

Like enrollment data, a student’s home campus can change from semester to semester as students decide on academic actions. The most recent data from the fall 2020 semester for the home campus of record in the administrative data were used.
The sample from this study was compared to all undergraduate students in the identified classes during the summer and fall semesters. Roughly nine percent of all students at RU who met sampling criteria responded to the survey (Figure 3-7).

Figure 3- 7: Global Campus student sampling in proportion to approximate enrollment at Research University.

**Survey Instruments and Items**

The literature related to racialized experiences of people using online tools contains numerous surveys. I selected established survey instruments for this study. The perceptions of race that students bring to the online classroom were measured by the Color-Blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS) (Keum et al., 2018; Neville et al., 2000). The perceptions of the online classroom climate were measured by the existing survey scales of the General Campus Climate, Academic Climate, and Racial Climate (GCC; AC; RC) (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). I
incorporated the following into a single survey that was administered electronically to students:

1) the CoBRAS; 2) the General Campus Climate with an open-ended prompt; 3) Academic Climate with open-ended prompts; 4) Racial Climate with open-ended prompts; and 5) students demographic and enrollment information (see Table 3-3). The survey began with an introduction and consent solicitation. Only students who provided consent were able to continue to the rest of the survey; those students who did not consent were taken to the end of the survey and not presented with any of the subsequent item blocks.

Table 3- 3: Survey Instruments with the Number and Type of Original and Adapted Items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Title of Subscale or Section</th>
<th>Original Items</th>
<th>Adaptations of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CoBRAS</td>
<td>Unawareness of Racial Privilege (URP)</td>
<td>7 items, (1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree)</td>
<td>6 items, (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree); removed item about prison; word change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unawareness of Institutional Discrimination (UID)</td>
<td>7 items, (1=strongly disagree, 6=strongly agree)</td>
<td>7 items, (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Campus Climate (GCC)</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>4 items, (1=strong agree, 7=strong disagree)</td>
<td>4 items, (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree), 1 open-ended prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Climate (AC)</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>6 items, (1=strong agree, 7=strong disagree)</td>
<td>6 items, (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree), 1 open-ended prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of Seriousness</td>
<td>6 items, (1=strong agree, 7=strong disagree)</td>
<td>6 items, (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree), 1 open-ended prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceptions of Respect</td>
<td>4 items, (1=strong agree, 7=strong disagree)</td>
<td>4 items, (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree), 1 open-ended prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Climate (RC)</td>
<td>Racial Experiences</td>
<td>5 items, (1=strong agree, 7=strong disagree)</td>
<td>5 items, (1=strongly disagree, 4=strongly agree)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Racial attitudes. The first block of questions in the survey I administered contained the Color-Blind Racial Attitude Scale (CoBRAS) (Keum et al., 2018; Neville et al., 2000; Tynes & Markoe, 2010). The CoBRAS instrument contains twenty items, divided between three subscales and rated on a 1=strongly disagree to 6=strongly agree Likert scale and had good reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha =.93$). Prior research has shown there is a relationship between students’ CoBRAS scores and their attitude toward discriminatory practices (Keum, Miller, Lee, & Chen, 2018; Neville et al., 2000). The CoBRAS assessed students’ level of awareness and perception of colorblindness with items related to racial privilege with social services. These privileges included advantages and disadvantages, racial discrimination, institutional discrimination and how language and culture, affirmative action, and benefits people of color receive. Additional items included blatant issues of racism of historical, contemporary salience of racism and the importance for leaders and educational institutions to address racism. One item related to race as a determining factor of imprisonment was removed as it did not seem broad enough to be used within an educational context. This particular instrument was suitable because asking students directly if they carry colorblind perceptions will not likely yield useful or honest information. Instead, the CoBRAS provided an overall mean of colorblindness which helped me understand students’ perception of race and ethnicity in the online classroom.

General Campus Climate. The General Campus Climate scale (GGC) (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003) was appropriate for this dissertation study as it is directly related to higher
education and measures the students’ perception of the campus climate (see Table 3-3). The GCC contained four items rated on a scale of 1=strong agree to 7=strong disagree to measure the students’ feelings of fitting in, selecting the university again, and friendly atmosphere and had good reliability (Cronbach’s α=.77). One open-ended prompt was added for students to explain their feelings of being “left out of things at the university.” The Likert scale was changed to 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree.

**Academic Climate.** The Academic Climate instrument contains sixteen items rated on a scale of 1=strong agree to 7=strong disagree to measure the overall opinion of their academic experience, including how they feel they are treated by their instructors and peers, and academic mentoring and also had good reliability (Cronbach’s α=.85). The items in this survey measure students’ perceptions of interactions with instructors, feelings of how they are treated as students, and their perception of being respected. Students provided their reasoning in added open-ended prompts in this section regarding instructor’s evaluation of their academic work, feeling out of place in the course, and treatment on campus. The Likert scale was changed to 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree.

**Racial Climate.** The Racial Climate contains two subscales: Racial Experience and University Perceptions. The Racial Experience subscale has five items measuring negative experiences of racialization on campus rated on a scale of 1=strong agree to 7=strong disagree. These items include experiences of racial insensitivity, the tension of interracial campus climate, perception that the campus is more racist than other campuses, and comfort level of other students around the student (see Table 3-4). One multiple-choice prompt was added for students to identify the campus they were thinking about when answering the prior item. The items from the University Perceptions subscale measured how students feel the university supports students of color, including recruitment and sense of belongingness, and cultural differences rated on a scale of 1=strong agree to 7=strong disagree. The Cronbach’s alpha for the Racial Climate showed
good reliability ($\alpha = .78$). Adaptations to words were change from “class” to “course” and changed “the” and “here” to “this university” to better signify RU as the location. The last question on the original University Perceptions subscale about the institutional mascot was not applicable to this study and removed. Three open-ended prompts were added in this section for students to explain what “belonging” meant to them, how attending online changed their college experience, and the impact of COVID on their education. The Likert scale was changed to 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree.

Table 3-4: Items from the Racial Climate subscale (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>I have experienced racial insensitivity from other students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>I have experienced racial insensitivity from faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>The interracial climate on this campus is tense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>In my opinion, this campus is more racist than most.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>What campus were you thinking about when you answered the previous question?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>Students of other races or ethnic groups seem uncomfortable around me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>The university makes a genuine effort to recruit racial and ethnic minority students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>The university fosters respect for cultural differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>The university has made a special effort to help racial and ethnic minority students feel like they “belong” on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>What does it mean to “feel like you belong” to the Global Campus?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>In what ways do you think attending online classes changes your college experience?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>Due to the pandemic, how has the closure of the physical campus influenced or impacted your online education? In what ways has the environment or climate of your course changed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The GCC, AC, and the RC subscales were created using principal components analysis with varimax rotation (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Items with factor loadings of .45 and higher were retained. Subscales are necessary because the overall construct of “climate” is too
general; separating the items into more specific subscales helps clarify the underlying factors that comprise climate as a whole. Principal components analysis with varimax rotation highlights items with strong relationships, which allows items to be confidently separated and analyzed alone or in combination with other subscales. The subscales show how perceptions of the academic and racial climates may serve as “mediators of racial differences in the perception of the general campus climate” (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 263).

**Demographics.** The last section of the survey utilized multiple choice questions to solicit self-disclosed demographic information. Students were prompted to select their gender identity; race/ethnicity identity; select an age range, classify where they live; in-state resident; how many online colleges they have attended; and total earned credits. Additional prompts offered multiple-choice options for avatar use and feelings of anonymity in online education. The last prompt asked students’ if they receive the Pell Grant. The Pell Grant is a federal grant offered to undergraduate students with a demonstrated financial need, as defined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which served as a proxy for earned income levels in this study.

**Adaptations.** As mentioned above, word changes and removal of certain items made these existing instruments suitable for an online student. Adjustments to the Likert scale options were made throughout to minimize confusion between the scales and decrease the available options to an even number. The neutral option offers survey respondents an additional option to express their opinion or belief, but this option also introduces confusion in the analysis as to whether or not the respondent truly has no opinion or does not know. “Offering a middle position makes less difference to individuals who feel strongly about an issue than it does to those who do not feel strongly” which is to say that knowing which way a person leans is beneficial (Converse & Presser, 1986, p. 37). Therefore, a four-point scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree) was used without a neutral position and reaffirmed that their opinion on the matter was important (Weisberg, 2005). The four-point scale forced students to have an opinion
about the question (Dillman, 2000). The survey allowed students to skip questions or leave blanks. Because of the change in the Likert scale response options, comparisons between data collected from this study and previously reported data with these survey instruments is not possible.

The last adjustment was to reduce difficulty. A time reference based on semester enrollment and location of enrollment in the introduction or stem of the items was provided. Students were asked to reflect on the current and previous semester as an online student. This limitation to a defined and short period of time can help improve recall (Dillman, 2000), and because of the inclusion criteria, reflect the students’ time spent at RU and not at other institutions.

**Total Survey Error Approach**

There is potential for error in every phase of survey method, but the use of the Total Survey Error Approach (TSEA) helps mitigate these problems (Weisberg, 2005). The three main categories of error associated with surveying are respondent selection issues, response accuracy issues, and survey administration issues. I made adjustments in the planning of this survey to help offset some of these potential errors.

**Respondent selection issues.** A solution was presented to decrease the sampling error by selecting classes enrolled by students who fit the inclusion criteria. These inclusion criteria may also have decreased the coverage area in that only online students are going to be recruited. The preparatory work with the help of the trusted institutional liaison addressed some of the known errors associated with selection issues. Additionally, I solicited faculty known to the student sample to initiate recruitment and utilized incentives for survey completion. Still, not all students in the identified courses completed the survey. There was no way to remove the non-response in
the survey at the participant level beyond making questions mandatory. Demanding mandatory responses to a survey like this would be unethical.

**Response accuracy issues.** The item nonresponse error increased when a student skipped a question. I chose to use a four-point Likert scale and not offer a neutral position or “I don’t know” in favor of letting students skip the question. Missing data are analyzed and covered in the subsequent section of Missing Data. It was important to know which way the student felt, either towards agreeing or disagreeing, rather than answer in the neutral and believe the trade-off in this error of nonresponse was to the benefit of this study.

I used established survey instruments that were tested for validity and reliability, which helps address the measurement error, it was not tested on this specific group of students. This type of error “occurs when the measure obtained is not an accurate measure of what is being measured” (Weisberg, 2005, p. 18). Said differently, the right question is not asked in the right way. Adjustments were made to the survey instruments to better align with the experiences of online students (see Appendix C) to address this type of error and to mitigate incidents when the student does not give an “accurate answer” (Weisberg, 2005, p. 19). Open-ended prompts were added for students to elaborate, explain, or share their thoughts about the questions. For example, “I have been treated unfairly on this campus” is followed with an open-ended prompt: “You answered that you have been treated unfairly on the campus. Why did you answer in that way?” These adjustments to the questions helped increase response accuracy but did not resolve all problems.

**Survey administration issues.** There was potential for error in the analyzing and data processing, post-survey. I used software systems (e.g. SPSS) to run the statistical analyses in place of hand-calculations and worked with the help of a research assistant to evaluate these outcomes. The survey mode, an electronic online survey, seemed like the best approach to use when surveying a dispersed and remote sample. It is not the intention or goal of this study to
create comparable findings to previous studies as no other studies have used the same combination of survey instruments with a similar student sample before, so the comparability effect errors with this study are already known. A qualitative data software (NVivo) was used for document analysis of the open-ended answers, as it assisted in the coding process. Errors were minimized by the faculty and staff interviews for the qualitative data.

The Total Survey Error Approach helped identify areas for adjustments before surveying and alleviated the potential for some errors to occur. Still, room for some of these error types exists and are addressed in the results and discussion section of this dissertation study.

**Survey Design and Mode**

This cross-sectional survey took place during two semesters and utilized a self-administered survey mode in which all aspects of the process were completed online. By the nature of online education, these students are likely dispersed throughout the world which renders a mailed paper survey a poor option. An electronic survey was the best way to reach a broad student sample for three reasons. First, online students are familiar with interacting with RU and completing academic assignments online and were likely comfortable completing this survey online. Second, students could complete the survey at their convenience and privately. Some of the questions on the GCC and CoBRAS are personal and so students would not have had any added social stress of answering these questions around others. Third, there was no cost associated with the use of the electronic survey through the software of Qualtrics, which made for a fiscally responsible decision.
Missing Data

When survey questions are skipped, these data must be handled appropriately in the analysis (Weisberg, 2005). There were no required questions in the survey instrument, so there was potential for students to skip questions and nonresponse data to be collected. Weisberg (2005) explained that respondents may skip questions unintentionally which creates missing at random (missing completely at random, MCAR) data. On the other hand, respondents may choose to skip the data intentionally which will create a different type of missing data (missing at random) data.

I used SPSS, a statistical software program, to address the missing data. First, data were analyzed to determine if I had MCAR or missing at random in the survey results; I expected fewer students to complete the open-ended prompts than the other parts of the survey but did not consider this data as “missing” for statistical analysis. Twenty-one cases with completion of less than 50% were removed which yielded a total of sixty-four (n=64) cases. The remaining completed surveys (n=64) showed few questions were skipped and no more than two students skipped any question. There was no qualitative data lost with the removal of incomplete surveys, as respondents abandoned the survey before the first open-ended prompt.

The descriptive statistics showed how much missingness existed in the survey results. Correlations with a pairwise deletion process were run to calculate “correlations between each pair of variables… on the basis of people with valid data on both” (Weisberg, 2005, p. 142). The pairwise approach retains more cases than listwise deletion. Even with pairwise deletion, results might be biased and thus misleading because of the nature of the missing data. For example, pairwise deletion will create a varying n throughout the analysis and required additional caution in writing of results. This also means there is a chance that the correlation with pairwise deletion cannot be found in the full data set (Weisberg, 2005). Still, pairwise was the appropriate way to
run correlations for this cross-sectional study and the partial data was valuable as I developed the other aspects of the study.

The variables with missing items in key areas of interest would mean “missingness” as the object of study yet, the missing values were too few to determine patterns. One case, which had the most missing data (all items associated with the subscale of Unawareness of Racial Privilege) was removed.

**Survey Data Analysis**

This case study contains both quantitative and qualitative data which required appropriate forms of analysis for each. This section discusses the process for the quantitative data analysis. First, the survey data was collected through the enterprise survey software tool and then downloaded for analysis. The survey data were cleaned and adjusted to upload into SPSS, a quantitative data analysis tool, to run the statistical analyses.

Data related to students’ demographic information (e.g. age, gender) were used to describe the students (Fonteyn, Kuipers, & Grobe, 1993). Findings from previous studies show differences in age, gender, and semester standing (Islam, Rahim, Liang, & Momtaz, 2011; Ke & Kwak, 2013; Moore, Bartkovich, Fetzner, & Ison, 2003; Wilson & Allen, 2011) may impact student experiences. Therefore, having these descriptors helped inform the understanding of these students’ experiences. The survey offered an age range in multiple choice including 45-54, 55-64, and 65 and older; however, few students were in these categories and were collapsed into a range of “45 and older”

The mean scores from the scales from the survey instruments were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to see what relationships, if any, existed between the
CoBRAS score and the other items from the General Campus Climate, Academic Climate, and Racial Climate. The guiding hypotheses were:

- $H_1$: higher CoBRAS scores will be related to more positive perceptions of GCC, AC, and RC
- $H_2$: lower CoBRAS scores will be related to lower perceptions of GCC, AC, and RC

The scores from the colorblindness subscales were combined into an overall score (CoBRAS), as done in previous studies (see Neville, et al., 2010).

The variables associated with each subscale were computed and reliability statistics were conducted. Numerous items on the varies scales were recoded (see Appendix C). All items in the Racial Experiences section were recoded for clarity so that students who agreed they had experienced racial insensitivity and believed the campus was racist carried a higher mean. This matches the rest of the survey items, as a higher mean indicates an agreeable perception. The inter-item reliability without recoding showed Cronbach’s $\alpha=.396$.

**Curricular and Programmatic Data Collection**

The purpose of using qualitative data in this case study helped describe the setting and context for online student experiences. The online student experience is greatly controlled by the production of material and is bound by the nature of the online modality. Documentary data came from publicly available materials, such as websites, social media platforms, selected syllabi, organizational mission, and institutional policies.

The environment of the online campus creates an opportunity to collect data using netnographic practices. Netnography mimics many aspects of ethnographic research except for it is based strictly on communication that is computer-based (Kozinets, 2002). Netnographic studies consider the offline life of the participant while focusing on the “social interaction, subculture,
and community” of the online space (Steinmetz, 2012, p. 29) which will be vital to understanding the activity system of online education. This dissertation study strays from typical netnographic practices because it considers the students’ offline lives as part of the primary data, instead of serving as a contextual interest (Steinmetz, 2012). Additionally, the documentary data served as a type of audit of the institutional actors’ involvement and interaction as part of the system. Documentary data informed the semi-structured interviews with faculty and staff and provided the descriptive context for “where” the experiences of online students take place or the climate of the online campus. This data, when coupled and integrated with data from the student survey, helped inform areas where, when applying CHAT, gaps in the activity system could lead to contradictions and disturbances. Documentary data was collected from both public and private spaces (see Table 3-2). These documents assisted in the development of how the interactions between subjects and the other elements of the activity system are understood.

I collected and reviewed websites, syllabi, social media, and institutional messaging as documentary data. This material is dynamic and constantly increasing in volume, so boundaries were necessary for the collection process. The files were either uploaded or linked to external files (e.g. web pages) in NVivo. File classifications and attributes were added so that authors, types of files, and details of each document could be distinguished before coding. The six elements from CHAT served as a deductive coding set first and then additional coding schema were added when patterns and themes emerged. The use of CHAT elements across all areas of the documents provided the opportunity to synthesize and pull together a comprehensive description of the online environment. The following section presents the collection and analysis of the documentary data.
Social Media Messaging

Social Media. The material on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram for the GC accounts was nearly identical across all platforms. Only the Twitter feed for the College was fully reviewed because it had the most followers of all of the social media platforms and presented in an easy format. Material available through the public social media accounts was used but where additional private online groups existed was noted. The tweets were listed in NVivo and coded for the reason or purpose of the post in relation to the activity system. Most tweets only received one code but some tweets may have been coded twice. For instance, a tweet about faculty research in the college related to COVID-19 would have received the codes “research in the college” and “COVID.” Two codes were dropped because they were applied too infrequently. The dropped codes were “global reach” in which GC acknowledged students attend from all over the world and “employment,” which signified how the education or degree directly influenced workplace outcomes.

Table 3- 5: Codes for Social Media Posts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NVivo Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic support</td>
<td>Activities related to academic success, such as academic advising, tutoring, technology for remote learning, and academic events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accolades</td>
<td>Acknowledgment of the good work and success of students, faculty, staff, and alumni of either GC or the college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional support</td>
<td>Support that falls outside of academic support and typical student services functions (e.g. professional development, peer mentoring)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID</td>
<td>Response to the worldwide pandemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday</td>
<td>Nationally or officially recognized holiday and any other specially designated day (e.g. National Online Education Day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>Related to or acknowledgment of military and veteran students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivational</td>
<td>Re-enforcing, positive, or encouragement to continue with educational goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical campus</td>
<td>Related to specifics of the physical campus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GC Blog Posts. I reviewed Global Campus blog posts published during the fall semester. Blogs are both a webpage and social media because of the frequency with which they are updated (see Kurubacak, 2008), as such, I coded the social media based on the topic of the post and coded the content of the post under the CHAT elements as I did with other webpages.

Targeted University Messaging. I looked at targeted pieces of institutional messaging related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and a university-wide campus community survey. The institutional messages were coded deductively and thematically and were used as supportive documentation during the final analysis. These institutional messages included leadership responses and reflect the rules, roles, and norms of the larger university which is important to understanding the activity system of online education at RU. The institutional messaging provided valuable information concerning the creation of the online campus environment context.

Syllabi

Syllabi can set the tone and climate of the classroom (Harnish & Bridges, 2010), explain norms and expectations of behavior (Wesp, Kash, Sandry, & Patton, 2013), and otherwise create general perceptions for students. To best understand these elements, the syllabi from the thirty-
three selected classes were reviewed at the file-level and the content-level. The file-level was coded as a tool in the activity system. The content-level was reviewed for five specific elements: instructor’s name and contact information; statements on academic integrity, disability, educational equity and reporting of wrongdoing, and information for the counseling services. The instructor contact was coded “Yes” if information beyond the name was provided (e.g. email address). For all other items, “Yes” was coded if more information was provided than the external link; “Redirected” if the link to the external link was provided; and “No” if the element was unaddressed.

Websites

The largest grouping of documents reviewed were websites from the Global Campus and the College of Computers. A decision was made to not branch out to other offices and instead only the URLs directly related to either the online campus or the College of Computers were used. Students access and use many more webpages while enrolled at the Global Campus, such as centralized administrative offices.

The webpages were coded with the six elements of the activity system (CHAT Codes) at the page level and the content level (see Table 3-5). Webpages are considered as tools (or artifacts) as they help students better understand and act upon what to do to be successful online learners. Yet the purpose of the pages changed which allowed for a wider application of the activity system elements to be used. For example, the page that contained information related to academic advising on the GC pages provided details for what academic advisers could help students with and what students would have to do on their own. This page-level code was assigned division of labor and the content-level includes community, tools, and division of labor codes. The campus climate for online students is abstract, so coding at both the page and content
levels gives more detail for how students may perceive the campus climate. The activity system code most closely related to the purpose of the page was selected. The pages that provided information about how to do things in a linear process were labeled as tools.

Table 3-6: CHAT Code definitions and application

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAT Code</th>
<th>Definition for applying code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>An activity system consists of those internal (e.g. student organizations, military team advisers) and external (e.g. alumni network) to the system who influence the activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of Labor</td>
<td>Separations in the activities performed within the system and are heavily influenced by the rules, roles, and norms of the system (e.g. “the Bursar is responsible for assisting students with their tuition bills”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Mention of or about the history, tradition, identity, emotion, branding, or other socio-cultural influences from the university at large (e.g. graduation, pictures of landmarks on campus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>The object of the system is the shared goal. For this study, the presumed object is an education as evidenced by the diploma and membership in a prestigious group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules, Roles, &amp; Norms</td>
<td>The rules, roles and norms are the expected behaviors found within the system. These are set by leadership, through policy implementation, and socio-cultural practices. (e.g. how the admission counselor helps students complete the application but does not do it for them)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>The subjects of the activity system are those who perform mediated activities towards the object. Students, faculty, and staff are subjects within this system. (e.g. military students, “courses are designed with your busy schedule in mind”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>The tools or artifacts help or mediate activities for the subjects in the system to achieve their goal. Tools can be both physical and abstract (e.g. learning management system, syllabi, financial literacy)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I added the code “History” as it related directly to CHAT and proved useful for items associated with emotion, identity, power, socio-cultural aspects of campus, tradition, and branding. For instance, references to when the college started, were coded as History and items related to graduation or the original administrative building were coded as Tradition. These subcodes
helped describe the socio-cultural and historical context of the online campus for the interaction between the six elements of CHAT.

**Faculty & Staff Interviews**

The functionality of the online education system is largely dependent upon the faculty and staff who work with the online students. The interview protocol for the faculty and staff (Appendix D) was created and based on the conceptualization of the online campus climate through the lens of CHAT. The interviews served as support to the documentary data review. All instructors were asked to participate in the interview by the college liaison and additional requests were included in the reminder emails sent to faculty (see Figures 3-1 and 3-3). Additional targeted requests were made to faculty who responded to the student recruitment messages indicating the invitation was posted in their class. All six interviews lasted sixty minutes each and served as clarification and verification for the description of the online environment.

Faculty were asked to participate in an interview with the help of an institutional liaison. They also received direct messages (Appendix K). Before the interview, I reviewed their biographical and educational information, if presented in the syllabi. We used email to identify a date and time and I sent them my credentials for video-conferencing. I identified Global Campus staff from what I learned from the faculty members and collected their directory information, including job position and duties. As I had a standing relationship with Global Campus, I was able to contact the staff members directly with the interview request. The intention was not to interview staff outside of the college but found it prudent to seek out individuals who could clarify the online education activity system.

I developed interview protocols (see Appendix D) and individualized the interviews based on the role of the institutional actor. For example, I did not ask the professional staff if they
received training to teach online and instead asked about training working with online students. I utilized a PowerPoint presentation provided a visual representation of the online environment and the activity system. This depiction was an easy way to reference what was found in the documents and conducive to the video conferencing software. I asked the faculty or staff member to help expand or explain sections of missing information (see Appendix D). The interviews focused on their experience working with online education and how they interpreted online student experiences based on the summarized data. The interviews were designed to illuminate how the activity system was expected to work by those who design it. With the stated expectations, coupled with the summarized documentary data, it was easier to find tensions and contradictions of the system when analyzing the data from the student survey. Additionally, by asking questions about current practices, the process teased apart institutional actions that had become normed and question the appropriateness of these actions (Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013) in constructive ways to move toward an equity-focus with online students.

Pseudonyms were not given to the interviewees because it was unnecessary to create profiles and only direct quoted short phrases that were easy to capture in my notes are given in subsequent chapters. Likewise, there was no need to record or transcribe the interviews because it is not critical to capture these interviews verbatim. Instead, the notes and memos crafted after the interviews provided informative iterations to the document analysis. Memoing is “one of the most important techniques” to understand, create ideas, and otherwise reflect and work through the studied phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013, p. 20). These memos were not the same as notes, but rather serve as a way to think analytically (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 188) and were a vital piece of data.
Qualitative Data Analysis

The document, curricular, and programmatic data were used to explore the influences and interactions of the six elements of the online education activity system, as conceptualized by CHAT with two interacting systems as the U.S. society, at large, and the online education system. It was important to remember when reading through the documentary data, that for most students this information is the only way students have to understand the environment and campus of RU. These documents create the climate and represent the campus for their online education experience. For example, one of the questions on the survey instrument asked if the student felt left out of RU and offered an open-ended follow-up question for students to explain and expand on their answer. The conceptualization of the online campus climate remained in the foreground of the analysis. The memos taken during the interview and document review were influential in creating the context.

Three layers of codes were applied to these data (see Table 3-6). First, the CHAT codes were applied when applicable. Second, a deductive code set recalled the corresponding item of the survey. This deductive coding process provided more context as it related to the specific section of the survey instrument. Finally, thematic codes were developed, and similar responses were grouped for pattern making. Where applicable, these codes in the open-ended responses were also applied to webpage content, institutional messaging, and interview notes and memos. Students who did not indicate the Global Campus as their home campus were recorded. The combination of the coding schemas and the home campus designation helped the analysis expose areas where interactions between the data exist and findings in context.

Table 3-7: Deductive and Thematic codes with top-level codes bolded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Climate</td>
<td>Of or related to perceptions of the academic climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to academic resources</td>
<td>Includes tutoring, office hours, mentoring, library, and other academic-related resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student services</td>
<td>Services specific to online learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Rigor, quality, or other items related to the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online environment is harder</td>
<td>Expressed online learning is more difficult than F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of course</td>
<td>Comments related to the quality of course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School to life connection</td>
<td>Connection of schoolwork to current employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online classroom Rules, Roles, &amp; Norms</td>
<td>Control of online environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student ownership for success</td>
<td>Expressed ownership for own learning, academic success, and involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>Work, life, school balances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Seriousness</td>
<td>Feelings of being treated like a serious student; intention or reaction of faculty to student needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Ability</td>
<td>Belief student can complete academic work successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Of or related to instructors in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading practices</td>
<td>Specifically used as defining “fair”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair grading</td>
<td>Specifically used as defining “unfair”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect as a student</td>
<td>Associated feelings of respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Experience based on age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbully</td>
<td>Undesirable experience with electronic bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as second language learner</td>
<td>Experience based on non-native English speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespected as a student</td>
<td>Associated feelings of disrespect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation student</td>
<td>Experience based on first generation student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Experience based on gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran status</td>
<td>Experience based on veteran or military status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>Of or related to COVID-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### General climate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense of belonging</th>
<th>Sense of belonging in general</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belonging in class</td>
<td>Definition of belonging in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging to University</td>
<td>Definition of belonging to Research University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of family</td>
<td>Research University community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to physical campus</td>
<td>Reference to physical campus, location or photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference between online and F2F</td>
<td>Expressed differences between online and F2F classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded</td>
<td>Associated feelings of exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded because online</td>
<td>Excluded because student attends online</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Physical disconnection
Excluded because student is not physically present

### Missing out on opportunity
Expressed missed opportunity available to physical campus only

### Same opportunities or activities
Expressed same opportunity as on physical campus

### University messages
University or institutional messages

### University policy
Of or related to university policy

### Interactions
- Of or related to interactions between student with peers, instructors, or others at Research University
- Interactions with others are few or weak
- Of or related to group work
- Interactions with others are positive

### Online College experience
- Of or related to the experience of attending online education
- Mention of cost or price of tuition
- Associated feelings of isolation as online learner
- Associated expectations that online education is different than F2F
- Online education is for reaching a different goal
- Personal connections are not the priority of online education
- Stated in-person class preference
- Ability to study online comes with tradeoff of opportunities or experiences

### Racial Climate
- Of or related to the racial climate of campus
- Associated feelings of prejudice
- Black Lives Matter movement
- Ignoring or pretending race is unimportant
- Associated feelings of including others when different (not always based on race)
- Experiences of harassment or discrimination based on or having to do with race and ethnicity
- Associated feelings of hiding characteristics because of physical separation and technology

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I assigned pseudonyms for each student from direct quotes or summarized thoughts from open-ended responses. If no open-ended response was given, I used combinations of the answers provided in the demographics.

All qualitative data were integrated with the quantitative data for analysis and then used to describe the case in detail. A written and visual representation of what undergraduate students
experience in the form of racialization in an online classroom helped guide the interview process. The analysis through the CHAT theoretical framework provides a holistic view of student experiences.

**Study Limitations**

As with all research, limitations exist in this study and three were identified: 1) site location; 2) survey restrictions; and 3) sample representation. First, the site location for this dissertation study limits the ability to see direct comparisons across other online education, as the activity systems will differ by institution. RU is a large PWI, located in a rural area of the United States with a majority of white people. Careful consideration should be made about the experiences of students at this institution as opposed to historically Black or Hispanic-serving colleges, or even colleges located in areas with a more diverse population. The institutional type may also have a substantial impact on the student experience. For example, RU has a large population of F2F students classified as traditional students but maintains a large portfolio of dedicated student services for online students. Community colleges or smaller private schools may not be able to afford such extensive support for their online students. Institutions interested in doing similar work to this study should conceptualize their own online campus climate to better understand student experiences. Similarities in context would be expected, although not identical.

Second, the survey mode and design may limit participation or stymie the full expression of online students. This dissertation study is voluntary, and the results of the survey were dictated.

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3 A traditional student is defined as being between the ages of 18-23, unmarried, do not care for dependents, and have not served in the military.
by those students who chose to participate. This type of participation means that the unheard voices will remain unheard and there may not be a way to determine how close or far the experiences of the response are to the other students.

The Total Survey Error Approach section acknowledges and preliminarily eliminates some errors in the survey mode but not all. An impact on response accuracy was likely. The survey was adapted to the online environment and some items were reworded to fit the idea of online education better or removed entirely. For instance, the question related to high school confidence levels had a low factor load likely because the majority of survey respondents were years removed from the high school experience. One item about how race is a factor in who gets sent to prison did not seem as relevant to this study initially. The summer survey opened at the same time as the death of George Floyd, and the impact the Black Lives Matter movement has had on students and college campuses is an important factor in the campus climate. While this item seems unconnected to higher education, the importance of the racial climates on college campuses is greater than ever before. Lastly, no open-ended prompts were provided in the CoBRAS sections which would have increased the volume of qualitative data and provide additional understanding of students’ perceptions of colorblindness.

The survey instruments have been tested vigorously but not with online undergraduate students or students who are older than the traditional-aged college student. Students might have been uncomfortable sharing highly personal information on the survey; for example, one student skipped all questions directly related to racism and race or ethnicity. The items on the survey did not clarify for students’ enrollment in the specified college and undergraduate level. This means graduate students inadvertently may be included in the student sample. Additionally, items about how students use social media, websites, and other documents are needed.

The survey instrument is long, and students may have suffered from fatigue. This fatigue may manifest in shorter explanations or personal stories to the open-ended questions, skipping
questions, or abandoning the survey, which happened. Items were not displayed in the same order in this study as in previously administered surveys; however, no answers were required to progress forward, which means students did not have to move through the survey in a linear fashion. Survey methods are easily administered and managed for a dispersed group of participants but can only capture the information included in the items.

Third, the sample size is small and may not be a good representation of the larger population of online students. While this project attempts to provide a better understanding of racialization in an online environment, it may not be useful to inform understanding of the experiences of graduate or professional students, non-degree students, or students in hybrid or other forms of distance education coursework. The sample includes students within one college, taking one of the selected classes. Although limiting the study to one college and certain classes creates clear bounding to the collection of the documentary data, doing so may limit potential variability of student responses.

**Researcher’s Positionality**

Robin Diangelo explains in her book “White Fragility” (2018) that our racialized society encourages white people to claim they do not see race and to believe they are not advantaged by their race. This leads to the sense of “white racial innocence” (p. 62). Diangelo continues that being white is the assumed standard for the majority of white people that generally allows for a sense of belonging, no matter the situation or location. As a white woman interested in studying the racialized experiences of students studying online, my positionality as a researcher contains three important elements. First, I recognize the power dynamics and privilege that whiteness affords me. I understand and appreciate that I may not be able to relate to the experiences of all the students but will try to be
an honest researcher and look for instances in which my implicit bias interferes with the reporting of experiences.

Second, I acknowledge my bias and feelings about online students because of my professional work experience. There is a stigma about online education possibly because of a history of bad actors taking advantage of poorly written regulations and guidance (Parker, 2012). In my time working with online students, I heard members of professional organizations, institutions, and colleagues exclaim online education to be of lower academic rigor and lower quality students. An opinion printed in Psychology Today (Cohan, 2019) claimed online education is the equivalent of a “one-night stand” meaning that it is unsatisfying, “cheap, easy, and fast.” These assumptions about online education, and the subsequent discourse, create a division between student populations based on educational delivery mechanisms, a key factor when discussing stigma and the creation of hierarchy (Link & Phelan, 2001). This stigma places traditional educational methods above those students attending online. As I continued to work with online students and learned how they incorporate a college experience into their lives as working adults, parents, caregivers, or as active-duty soldiers, I found myself serving as an advocate for online students and educating my colleagues about students’ experiences.

Third, I explored what it means to me to address the needs of students of color studying online through this research. The literature about traditional student experiences provides evidence that the physical classroom either promotes or inhibits students of color from finding academic success (Quaye, Griffin, & Museus, 2015). If this is true in the physical classroom, then how can we not assume the same to be true for online students? I come to this project with a belief that supporting and promoting online education as a color-evasive and culture-neutral environment creates long-lasting and hurtful practices for online students of color, similar to the ways found in physical classroom settings. Online education creates access where none previously existed and in doing so, may have the potential to increase educational equity.
Educational equity through online education must be moved to the forefront of online education planning. As Chen, Lambert, and Guidy (2010) state:

As more ethnic minority and part-time students elect to take online courses instead of traditional classroom courses, ensuring the quality of online education and providing good online student support services becomes a mandate for social equity. It is also the responsibility of the institutional administrators and faculty to make certain that all online students received adequate academic and technological support…(p. 1230).

My hope is that this research illuminates the student experience in such a way that creates urgency for institutions to investigate and respond to the online student experience. This research is important to me as a white woman learning more about our racialized society and existing inequities and my interest in online education. My attempt in writing this positionality statement is to address the implicit bias I bring and to challenge myself to move towards a more critical perspective.

**Trustworthiness**

When working with data related to students and their deeply personal experiences, creating a sense of trustworthiness is paramount. I did this in several ways, both as a researcher and with the research.

As a researcher, I protected the data. Students’ identities were protected to the best of my ability by using aliases and non-identifying descriptions. The anonymity of the administrative data was protected by deidentifying all the students. The institutional name and reputation were protected by using a different name and checking for other identifying factors when making observations and analyzing data. For example, the names of campus landmarks were discussed in general terms. I used few descriptions of those interviewed and only included a few instances of a direct quote. An institutionally approved vendor for the delivery and collection of survey data (e.g. Qualtrics) was used. The data results were stored following the highest level of protection as
identified by my home institution’s standards. These safeguards include storage in a password protected cloud location and not on a personal computer. The data for this project will be retained for the specified length of time and all data will be subsequently destroyed according to institutional standards.

The research combined data for a wide range of material and served as data triangulation. For instance, students’ survey responses referenced the physical, the websites showed in-person graduation ceremonies, and the staff confirmed online students are welcomed on the physical campus. This example shows how various perspectives and pieces of data were connected to advance the study results. The supportive interviews with faculty, staff, and administrator provided a type of participant feedback. As these people have control over the development and maintenance of the system of online education, their responses gave critical feedback on the accuracy of my observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The open-ended prompts were coded with consideration to the context of the previous item on the survey. Additionally, careful consideration was given to the sample size as to not conflate the issues or misrepresent

Chapter 3 Summary

The literature about whether or not students experience racialization in an online classroom environment is incomplete and inconclusive. Few studies include qualitative components that examine online students in a way that leads to an understanding of their experiences (see Ware & Stuck, 2010) as it relates to the socio-cultural influences and perceptions of the online campus climate. Too often, the essence of the campus or the climate is excluded from the online education study.
Data were collected and integrated from various locations (see Table 3-2). Previously validated survey instruments and documentary data were used, with support from institutional members, to develop a mixed-method case study to understand how students experience racialization while attending online education. The quantitative data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and correlation. The qualitative data was analyzed through deductive and thematic coding. Data collected from documents, and through faculty and staff interviews, helped describe the activity system of online education and contextualize parts of the student experience within the campus climate.

This project was guided by positionality as a researcher, a white woman who spent years advocating on behalf of online students, and a desire to explore how experiences of racialization occur in the online environment as a way to further use online education in equitable ways.

Chapter 4 provides descriptive results from the survey, including student characteristics, representation of the sample to the study population, and reliability testing and correlation. I show results from the deductive and thematic coding of open-ended survey responses and the curricular and programmatic documents. Chapter 5 provides interpretive results where I apply the theoretical framework of Cultural Historical Activity Theory. Chapter 6 brings these results into conversation with the literature, offers implications to practice and theory, and ends with concluding thoughts.
Chapter 4

Descriptive Results

The purpose of this study was to learn how students experienced racialization in online undergraduate classrooms. The activity system of online education and its socio-cultural influences were measured and contextualized through combined data sources from a student survey and curricular and programmatic documents. This study combined both qualitative and quantitative methods to answer the research question:

What are the classroom experiences of racialization of undergraduate students attending college online?

Data collection for this study yielded sixty-four completed surveys with over three-hundred responses to open-ended questions. University administrative data provided information to describe the study population and sample. Curricular and programmatic documents consisted of hundreds of social media posts and over eighty webpages. Interviews from two faculty, one administrator, and three professional staff members from the Global Campus and the College of Computers provided additional information about how those documents were or were not used by faculty and staff.

This chapter presents the results of the study by responses to scaled items on the survey; reliability testing and correlation; deductive and thematic coding of open-ended survey responses and of curricular and programmatic documents. Table 4-1 shows the volume of data collected and the analytical methods for each data source.

Table 4-1: Data Collection Description Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument/Data Source</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Volume of Data</th>
<th>Data Represents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Survey</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics</td>
<td>n=64</td>
<td>Describes student characteristics; measures perceptions of colorblindness and perceptions of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Student Characteristics

I collected eighty-five surveys and removed cases that had survey completion of less than 50%, leaving a total of sixty-four cases. Of the twenty-one cases removed, more than half were less than 10% completed, including students for whom the Global Campus is not their home campus. As shown in Table 4-2, 80% of the retained sample indicated “I am a Global Campus student” which supports interpretation of the results as representing the experiences of students who mainly study online.

Table 4-2: Global Campus Home Campus Assignment as a Percentage of the Sample during Summer and Fall, 2020 (Respective Cases in Parentheses)
Descriptive statistics characterize the study population and sample by gender, age range, race and ethnicity, in-state residency, international status, number of online schools attended, and semester standing. Overall, the study sample is generally representative to the study population. Figure 4-1 shows the study population has fewer female students (20.9%) than male students (78.7%), but females are overrepresented among the sample (32.8%) (see Appendix J). While the survey item stated gender identity, the multiple-choice selections were related to sex and I acknowledge and regret the error of word choice. No students identified as third-gender, non-binary, or elected to self-describe.
Adult students in the 25-34 and 35-44 age ranges were slightly overrepresented in the survey sample than in the study population (36.9% and 20% respectively). Traditional aged students, 18-24, made up around a quarter of the sample (26.2%) but made up over a third (36.5%) of the study population. Several responses to open-ended survey questions and interviewees suggested that the pandemic likely impacted the number of traditional aged students in the Global Campus with more enrolling during the summer and fall semesters 2020.
RU is considered a Predominately White Institution (PWI) and, as shown in Table 4-3, white students were in the majority of the study population (65.7%). The sample was more racially and ethnically diverse than the study population. The sample included a lower percentage of white students (56.3%) and higher percentages of American Indian or Alaska Native (1.6%), Asian or Asian American (12.5%), Black or African American (9.4%), and Hispanic or LatinX (10.96%) than the study population. The study population included few students who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native (.3%), Asian or Asian American (10.0%), Black or African American (6.5%), Hispanic or LatinX (7.4%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (.2%) and those who identify as multiple races and ethnicities (2.5%).
percentage of international students in the study population and the sample were nearly identical (4.9% and 4.7% respectively.)

Table 4-3: Student Race and Ethnicity as a Percentage of the Sample (Respective Cases in Parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race &amp; Ethnicity</th>
<th>Total Admin (n=647)</th>
<th>Survey Respondents (n=64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>.3 (2)</td>
<td>1.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian American</td>
<td>10.0 (65)</td>
<td>12.5 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>6.5 (42)</td>
<td>9.4 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or LatinX</td>
<td>7.4 (48)</td>
<td>10.9 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>.2 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>65.7 (425)</td>
<td>56.3 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Race &amp; Ethnicities</td>
<td>2.5(16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Student</td>
<td>4.9(32)</td>
<td>4.7 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to disclose</td>
<td>1.6 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer/Missing ^a</td>
<td>2.5 (16)</td>
<td>3.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^a The race and ethnicity field in the administrative data is captured by the student on the application for admission and is not required.

^b The student selected white in the demographic section but stated he was Black in the open-ended answers. The original answer was retained but the difference is noted.

The sample had a slightly higher percentage (50.3%) of students who reside in the same state as Research University than the study population (47.4%). Two international students in the study population and none who were identified as living in-state have been counted in the out-of-state category.

Figure 4-3 shows the sample has a higher percentage of advanced standing students (79.7%) than the study population (69.34%). The selected classes were level 200 and above which means most students are not first year students but second year and above. This led to a higher representation of students at the “senior level” (or those who have earned more than ninety credits). A quarter of the sample (26.6%) answered they receive the Pell Grant, which serves as a proxy of a student’s financial strength and means the majority of the sample is not considered low-income.
Figure 4-3: Frequency of semester standing of study population and sample.

Racial Attitudes and Campus Climate

A working hypothesis for this study was the higher the colorblind attitudes score on the CoBRAS, the more positive students’ perceptions would be with the general campus, academic and racial climates. Conversely, the lower the colorblind score, the more negative students’ perceptions would be of the general campus, academic, and racial climates. The guiding hypotheses were:

- **H₁**: higher CoBRAS scores will be related to more positive perceptions of General Campus Climate, Academic Climate, and Racial Climate
- **H₂**: lower CoBRAS scores will be related to more negative perceptions of General Campus Climate, Academic Climate, and Racial Climate
Table 4-4 reports the descriptive statistics based on a four-point Likert scale. For the racial attitudes scale (CoBRAS), lower scores represent fewer colorblind perceptions. The sample mean was $\mu=2.05$. The sample means for the general campus climate ($\mu=3.29$), academic climate ($\mu=3.1$), and racial climate ($\mu=3.23$) showed positive perceptions in the respective areas.

Table 4-4: Descriptive Statistics of Scales for Sample (n=64).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Color-blind Racial Attitudes Scale (CoBRAS)</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>0.599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Campus Climate</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Climate</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>0.416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Climate</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.426</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reliability statistics were conducted, across these four scales and results showed Cronbach’s $\alpha > .75$ (see Table 4-5), which indicates items are an acceptable level of internal consistency (see Gilem & Gilem, 2004).

Table 4-5: Inter-item Reliability Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CoBRAS (n=19)</td>
<td>$\alpha = .925$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Campus Climate (n=4)</td>
<td>$\alpha = .766$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Climate (n=16)</td>
<td>$\alpha = .854$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Climate (n=8)</td>
<td>$\alpha = .777$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relationship of Colorblindness to Climate**

The mean scores from the scales were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to see what relationships, if any, existed between the CoBRAS score and the other items from the General Campus Climate, Academic Climate, and Racial Climate. Pearson’s Correlation shows the CoBRAS and
the General Campus Climate ($r(64)=.054$, $p=.672$), Academic Climate ($r(64)=.088$, $p=.492$), and Racial Climate ($r(64)=.153$, $p=.226$) scales had no statistically correlated relationship (see Table 4-6).

Table 4- 6: Pearson Correlation Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>CoBRAS Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Campus Climate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.672</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Climate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Climate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The null hypothesis is retained. Survey results indicate no relationship exists between the CoBRAS scores and the GCC, AC, and RC.

Overall, the minimum point of the range of scores for all students are similar, though the maximum of the range of scores varies across race and ethnicities, as shown in Figure 4-4. Likewise, the mean scores varied across race and ethnicities. Black or African American students have the lowest colorblind score. White, Hispanic or LatinX students, and International students have the highest maximum range and share similar minimum range and mean scores to the overall sample. While a difference between groups existed, no correlated statistical significance was recorded for the sample. Additionally, no statistically significant relationship between the colorblind scores and the General
Campus Climate, Academic Climate, and Racial Climate scores exists when Black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) were grouped together.

![CoBRAS Range and Mean by Race & Ethnicity](image)

Figure 4-4: Range and mean of colorblind perceptions by race and ethnicity.

Although not statistically significant, these descriptive results suggest that students who identify with different racial and ethnic groups bring different perceptions of race and ethnicity to their online classroom. In addition, they have different perceptions of the campus climate. Figure 4-5 shows a scatterplot of CoBRAS scores with sample means of the General Campus Climate and visually represents the variations in the data. The size of the bubble represents the number of students in the sample who identify with each race and ethnicity group, which allows for interpretation of the mean results to be informed by sensitivity of the estimate to small sample size. The General Campus Climate (GCC) shows an overall positive perception with an average mean of $\mu=3.29$. Black or African American and Hispanic or LatinX students had less positive perceptions than the sample mean ($\mu= 3.00$ and $\mu =3.07$ respectively), though both of these estimates are sensitive to small sample size. The other students had
positive perceptions higher than the sample mean. White students (μ = 3.34), who made up the highest number in the sample, and Asian or Asian American (μ = 3.31) students had similar means, with the latter sensitive to small sample size. Although not meaningful as averages due to small numbers, note that the International students had the next highest mean score (μ = 3.58) and the one American Indian or Alaska Native scored a 4.0, the highest score available.

**Figure 4-5**: Mean scores of racial attitudes by general campus climate perception, with bubble size representing the number of students by race and ethnicity in the sample.

Still, the no statistically significant correlation existed between the Academic Climate and Racial Climate scales. Figure 4-6 shows all scores for the Racial Climate and Academic Climate against the corresponding CoBRAS score for each person in the sample. No discernable pattern exists between the colorblindness score and the perceptions of the Racial and Academic Climates. The average means for
both the Academic and Racial Climates suggest positive perceptions overall ($\mu=3.4$ and $\mu=3.56$ respectively).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Climate</th>
<th>CoBRAS</th>
<th>Academic Climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4-6: Racial Climate and Academic Climate scores mapped to CoBRAS scores.

Table 4-7 shows percentiles of highest and lowest scores on the colorblindness scale. White students were nearly evenly split across all percentiles, whereas most students of color were in the 50% and below score range.
Table 4-7: Percentiles of the CoBRAS Scale by Race and Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race &amp; Ethnicity</th>
<th>25%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or LatinX</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Not to Disclose</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ Explanation of Experiences

The survey instrument contained seven open-ended prompts in the General Campus Climate, Academic Climate, and Racial Climate sections (Table 4-8). The response rate for the open-ended questions was over 70% for all respondents. In all, three hundred sixty-five open-ended answers were provided.

Table 4-8: Percentage of Responses to Open-ended Prompts (Respective Cases in Parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Completed Answers (n)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.6 We asked you if you felt left out of things at the university and you said you &quot;[insert answer]&quot;. What made you answer in this way?</td>
<td>87.5 % (56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 You answered that you &quot;[insert answer]&quot; that your work is evaluated fairly. Why did you answer in that way?</td>
<td>84.38% (54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6 We asked if you feel out of place in the course and you said you &quot;[insert answer]&quot;. What were you thinking about and why did you answer in that way?</td>
<td>82.8% (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6 In what ways do you feel that you have been treated fairly or unfairly on this campus? Why did you answer in that way? Is there a particular reason or experience you can share?</td>
<td>73.4% (47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.5 What does it mean to &quot;feel like you belong&quot; to the Global Campus?</td>
<td>75% (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.6 In what ways do you think attending online classes changes your college experience?</td>
<td>84.38% (54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.7 Due to the pandemic, how has the closure of the physical campus influenced or impacted your online education? In what ways has the environment or climate of your course changed?</td>
<td>82.8% (53)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A total of fifty-four deductive codes and thematic sub-codes were applied during data analysis. Table 4-9 shows this code application to the open-ended responses only. Codes with lower occurrences were applied to other data, such as curricular and programmatic documents, and thus retained. The top-level codes include individual coding and aggregated sub-codes. Academic climate and sub-codes had the most frequent coding (n=196), and the General Campus Climate had the next highest coding occurrences (n=132). COVID (n=59) and Racial Climate (40) were the least coded themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Climate</strong></td>
<td>196</td>
<td>Of or related to perceptions of the academic climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to academic resources</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Includes tutoring, office hours, mentoring, library, and other academic related resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Services specific to online learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Rigor, quality, or other items related to the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online environment is harder</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Expressed online learning is more difficult than F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of course</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Comments related to quality of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School to life connection</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Connection of schoolwork to current employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online classroom Rules, Roles, &amp; Norms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Control of online environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student ownership for success</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Expressed ownership for own learning, academic success, and involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Work, life, school balances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of Seriousness</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>Feelings of being treated like a serious student; intention or reaction of faculty to student needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Ability</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Belief student can complete academic work successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Of or related to instructors in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading practices</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Specifically used as defining “fair”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair grading</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Specifically used as defining “unfair”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect as a student</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Associated feelings of respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Experience based on age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyberbully</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Undesirable experience with electronic bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as second language learner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Experience based on non-native English speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespected as a student</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Associated feelings of disrespect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Experience based on first generation student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Experience based on gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran status</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Experience based on veteran or military status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID19</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Of or related to COVID-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General climate</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Of or related to the general campus climate, including online and physical campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of belonging</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Sense of belonging in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging in class</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Definition of belonging in class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging to University</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Definition of belonging to Research University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Research University community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to physical campus</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reference to physical campus, location or photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference between online and F2F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Expressed differences between online and F2F classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Associated feelings of exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded because online</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Excluded because student attends online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical disconnection</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Excluded because student is not physically present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing out on opportunity</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Expressed missed opportunity available to physical campus only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same opportunities or activities</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Expressed same opportunity as on physical campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University messages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>University or institutional messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University policy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Of or related to university policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Of or related to interactions between student with peers, instructors, or others at Research University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer or weak interactions</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Interactions with others are few or weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Of or related to group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive connections</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Interactions with others are positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online College experience</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Of or related to the experience of attending online education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost &amp; Price</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mention of cost or price of tuition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Isolation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Associated feelings of isolation as online learner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Online is just a different experience 41
Means to an end 6
"I'm good" 3
Prefer in person classes 6
Tradeoff 23

**Racial Climate** 39
Bias 3
BLM 1
Color-evasiveness 11
Diversity & Inclusion 9
Racial Discrimination 8
Virtual Veil 9

Associated expectations that online education is different than F2F
Online education is for reaching a different goal
Personal connections are not the priority of online education
Stated in-person class preference
Ability to study online comes with tradeoff of opportunities or experiences
Of or related to the racial climate of campus
Associated feelings of prejudice
Black Lives Matter movement
Ignoring or pretending race is unimportant
Associated feelings of including others when different (not always based on race)
Experiences of harassment or discrimination based on or having to do with race and ethnicity
Associated feelings of hiding characteristics because of physical separation and technology

The academic climate code was coded most frequently, likely because three open-ended prompts about fairness in grading, feeling in place in class, and extent of being treated fairly were in this section. Figure 4-7 shows a heat map of the coding matrix for the open-ended responses only and shows areas where topics and themes overlap. For instance, the COVID code relates to student responses in the academic climate, general campus climate, and the online experience. This code has two occurrences in the racial climate. The heat map shows that student responses combine more in one area of their online educational experience with another.
| Academic Climate               | Access to academic resources | Online Classroom Roles, Rules, & Norms | Student Ownership for Success | Perceptions of Respect | Research in the college | COVID-19 | General Climate               | Connection to Physical Campus | Excluded F2F System | University Messages | Same Opportunities/Activities | Online College Experience | Cost & Price | Feelings of Isolation | Online is Just Different | Tradeoff | Racial Climate               | Bias | Racial discrimination | BLM | Color-consciousness | Diversity and Inclusion | Virtual Veil |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|----------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|------|------------------------|
| Access to Academic Resources | 11                           | 11                                     | 33                            | 1                       | 22                    | 94                   | 37                   | 11                            | 44                      | 9                    | 13                    | 6                       | 16                     | 1           | 1                          | 5                          | 18          | 3                          | 3               | 1                          | 4               | 2                       | 6               |
| Curriculum                   | 33                           | 2                                      | 33                            | 2                       | 23                    | 3                    | 3                   | 6                            | 2                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 2                      | 1           | 1                          | 1                          | 1           | 1                          | 1               | 1                          | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Online Classroom Roles, Rules, & Norms | 1                  | 1                                       |                               |                         |                       |                      |                      |                               |                         |                      |                        |                          |                        |             |                            |                             |             |                            |                  |                           |                  |                          |                  |
| Student Ownership for Success | 22                           | 2                                      | 22                            | 1                       | 5                     | 4                    | 5                   | 3                            | 4                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 1                      | 1           | 1                          | 1                          | 1           | 1                          | 1               | 1                          | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Perceptions of Respect       | 84                           | 2                                      | 3                              | 84                      | 2                     | 5                    | 3                   | 4                            | 1                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 1                      | 1           | 1                          | 1                          | 1           | 1                          | 1               | 1                          | 1               | 4                       | 4               |
| Research in the College      | 37                           | 3                                      | 5                              | 37                      | 1                    | 19                   | 2                   | 5                            | 1                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 3                      | 1           | 1                          | 1                          | 1           | 1                          | 1               | 1                          | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| COVID-19                     | 11                           | 1                                      | 3                              | 89                      | 8                    | 4                    | 1                   | 1                            | 1                      | 4                    | 1                     | 2                       | 2                      | 1           | 1                          | 1                          | 1           | 1                          | 1               | 1                          | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| General climate              | 44                           | 2                                      | 6                              | 4                       | 19                   | 8                    | 132                  | 52                            | 6                      | 24                  | 39                    | 2                       | 2                      | 25                     | 3                      | 15                    | 11                    | 14                     | 6                       | 5               | 2                       |
| Sense of Belonging           | 9                            | 1                                      | 2                              | 1                       | 1                    | 2                    | 52                   | 52                            | 2                      | 2                   | 2                     | 5                       | 2                      | 1                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Connection to Physical Campus| 1                            | 1                                      |                               |                         |                       |                      |                      |                               |                         |                      |                      |                        |                         |                        |                        |                      |                        |                        |                      |                      |                        | 1               |
| Difference between Online and F2F | 9                          | 1                                      | 1                              | 5                       | 4                    | 24                   | 1                    | 24                           | 12                     | 9                    | 1                     | 6                       | 4                      | 2                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Excluded F2F System          | 13                           | 1                                      | 1                              | 1                       | 39                   | 2                    | 12                   | 39                            | 1                      | 9                    | 5                     | 5                       | 3                      | 3                      | 1                    | 3                     | 1                       | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| University Messages          | 1                            | 1                                      | 1                              | 1                       | 2                    | 1                    | 1                   | 2                            | 1                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 1                      | 1                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Same Opportunities/Activities| 6                            | 2                                      | 1                              | 2                       | 1                    | 25                   | 2                    | 9                            | 9                      | 1                    | 64                    | 4                      | 2                     | 41                     | 25                     |                      |                       |                        | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Online College Experience    | 16                           | 2                                      | 4                              | 5                       | 1                    | 2                    | 4                   | 25                           | 2                      | 9                    | 1                     | 64                     | 4                      | 2                     | 41                    | 25                     |                      |                       |                        | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Cost & Price                 | 1                            | 1                                      |                               |                         |                       |                      |                      |                               |                         |                      |                      |                        |                         |                        |                      |                      |                        |                       |                        |                      | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Feelings of Isolation        | 1                            | 1                                      |                               |                         |                       |                      |                      |                               |                         |                      |                      |                        |                         |                        |                      |                      |                        |                       |                        |                      | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Online is Just Different     | 1                            | 1                                      | 1                              | 4                       | 4                    | 1                    | 2                   | 15                           | 1                      | 6                    | 5                     | 41                     | 1                      | 41                    | 3                     | 1                      |                        | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Tradeoff                     | 1                            | 1                                      | 1                              | 2                       | 1                    | 11                   | 1                    | 4                            | 5                      | 1                    | 25                    | 4                      | 3                     | 25                    |                      |                        |                       |                        | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Racial Climate               | 18                           | 1                                      | 1                              | 2                       | 7                    | 7                    | 1                   | 14                           | 2                      | 2                   | 3                     | 2                       | 1                      |                      | 39                    | 3                      | 8                     | 1                       | 11                    | 9               | 9                       | 3               |
| Bias                         | 3                            | 3                                      |                               |                         |                       |                      |                      |                               |                         |                      |                      |                        |                         |                        |                      |                        |                       |                        |                        | 3               | 3                       | 1               |
| Racial discrimination        | 3                            | 3                                      |                               |                         |                       |                      |                      |                               |                         |                      |                      |                        |                         |                        |                      |                        |                       |                        |                        | 8               | 8                       | 1               |
| BLM                          | 1                            | 1                                      |                               |                         |                       |                      |                      |                               |                         |                      |                      |                        |                         |                        |                      |                        |                       |                        |                        | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Color-consciousness          | 4                            | 1                                      | 1                              | 1                       | 5                    | 1                    | 1                   | 1                            | 1                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 1                      | 1                      | 1                    | 1                     | 1                       | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Diversity and Inclusion      | 2                            | 1                                      | 1                              | 2                       | 1                    |                     |                      |                               |                         |                      |                      |                        |                         |                        |                      |                        |                       |                        |                       | 1               | 1                       | 1               |
| Virtual Veil                 | 6                            | 4                                      | 1                              | 1                       |                      |                      |                      |                               |                         |                      |                      |                        |                         |                        |                      |                        |                       |                        |                       | 9               | 1                       | 9               |

Figure 4-7: Deductive and thematic code heat map for open-ended responses with higher occurrences in darker colors.
The item prior to the open-ended prompt gives context to the students’ responses for when the coding schema was applied (see Table 4-10). Because this study sought to understand the experiences of racialization, codes associated with racial climate were investigated further. Racialized climate codes were most frequently applied to the prompt related to “feeling left out” of the university with twenty-two instances. The items “belonging to the university” and “work is evaluated fairly” had sixteen occurrences each. Only ten occurrences of the racial climate codes were applied to feelings of “treated unfairly.” The two prompts of “feeling out of place” and “college experience online” both had nine occurrences. Educational changes due to COVID had two occurrences and was the only place where a student shared how the Black Lives Matter movement impacted his ability to be academically successful. The infrequent coding occurrences indicate students did not always associate feeling left out, not belonging, unfair work evaluation, or different college experience with issues related to race and ethnicity.

Table 4-10: Occurrences of Codes with More Than Five Occurrences Applied to Open-ended Prompts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Open-ended Prompt</th>
<th>Racial Climate</th>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>Color-evasiveness</th>
<th>Diversity &amp; Inclusion</th>
<th>Racial discrimination</th>
<th>Virtual veil</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling left out of the university</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging to Global Campus</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work is evaluated fairly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treated unfairly on campus</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of out of place in course</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College experience online</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4-8 shows the range of scores for selected items immediately preceding the open-ended prompts. The circles indicate the mean of each item. The mean response (µ=1.3) to “treated unfairly on campus” fell between strongly disagree and disagree and the mean response to “work is evaluated fairly” indicated agreement (µ=3.48). Combined, these results imply that students did not feel unfairly treated. Likewise, students disagreed they felt like they “out of place” in their course (µ=1.67) and the mean on
the other item indicates the majority of respondents disagreed about being “left out of things” at the university (µ=2.06). Additionally, students agreed that the university makes an effort to make students of color feel like they belong (µ=3.16). Each open-ended prompt was explored with deductive and thematic coding. Students were assigned pseudonyms from direct quotes or from thematic coding based on their responses. If no open-ended response was given, I used a combination of demographic information (see Table 5-3 for a complete list). The pseudonyms are presented after the quotes in italics.

Figure 4-8: Range of scores for selected items with a circle approximating the mean score for each item.

Figure 4-9 show that students disagreed to feeling left out of things at the university (µ = 2.03). The breakdown by race and ethnicity show that more than half of the Asian or Asian American students (n=6) and Black students (n=3) fall into the “disagree” or “strongly disagree” categories. More white students (n=23) disagreed to feelings of being left out. The few students who identified as international or did not disclose their race and ethnicity also disagreed to feeling left out. No difference existed between
students who identified as living in-state or out-of-state, with over 60% disagreeing to feelings of left out, including international students.

Figure 4-9: Feelings of being left out by race and ethnicity.

For some students, race and ethnicity informed their answer to the following open-ended prompt that followed the item asking if they felt left out.

[Research University] does a phenomenal job of including people of all races and ethnicities in its events and clubs. (*Less Motivated*)

I feel that [Research University’s] culture is very accepting, and I despite being a predominantly white population, the students and the surrounding community is very open and I have never felt like I was discriminated against due to my skin color or race. (*Caring Instructors*)

I feel as though certain campuses are known for not being diverse as other ones. I transferred from [Research University campus] and I felt as thought [sic] I fit in being an African American and having other people in that area who are also black and or went to school that had a fair amount of black people there. I then transferred to [Research University campus] which was the complete opposite. I have heard and seen a lot of racism here at this campus from students, and a lot of words being said. If I had the chance to go back in time I would go to HBCU or stayed at [Research University campus] if they had my major. (*Easier to Talk with Others*)

One student, specifically said her race made her feel less belongingness:
I often find that I have great working relationships in groups when it is based solely on the quality of work and we have not seen each other on a video conferencing platform. However, as soon as I am forced to present and they realize that I am an African American woman, my groups tend to treat me differently in subtle microaggressive ways such as cutting me off when I speak or restating something I have already said as if it was their original idea. (Suffered Microaggressions)

This student felt her academic work is the basis of judgment until others recognize her as an African American woman. One student said that the sense of belonging has nothing to do with race and ethnicity. He stated:

The University's support of [Global Campus] students is abysmal. This is completely regardless to race, creed or skin. It has to do with the culture of [Research University]. [Global Campus] students and even Faculty were often the last to know about career and college-centric major-related events; likely from the belief that as distance learners they somehow have no interest in them? So does it have to do with racial injustice? Absolutely not. It has to do with academic tribalism and seemingly a sense of in-fighting among disparate [campuses] (Academic Tribalism)

The lack of belongingness for this student was more focused on the modality of education, than race and ethnicity. The “online student status” was frequent cited reason for exclusion in the open-ended responses. At least seven other students shared similar thoughts. They felt excluded for no reason other than they were online students.

It does appear that there are situations where an in-school student can take [Global Campus] classes while [an online] student can't take online classes that are designed only for in-school students. (Can’t Access the Same Opportunities)

As a [Global Campus] student, my colleagues and I are not afforded the same consideration, respect and treatment as students of other campuses. (Second Class Citizen)

I have never felt part of the university and still do not. As hard as they may try, they still treat the [Global Campus] and their students and afterthoughts. (Afterthought)

[Global Campus] is after all, as [Research University] likes to put it, a separate entity (Graded Fairly)

As a [Global Campus] student there are limited opportunities to be involved with on-campus activities. Many of these could be offered simply by streaming or utilizing conference calling. (Same Opportunities)

There are a lot of activities going on at [Research University] and branch campuses, but [Global Campus] students rarely know what events these are and almost never have the chance to participate in them, although some of that may be due to geographic locations, but even with clubs on campus or activities that could be live-streamed, [GC] students are left in the dark. (Disconnected)
I don't have the luxury to drop by a professor's office or meet up at a café with them to go over issues in class. (*Concerned for Mental Health*)

While race and ethnicity were not salient in these answers, it demonstrates that online students feel left out for no reason other than modality. When I analyzed these statements through CHAT in the next chapter, it led me to see online students are disconnected from the community of Research University.

Figure 4-10 shows students, regardless of race and ethnicity, feel their work is evaluated fairly with the majority answering affirmatively ($\mu=3.48$).

![Figure 4-10: Feelings that work is evaluated fairly by race and ethnicity.](image)

Students expressed benefitting from hiding their identities while online. This sense of anonymity is evocative of the “virtual veil” described by Palacios and Wood (2016). My application of this term, virtual veil, refers to the ways students use the anonymity afforded by technology to separate their physical attributes form their academic performance, thereby removing such considerations from others’ perceptions of their academic ability. These four students offered the virtual veil:

Well. As I am in [Global Campus], what basis do instructors have to evaluate me on? Unless a student has a picture up, you have no idea if the person is male or female, and unless you have a very different name, like my last name, there's no way to determine that I am "different." It would
take quite a terrible person to discriminate on me or others without seeing them. If such were the case, then I'm sure someone would raise concerns so I think my work is evaluated fairly. (917)

I have no way of knowing how other students are evaluated. I also do not think my instructors are aware of my race or gender unless we meet in a video conference which rarely happens in my [Global Campus] courses (I think it has happened twice and I have been a full-time [GC] student for 2 years). (932)

I have no idea if the assignments are being graded unfairly as I am [Global Campus]. I do think they are being graded fairly, and not based on any prejudices. (952)

The virtual veil offered a sense of anonymity for these students which led them to believe there was no prejudice in evaluations of their work. Other students acknowledge implicit bias may influence grading:

I'd say "somewhat fairly" because there is always implicit bias involved in the instructor's processes and, when answers are limited to multiple choice and/or don't allow for students to explain their answers - this creates confusion when "multiple answers" could actually be correct given the logic and circumstance. (Implicit Bias)

It is never fair because one person is grading it. In every class, you have to learn what that particular professor likes and does not like. You have to learn what you will lose points for and adapt accordingly. Is it fair, no, but it is a part of life and will be a part of the professional world. The real world does not evaluate your work fairly. (Hard to Connect)

One response leaned toward color-evasiveness:

I have never felt that I have received special treatment, both better or worse, due to who I was (Caring Instructors)

As shown in Figure 4-10, there was a sense that work is evaluated fairly. For many of the students, the ability to perform academically was a key factor in the evaluation of work, more so than any racialized perceptions. One student wrote “My grades are based on quality so yes I believe I am graded fairly” (Quality Matters) and another stated: “Usually, if my work is correct it is treated that way” (Missing in Person Class). The sentiments of these two examples sums up more than forty occurrences of coding for fair grading (see Table 4-10).

Students agreed they felt comfortable approaching their instructors (µ=3.52) and disagreed their comments were ignored in class (µ=1.48). Several students had positive things to say about the support they receive from instructors:
When I have a question or concern about something and I get a response from my professor or advisor right away! \textit{(Academic Ability)}

I have never been ignored by an instructor. \textit{(Highest Grade)}

I am able to easily engage with my professors on a personal basis. \textit{(Frustrated with Group Work)}

One student shared less positive comments about their instructors:

To have professors that actually care about and engage with the students (they don't, except a select few) \textit{(Military Spouse)}

\textit{Military Spouse's} feelings are stronger than most other responses about instructors. For other students, the lack of connection was caused by modality and not disinterested faculty:

Makes it difficult to develop relationships with professors and to get more hands on experience and access to resources in areas like obtaining an internship or professor led one etc \textit{(Judged by Academics)}

[Online learning] is hard to have any sort of connection with your professors. It is almost impossible actually. I really miss that from when I was a traditional student. \textit{(Hard to Connect)}

These responses indicate relationship building is altered by the modality. Students agreed that their instructors helped them feel confident (\(\mu=3.10\)) and disagreed that faculty show little interest in their opinions (\(\mu=2.06\)).

Only four students disagreed their work was evaluated fairly. These students offered reasons of poor participation from group members, disengaged faculty, poor quality of chosen assessments, and that “the bar ... is set very low” \textit{(Treated Equally)}. No student felt race or ethnicity played a part of the unfair evaluations.

The faculty shared a preference for teaching online. One faculty member shared other instructors treat online education as a less worthy form of education because they were unmotivated to put forward the change in effort. Both faculty members agreed teacher motivation was crucial as it directly impacted
student motivation in the classroom.

Figure 4-11: Student responses by race and ethnicity for feeling “somewhat out of place in the course” by race and ethnicity.

More students strongly disagreed they felt like they feel out of place in their course ($\mu=1.67$) as shown in Figure 4-11 than those who strongly agreed. The student responses were equally divided between somewhat disagree and agree. The one white student who strongly agreed with this statement offered his extensive professional experience as the reason for feeling out of place. The academic climate was more frequently coded but for some students, the racial climate was important. For one student, the virtual veil made her feel as if she fit into her course. She wrote:

the interactions with my classmates are sight unseen and I demonstrate my capabilities. I know I would feel differently if I were sitting in the classroom with students who are younger than me, whiter than me, and likely male (Suffered Microaggressions)

For two students, the feeling of racial and ethnic discrimination explained their answer. One international student described feeling out of place because he had had a “different life and cultural experience few [other] students here” (Judged by Academics). One student said he felt out of place because “sometimes
my classmates are insensitive to racial disparities and it shows in discussions. I can’t change that, even though I sometimes feel out of place” (Classmates are Insensitive).

One student believed diversity in the classroom comes from other professions in the field associated with the College of Computers. He offered:

My classmates and I are progressing at the same levels with the same struggles. Some may be professionals in the field. This diversity allows us to communicate our particular fields into a uniform project. Thus allowing us to create a more well round deliverable that may be looked at from all angles of the field (School is Family)

For this student, diversity did not mean race and ethnicity. Rather, it meant professional experience and perspective.

Figure 4-12: Student responses of being treated unfairly on campus by race and ethnicity.

Students disagreed they were treated unfairly on campus ($\mu=1.31$) with nearly 80% strongly disagreeing (Figure 4-12). The open-ended response from two of the three white students who strongly agreed did not explain their answers. One stated “I have no reasoning behind being treated fairly, but I haven’t been treated unfairly” (931) and the other said “I have been treated like any other student. Nothing to write
Neither student gave a reason for why they selected strongly agree. The third student provided a story about a specific instructor that gives reason to her affirmative answer:

[Instructor] was extremely rude and combative to me asking basic questions (clarifications on assignments, etc) and even accused me of lying when I told him that certain parts of the assignment were missing from [the LMS]. When I brought this up to my MALE group members, he was extremely nice to them even when they had a more rude tone with him. (*Military Spouse*)

The white student who somewhat agreed shared a story about not being allowed to enroll in a class that was offered remotely because of COVID. He wrote that “as a [Global Campus] student, my colleagues and I are not afforded the same consideration, respect and treatment as students of other campuses” (*Second Class Citizen*). For these four students, race and ethnicity did not play a part in their disagreement.

Students who agreed they were treated fairly shared some experiences of racialization. For one student, he thought fair treatment “depends on the person and not the school itself. The school's priority is to have a zero tolerance policy” (*Zero Tolerance*). Another student offered the virtual veil and said: “being online almost makes it better no one can see or hear you so all they are experiencing with you is your work and comments” (*Academic Ability*). Two additional responses were similar. One said: “No reason, in particular, I have the same opportunities to be treated just like everyone else” (*Comfortable with Online Class*) and the statement above about being treated the same as other students. The third student acknowledged there might be institutionalized issues related to the way he is treated:

I feel that my experience is my own and, as such, I don't feel like I've had any more or less in the way I've been treated throughout my experience with [Research University]. I feel, in some ways, the system caters to traditional students and I feel there are some "elements" of fair vs. unfair in how the entire system works; however, in the end, I'm responsible for whether I excel or receive equitable treatment (*Implicit Bias*)

Treatment on campus for these students had little to do with race and ethnicity and the majority disagreed they were treated unfairly (µ=1.31).
Figure 4-13: Feelings that the University makes an effort for students of color feel like they “belong” on campus by race and ethnicity.

As shown in Figure 4-13, over 85% of students agreed that Research University makes a “special effort” for students of color to feel like they “belong on campus” ($\mu=3.16$). Only one Black student disagreed and seven students from various races and ethnicities somewhat disagreed.

Students explained in the following open-ended prompt what made them feel like they “belong” to Global Campus. Some students indicated race and ethnicity in their response, though the rationale varied. One student said belonging to him meant being:

Treated as everyone else and that you will be judged and graded on your work not your ethnic background or skin color (*Judged by Academics*)

Another student said it meant that he was “not discriminated against overtly. No overt racism” (*No Overt Racism*). This student identified as a white male.

Two other students believed “belonging” related to fostering diversity and said:
In order to ‘feel like you belong’, I feel as though the campus must foster an equal environment where different ethnicities are given the same opportunities as the white students (*Same as White Students*)

To have more opportunities for racial and ethnic minority students who are [Global Campus] students (*Different Social Experience*)
Equal treatment and opportunity for all students meant belonging, irrespective of race and ethnicity.

Color-evasiveness was most frequently coded for this open-end response. Students offered these responses:

It means to be accepted no matter what (*Quality Matters*)

All people are treated equally and where there is no focus on race, gender, sexuality or religion but a focus on being part of a community instead (*Treated Equally*)

Treated as everyone else and that you will be judged and graded on your work not your ethnic background or skin color” (*Judged by Academics*)

I am part of the [Global Campus] community no matter what the race is (*Paying Full Price*).

The mean response for other items in this section indicate that students feel the university makes efforts in recruitment ($\mu=3.17$) and to create a sense of belongingness for students of color and respects cultural differences ($\mu=3.36$). Students did not rank the “campus” as being more racist than other campuses with nearly 90% of students strongly disagreeing (see Table 4-12).

**Online Campus Experience**

Students can create profiles and include a picture next to their name in the Learning Management System (LMS). While this picture, called an avatar, can be any image selected by the student, the majority of survey respondents indicated they used a real picture (62.5%) as shown in Table 4-10. A quarter of the respondents indicated they do not use any avatar (25%). Additionally, students answered they felt more anonymous online (75%) than in a course held in-person classes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avatar Use</th>
<th>Sample (n=64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An avatar that looks like me</td>
<td>3.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An avatar that does not look like me</td>
<td>7.8 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A real picture</td>
<td>62.5 (40)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A challenge of online education is the definition of “campus” and understanding how students conceptualize a virtual campus. Students were asked what campus they were thinking about after ranking their perception of the campus being more racist than most (see Table 4-11). Very few students thought only of physical campus(es) \((n=8)\). More students thought about Global Campus and Research University as one \((n=23)\). Most students \((n=31)\) thought only about the Global Campus. Only two students agreed that the campus was more racist than other campuses and all other students disagreed \((93.75\%)\). Nearly half of the sample thinking only of the Global Campus disagreed it was more racist than other campuses \((48\%)\).

Table 4-12: Responses Campus is More Racist than Most by Chosen Campus as a Percentage of the Sample (Respective Cases in Paratheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Global Campus and Research University as one</th>
<th>Research University physical campus(es) only</th>
<th>Global Campus only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>1.58 (1)</td>
<td>1.58 (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Disagree</td>
<td>1.58 (1)</td>
<td>1.58 (1)</td>
<td>3.17 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>33.33 (21)</td>
<td>9.52 (6)</td>
<td>46.0 (29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The online format is a distinctly different college experience. A few students provided examples of how online education changed their college experience within the racial climate. Two students referenced how attending online changed the physical connection associated with on-campus:

It’s easier to complete work based on quality. At physical schools sometimes professors could know students years before and have gotten chances to talk to them or help them and it can impact other students. Online I have experienced that professors may have some type of connection with students but it’s not made into an unprofessional one and they still expect the same in class. *(Quality Matters)*
I don't have the face-to-face that comes with being on campus. I think that people are routinely afraid of black people. As a black man, I am always aware of how I am perceived and often have to be animated and engaged to not appear "angry" or "scary" (*Classmates are Insensitive*).

Both of these students believe that because there is no physical connection, either with faculty or campus, their college experience is changed. Many students felt their college experience changed because the physical connection was lost but did not specifically state race and ethnicity as important factors. *Classmates are Insensitive* feels online education provides a level of protection him from racialized projections based on his race. His comments suggest a negative educational experience on a physical campus in the past and a change in behavior to counter the negative perceptions. In comparison, *Concerned for Mental Health* said she did not have “the luxury to drop by a professor's office or meet up at a café.” As a white woman, she assumes her unannounced presence would be accepted and welcomed on campus. For both, the comparison of the educational context was made between online and on-campus, though the experiences differ dramatically.

For one student, age was a determining factor in the change of experience. He said that “Attending online classes has allowed for me to interact with people outside of my age range” (*Caring Instructors*). Most other students thought their experience was changed because a virtual campus is just different than a physical campus, interactions are weak and few, and that replicating the college experience online is not feasible. As shown in Figure 4-7, the matrixed heatmap for the college experience code shows students focused on the differences between online education and face-to-face learning and the tradeoff between the more traditional on-campus college experience with flexibility and convenience more frequently.

The last open-ended prompt referenced changes to students’ online education experience with the physical campus closure due to the pandemic. Only one student made reference to the racial climate in his response. He said:

I felt no impact from the closing of [RU’s] physical campus. However, I took Summer Semester 2020 off after the death of George Floyd and subsequent nationwide unrest. The stress of work, pandemic, protests, upcoming election, and current political climate was just too much and began to affect my coursework and GPA. (*An Island to Yourself*)
An Island to Yourself’s story indicates that the external lives of students studying online cannot be discounted. Although online education seems to be standardized through the syllabi and course design, students will not have the same experience, as their external lives and their histories are different. The next chapter provides additional analysis of the external community for online students. Other students shared issues related to the change but were not focused on the racial climate and instead focused on the academic or general climate. Many students said there was no impact and only a few mentioned how closure of the physical campus impacted their academic success, such as walking at graduation or accessing the library. In this sense, the online modality mitigated the stress on-campus students may have felt when the campus closed.

**Online Education Context and Culture**

My understanding of the context of online education and organizational culture of Global Campus stems from curricular and programmatic documents. Social media, syllabi, and websites were included as a way to familiarize myself with the online environment and the materials offered to students.

As a theory, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) frames these materials as tools that make up cultural artifacts of the activity system. CHAT helps explain how someone interacts with the six elements of an activity system, describing how tools and artifacts assist actors or subjects of a system achieve the system's object or goal. The online education system functions as a smaller or sub-system within the larger activity system of Research University. The larger system of Research University extends to the Global Campus as a sub-system, though differences exist in elements of the system. For example, the support services are separated and removed from the larger system for online students. The distinction of those staff who provide this support at Global Campus is clearly outlined as not being in the College. This division of labor, or of those persons responsible for working with the online students
outside of the classroom, was the sole responsibility of Global Campus. The materials presented below frame how online students experience the culture of the sub-system.

The term context conveys the relationship between the Global Campus and Research University and communicates an abstract location. The lack of physical presence is paramount when discussing online education. Culture relates to the "behaviors, perspectives, and values" (Uzner, 2009) and, similarly, the organization's internal culture represents traditions and history with a shared understanding of a mission (Tierney, 1988). The term environment means the essence of the online classroom and connects to the perceptions of climate. The system and the sub-system in this dissertation refer to the activity systems of higher education, as defined by the six elements of CHAT.

**Online Media**

**Social Media.** Social media is one way for colleges and universities to extend campus life to students (Tynes, Rose, & Markoe, 2013), especially for those students studying at a distance. Nearly identical material from Global Campus was posted across all major social media platforms. The College of Computers did not have as many Tweets posted during the collection period as Global Campus. Social media was coded for the reason or purpose of the post by thematic codes. The most frequent codes applied to the College Twitter feed related to professional development opportunities or activities, followed by college-led research and student experience (Figure 4-14). The most frequent codes applied to the Global Campus Twitter feed related to holidays, student services, and pictures from students. Only the Global Campus posted motivational messages and pictures from students and did not include research from the College of Computers. The Global Campus serves many academic colleges and students, which may explain the lack of college-specific content.
Figure 4-14: Frequency of social media codes.

**GC Blog Posts.** Global Campus posted seven blogs during the fall semester (Table 4-13). These blog posts highlighted different student service offices, offered advice from other students, and supportive messages about academic success. The most frequent occurrences of coding were academic support, followed by additional support. One post each was dedicated to a holiday and student experience.

Table 4-13: Count of Social Media Codes in Blog Posts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Count (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic support</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional support</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student experience</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**University Messaging.** Twelve pieces of material consisting of news stories, university policy, and the results of the community survey (Table 4-14) are included in this study. There were more news stories
than any other type of message. The COVID pandemic and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) were visible influences on Research University. These university messages included leadership responses and reflect the rules, roles, and norms of the larger university, an important component to understanding the activity system of online education, had the highest coding occurrence \( n=7 \). As shown in Table 4-15, the material was coded according to CHAT element, shown in bold font, and grouped by message type. No pieces related to object, division of labor, or subject were coded and thus are not represented in the table. Thematic coding was applied to the university messages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAT Element</th>
<th>University Message</th>
<th>Academic Climate</th>
<th>General climate</th>
<th>Racial Climate</th>
<th>COVID19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community ( n=2 )</td>
<td>Community Survey ( n=1 )</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Survey ( n=1 )</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Message ( n=1 )</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules, Roles, &amp; Norms ( n=7 )</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Story ( n=7 )</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools ( n=3 )</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Story ( n=1 )</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Policy ( n=1 )</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No COVID related information from RU leadership directed at Global Campus students was found; rather, the COVID related material for Global Campus students came directly from Global Campus and found on websites. The university messaging related to BLM and the community survey are directly relevant to this dissertation study and helped define the Racial Climate of the institution. For example, the president of Research University shared after the murder of George Floyd that “the need for real and tangible change has never been more critical.” The university started a series of Town Halls to explore the racial climate and kicked off numerous committees during the summer of 2020. One such committee was a presidential commission on race, bias, and discrimination so that the “best practices” of diversity, equity, and inclusion are implemented throughout the university. I did not find any reference to these Town Halls on the Global Campus twitter feed.
The community survey was administered by Research University during the spring 2020 semester, just prior to the campus closure from COVID (see Appendix L). The community survey included student, faculty, staff, and administrator responses to items related to belonging, experiences of harassment and microaggressions, and belief in leadership’s commitment to diversity and inclusion, which is why Racial Climate codes had higher occurrences than other message types (n=28). Other institutional messages exist, such as the Dean’s message to the College of Computer students, that were not publicly available.

**College of Computers and Global Campus Websites.** Fifty-seven webpages from the Global Campus and twenty-five from the College of Computers were coded for this study (n=82). Each page was coded twice, at the page-level and at the content-level. Tools was coded most frequently (n=26) and often described a process related to some action the student needed to take for enrollment, financial, or academic purposes. The least frequently applied codes were community and history (n=6 for each). Object and students had few codes applied (n=8 each). Professionals, staff, and administrations (subjects) in the College tended to have more personalized information, such as pictures and biographies, than at the Global Campus which typically included the office name and function. Though, when talking about students as subjects, the Global Campus attended to characteristics of adult students, like work-life balance, military status, and dependent care. A separation of on-campus students (subjects) and online students was found in these webpages, with online students always redirected to the Global Campus sites. Although the Global Campus had more instances of rules, roles, and norms than the College, the imbalance of total webpages shows that the percentage of this code is similar between the College and Global Campus (16% and 19% respectively). Object had a much higher percentage (20%) on the College’s webpages than Global Campus (5.1%) as the College included concepts of student development and what a degree might help a student achieve. Likewise, division of labor was coded more frequently on the College (24%) than on the Global Campus (12%). The division of labor provided information about how students should seek out help and from which offices. For example, the language placed responsibility on the student to take the first connection in the event of an unforeseen natural disaster or
violent crime and “make contact with their instructor, when they are safe and able, to discuss their circumstances and seek guidance for completing their course work” (GC, Student Support Services).

Table 4-15: Percentage of page-level Codes by Website Location as a Percentage of Data Collected (Respective Cases in Parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>College of Computers (n=25)</th>
<th>Global Campus (n=57)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>4 (1)</td>
<td>9 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division of Labor</td>
<td>24 (6)</td>
<td>12 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>4 (1)</td>
<td>9 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>20 (5)</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules, Roles, &amp; Norms</td>
<td>16 (4)</td>
<td>19 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjects</td>
<td>8 (2)</td>
<td>11 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools</td>
<td>24 (6)</td>
<td>35 (20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both websites attend to three types of audiences: students in the admission process; currently enrolled students; and general audience (Figure 4-15). Targeted communication for current students was more prevalent on webpages (59%), fewer pages dedicated for prospective or new students (28%), and some pages had a general audience feel (13%).

Figure 4-15: Percentage of total webpages by audience type.
Figure 4-16 shows the webpage content coded using CHAT. From the content-level analysis, the most frequently used code was division of labor, followed by rules, roles, and norms. Often division of labor and rules, roles, and norms were included on the same page. For instance, a webpage on the Global Campus gives students an idea of how learning online “works” and gives an estimated amount of time a student can expect to spend on classwork. This page also includes the following: “Most of the courses are structured for asynchronous learning, meaning the classes are facilitated so students are not required to attend courses at scheduled times” (GC, webpage). This webpage provides the rules and norms of online education and promotes student’s role in deciding how to best complete their work. The normative behavior of the class is asynchronous, highlighting the role students have in deciding when to complete their schoolwork.

![Content-Level Codes by Website Location](image)

Figure 4-16: Count of content-level CHAT Codes by website location.
All webpages have university branding, including the logo and customized colors, and many contain pictures of the physical campus. The GC pictures were typically of the original administrative building and the university mascot. These images bring forward tradition and history of the university to the GC pages which is why the History code has a significant presence in the GC webpage content. The GC pages also include short videos; many of the videos follow a question-and-answer format and are set to fast, up-beat music. Other videos contain stories from students about their experience attending the GC. These videos were treated as website content: I watched the videos, made notes and memos about each, and coded according to the same content CHAT Code schema.

**Interviews.** As shown in Table 4-16, six people were interviewed for this study; two faculty members who taught the selected courses during both the summer and fall semesters; one administrator who serves in a leadership role within the college and also teaches in-residence; one academic adviser who advises students majoring in programs in the College of Computers; and two professional staff members in the Global Campus, both of whom hold leadership and decision-making positions. The interview protocol changed slightly based on the role of the interviewee (see Appendix D).

The responses informed and extended the description of the online classroom, with a particular focus of the classroom details and personal experiences. The interviews also presented internalized practices not found in public websites, such as the faculty member example of a discussion board that was not included on the syllabi or the emergency coaching offered to Global Campus students because of the pandemic. Issues related to the Academic Climate were the most frequently coded (n=29) and COVID was least coded (n=9). Both faculty members explained they only see names, no faces, and most students do not use avatars, to explain how race and ethnicity were represented in their online classes. Global Campus employees said students shared experiences of racialization with them, though students had a hard time explaining why they felt they had experienced discrimination. Examples of Academic Climate by the faculty included access to technology labs, grading practices and quality of coursework, and general unfamiliarity of Global Campus support services. Interviewees at Global Campus talked about available academic and support services, including financial assistance, additional coaching, and quality
of the programs. Everyone interviewed believed students “belonged” to the larger university above the
college or the virtual campus.

Table 4-16: Thematic Codes Occurrences by Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee</th>
<th>Academic Climate (n=29)</th>
<th>General Climate (n=21)</th>
<th>Racial Climate (n=14)</th>
<th>COVID (n=9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COC Faculty (n=2)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COC Administrator (n=1)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC Leadership (n=2)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GC Academic Adviser (n=1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Syllabi**

Syllabi from each of the selected thirty-three courses were reviewed (Table 4-17). A standardized
syllabi format was designed by the college, used for all classes in the sample, and included: a course
description; prerequisites; learning objectives; instructor; materials; breakdown of grading and grading
scale; tutoring services; course polices and expectations; academic integrity; university policies;
resources; technical requirements; and a schedule of assignments. The standardized syllabi states:
“Review current information regarding various [Research University] policies (such as copyright,
counseling, psychological services, disability and military accommodations, discrimination, harassment,
emergencies, trade names, etc.) on the University Policies [website].” A hyperlink connects to an external
document with additional resources. I understood that the link is provided on all syllabi to create a single
location for updates and changes to policies and resources. Additionally, information related to COVID-19
was found on only one syllabus; this message included a statement about the pandemic and potential
impact on late assignments.

The academic integrity policy was included on the majority of the syllabi (90.9%), as was the
instructor’s contact information (97%). The statements on disability services (93.9%), counseling services
(90.0%), and the educational equity and reporting of wrongdoing (87.88%) were redirected by hyperlink
to an external document. Group work is expected in the majority of classes within the College.
Table 4-17: Percentage of Items Coded in Syllabi (Respective cases in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus Element</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Redirected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Integrity</td>
<td>90.9 (30)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9.09 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>6.1 (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>93.9 (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Equity/ Reporting of Wrongdoing</td>
<td>9.09 (3)</td>
<td>3.0 (1)</td>
<td>87.88 (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Counseling Services</td>
<td>6.06 (2)</td>
<td>3.0 (1)</td>
<td>90.9 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor Name and Email</td>
<td>96.97 (32)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.03 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groupwork</td>
<td>60.6 (20)</td>
<td>39.4 (13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirteen syllabi (39.4%) did not provide information related to groups beyond listed assignments and twenty syllabi (60.6%) included some information related to group grading, formation, or presentation. Course expectations for all syllabi contained logging into the class regularly, using the LMS for communication, synchronous virtual meeting attendance. Upper-level courses (300 and 400) included a statement about staying in contact with group members.

I interpreted the culture of the online education setting to share characteristics of the larger system, though tightly controlled by the division of labor. Online students are direct to the Global Campus for all forms of support and help, which limits the visibility of the College. Global Campus caters to all online students, which makes specific attention towards students of the College of Computers limited. The classroom is more salient than the abstract virtual campus and where students are likely to find the material and conceptual tools they need to be successful. The syllabi contain few details, opting to redirect students to other locations for information, which leaves unknown rules and norms for online students.
Descriptive Results Summary and Findings

Data for this study combined qualitative and quantitative data from a student survey, university administrative data, and curricular and programmatic documents with supporting faculty and staff interviews. The data represented personal feelings and experiences. Descriptive statistics helped describe the study population, sample, and provided insight into the culture of the online campus. The collected data extended my understanding of the system of online education.

I collected sixty-four completed surveys and ran descriptive statistics on the responses. The results did not show statistically significant correlation. The sample was more racially diverse than the study population and included a higher percentage of women. The selected classes led to more representation of advanced standing students in the sample than the study population.

Results indicate students have an awareness of society’s influence on race and ethnicity. Students carried positive perceptions of the general campus climate, academic climate, and racial climate. While no statistically significant differences were found between groups, students in the sample had varying levels of colorblindness. Overall, students felt they were treated and graded fairly, did not feel out of place, and thought the institution helps students of color “belong,” students felt mediocre about feeling left out of things at the university (see Figure 4-8). These overall perceptions and feelings did not change based on race (see Figures 4-9, 4-10, 4-11, 4-12, and 4-13). Likewise, students did not feel the campus was more racist than college campuses.

Open-ended responses revealed more nuanced experiences than the statistics. Most frequently coded were academic related issues, though the racial climate played an important role for some students. Overall, results showed students did not think the Global Campus was more racist than other campuses. Though some students believed their status as an online student made them feel like they did not belong to the university. Several students' responses related directly to race and ethnicity, with a few sharing how the online setting mitigates some unsavory experiences with racism. Students felt technology-created invisibility did not create a biased or prejudicial environment. Instead, this sense of invisibility allowed
academic performance to be graded without regard to identity. Students did not feel as if they were treated or graded unfairly, and most students felt like they belonged in their classes. Likewise, most students agreed that online classes make them feel more anonymous than on-campus classes, even when the majority used a real picture in their profile.

Anonymity was not just felt by students but also describes faculty and others' views of online education. Faculty members and the College were anonymous in the system. Faculty members did not provide biographies, and no link provided on the Global Campus takes students to the College of Computers. The College administrator said online students are not "socialized" into conversations or decision-making on a routine basis. The Global Campus did not use social media as an invitation to campus activities or opportunities and instead focused on motivational quotes and holidays, whereas the College used their social media to present professional development and research. The diversity and inclusion statement acknowledges the "diverse needs" of "adult students," without attending to other factors such as race and ethnicity. Students' individuality is lost when the system homogenizes students. The environment leans toward color-evasiveness which “mutes racialized experiences” (Vue, Haslerig, & Allen, 2007, p. 2) and makes whiteness the norm, leaving individual experiences unknown. Students' responses about feeling left out of things at the university or like they do not belong provide further evidence that the online students are a seemingly anonymous group.

The online educational experience cannot be decoupled from the online setting. Students did not expect the online college experience to be the same as a traditional experience and anticipated the tradeoff for the traditional experience was worth the chance to obtain a degree. Students felt disconnected from the physical campus and each other. This online college experience is bound by the tools, such as online media, syllabi, and the norms set by institutional messaging. The tools of the online education setting do not attend to race and ethnicity of the student population.

In the next chapter, I use CHAT to interpret these findings further, aided by the documentary data and open-ended student responses. I describe the color-evasiveness found in the system. The color-evasiveness in the online education system differs from the practices of the larger system, particularly as
it relates to the homogenization of the online student population. A disconnection between the online education and the larger university exists as the system historically relies on a physical presence and known members. Online education instead creates an environment inclined toward anonymity. Student anonymity becomes a salient aspect of the online education experience and helps describe how students experience racialization in a color-evasive environment.
Chapter 5

Interpretive Results

This chapter offers interpretive results through the lens of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Initially developed by Vygotsky, activity theory seeks to understand the motive driving individuals to perform specific actions directed at an object or goal. The activity, driven by motive, and the action, driven by the goal, are often shared in an activity system and, when done collectively, moves towards a systems approach (Engeström, 2000; Nussbaumer, 2012). This study identified Research University and broad society, interconnected globally, as activity systems. The systems are influenced by the six elements of subject, tools, object, community, rules, roles and norms, and division of labor.

Central to this study are the tools, particularly that of technology, and the rules associated with online education that influence the division of labor. The six elements work together but may not always be in balance. Those engaged in the system often share a goal (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) though the goal may not always be expressed easily or similarly by those in the system (Engeström, 2000).

Online Education as an Activity System and a Sub-System

The setting of online education within the larger university is vital to understanding students' experiences in their online classrooms. The site for this study was the online education of a College at Research University. RU is located in the northeastern part of the United States and is a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). White people hold over 85% of the executive and administrative positions (Appendix L), and around 67% of students enrolled in the Global Campus are white (see Figure 3-5). Research University has a long history of providing distance education and delivering the same education for online students as on-campus students. Online education creates a sub-system that replicates the larger system with student services, staff and administrators, and resources, dovetailing with centralized offices from the larger university. For example, the Bursar at Global Campus serves online students using a
centralized and integrated student information system and follows the same policies of the larger system. The intention is to provide a seamless transition between the larger university system and the sub-system of online education with the same shared goal. The ability to achieve the seamless transition is challenged by the strict rules and roles and division of labor for those who work with online education.

While online education is part of the larger Research University system, it functions as a sub-system. The separation is warranted as both systems share similar goals and motives, though the mediated actions are different. Benson, Lawler, and Whitworth (2008) use the online learning platform as more than just a tool and instead consider it as a "constitutive part of the infrastructure that impacts three 'mediators' of activity simultaneously" (p. 460). A similar context exists in this case study. The online learning environment provided the tool that mediated learning outcomes. The technology creates rules for how others within the system use it, constrained by the software platform's asynchronous communication and functional limits.

The unique sub-system provides students with a similar object to those in the larger system. However, the sub-system functionality cannot rely on the same physical presence observed and encompassed by the larger system. Online education was created in part to provide education to people who were otherwise unable to attend in person. If we are to believe tools are culturally influenced, then online education reflects society and culture (see Cole, 1998) and is inseparable from the reason it was created or adapted (Newman & Holzman, 1993). This is to say that online education technology is both a delivery mechanism and an extension of the university. Those in the community who interact with the online system have different roles as defined by the division of labor (c.f. Benson, Lawler, & Whitmore, 2008) and are influenced by the rules set by the tools.
Online education cannot make a direct replica of the larger university. The community in the larger system is influenced by dynamic and different in-person interaction types. The internal community at Global Campus is comprised of the students, staff, faculty, and others within the larger university and those specifically dedicated to working with online students. In contrast, the community at Global Campus has fewer types of interactions. Further, technology mediated communication removes physical cues, facial features, and other signs language speakers use when conversing. The mediating tools in an online classroom, especially when the class is asynchronous, removes the immediate and physical cues from in-person communication. Students describe interactions online as being less frequent and less active than in-person interactions. Still, this is not to say they are unhappy in their classes, but rather their college experience and sense of belonging is altered because of their online experience.

Online students did not want or expect traditional college experiences to be replicated. Yet, many students felt certain factors were missing from their experience in the online environment, such as access to campus, events, and interactions with instructors and peers that led to feelings of exclusion. The feelings of exclusion and separation influence the sense of community. As the motive between the
systems diverge, tensions are exposed. The goal of the system shifts away from an experience rooted on a physical campus and the reproduction of the traditional college experience. The tension between the systems was exposed through students’ feelings of exclusion from the community. These feelings of exclusion should not go unnoticed; concern toward student satisfaction in online education is intensified because students are “one-click away” from transferring schools and plays a significant factor in retention efforts (see Bradford & Wyatt, 2010; Herbert, 2006; Rovai, 2002). The online sub-system is partially motivated by satisfaction, as it relates to the exchange value students place on the credential. This type of student satisfaction, coupled with the ability to change educational organizations quickly, may not be as salient in the larger system. The change in motive creates tension between the systems and requires tool to be adapted to meet this differentiated motive. Much like the study Murphy and Rodriguez Manzanares (2008), elements can change between systems when physical presence is absent, requiring reorientation of the activity systems and modifications to tools. Not all tools are modified for online students, leaving them excluded from the internal community for no reason other than they are online.

In an activity system, community is mediated by the division of labor and the object of the system (Issroff & Scanlon, 2002). The internal community between the systems is a bifurcated concept. On the one hand, students thought the idea of community was the relationship to other students and, on the other hand, thought it was the connection to the larger university. In either case, the rules, roles, and norms of Research University influence the internal community and define the division of labor. The division of labor was salient for online education at Research University in two ways. First, students, faculty, and professional staff must adapt and change processes and policies to meet the dispersed and physically absent educational context. For online students, technical or work-oriented solutions that rely on engaging in person, such as classroom lectures, changes necessary actions to achieve educational objectives. Second, the organizational culture, which also carries a set of norms, channels online students to the sub-system. The act of teaching is controlled by the larger system, but all other aspects of staff, support, and needs of online students are handled by the sub-system. Identical services, tightly coupled to the larger system, serve as a connecting piece between the virtual and physical campuses and create ideals of
belonging to Research University. However, the separation of students through division of labor disconnects online students from the internal community and puts tension on the concept of a seamless university. The tension was felt and described by students sense of belonging. Tensions are derived from the system's history and context and are often highlighted by sub-groups (Netteland, Wasson, & Mørch, 2007), such as online students. The sub-system functionality must mediate tools differently than the larger system to move past the physical presence.

Students’ experiences of racialization in online undergraduate classrooms are nuanced and stem from the unique context of online learning environment. In the next sections, I describe student experiences as influenced by the sub-system. First, the sub-system of online education displays practices of color-evasiveness through missing educational equity values, unregulated group work, and students’ personal feelings of race and ethnicity. The sub-system does not actively engage in anti-racist practices like the larger system and favors color-evasive practices. Second, students feel a sense of belonging and a sense of exclusion from the community of the system. While their interests are not in reproducing the traditional college experience, the poor adaptation of tools to the sub-system and the division of labor changes how students engage with the community. Last, students’ sense of anonymity and lack of physical campus create a monolithic and homogenous student population, striping students of their racial and ethnic identity in the online classroom. This homogenization outwardly suggests online education is a “colorblind” environment which is different than students’ personal feelings about their identities.

**Color-Evasiveness in Online Education**

**Equity in the Online Classroom**

Educational equity efforts at Research University aim to support diversity and inclusion for all students, faculty, staff, and others. These values are expressed by promoting safe environments,
awareness of cultural and social injustices, inclusive access to buildings, and representation in all areas. A small number of students (9.4%) agreed they were treated unfairly on campus, and about a third of students said they felt left out (34.4%) (see Figures 4-9 and 4-12). Still, efforts related to educational equity and reporting of wrongdoing had low visibility in the sub-system.

All students, regardless of campus location, receive emails from university leadership each semester promoting the reporting mechanism for instances where educational equity failed. Beyond this message, I found no overt outreach to online students related to race and ethnicity in the documentary data about educational equity. Social media posts did not reflect these values and instead focused on motivational quotes and support services (i.e., tutoring). Throughout data collection, I could not find any tweet from Global Campus about the RU’s work on race, equity, and bias, even when these events were live-streamed or held virtually. The College’s webpages contained links and menu options for their Office of Diversity and Inclusion and did not direct students to the college-level site. The Global Campus website did not include diversity and inclusion on navigational menus, making the information difficult to find. The definition of diversity did not include race or ethnicity and instead focused on the “diverse needs” of the “adult learner.” The text within the page offered support for the diverse student population and hyperlinked to specialized sister offices at the larger university, such as the multicultural, spiritual, and gender centers. It is unknown how often students refer to these webpages, so some students may never see this information.

In contrast, each student is presented with the class syllabus. The syllabi, as a tool or artifact, is an “accountability agreement between professor and student by the information it provides” (Habanek, 2005, p. 62). The College used a standardized syllabus for the online classes. All syllabi utilized the same hyperlinked page to explain university policies, including institutional statements on educational equity, reporting of wrongdoing, and services. This single webpage centralizes the administration to a single location, as opposed to editing individual syllabi. A small number of syllabi contained the institutional statements in the text; 9% of the syllabi included educational equity, 6% included psychological counseling, and 6% showed information for disability accommodations. On the other hand, the full
academic integrity statement was included on 90% of the syllabi and contained full statements and explanations. For some faculty, a quiz ensured students understood and read the academic integrity statement. The protection of academic integrity at an institution such as Research University is important, as it maintains the history and prestige of the degree credential. The importance of these concepts is reaffirmed through the attention instructors and the syllabi give to academic integrity. However, educational equity, counseling, and accommodations address and mitigate harmful experiences, such as the experiences found in this study, are given less attention.

The syllabi serve as tools or artifacts for the class. Tools or artifacts are not simply physical objects; rather, they are objects created by people and changed over time used in goal achievement; it is both material and conceptual (Cole, 1998). As a material object, the syllabi contained necessary information for students to finish the course by performing specific actions. However, as a conceptual tool, the syllabi did not explicitly state institutional values related to educational equity, counseling and disability services, and faculty persona. Tools are developed with the result in mind (Newman & Holzman, 1993). As a tool, the syllabi not conveying these values of educational equity renders the concepts of these values as unimportant to the result of the students’ education.

The engagement between students, as regulated by university policies, went unspecified. No syllabi reviewed included information about how groups were to treat, communicate, or otherwise behave together. The rules and division of labor associated with the student code of conduct could stand in place as implicit expectations for interactions, as information related to peer-level interactions is included in policy. However, policy language is not entirely inclusive of online education. The policy included the words “physical or verbal conduct” (RU, Student affairs), which are not as common in online spaces as written text or images. One student reported:

I was cyberbullied in a class for the first time this semester. This has never happened in my 4 years as a [Global Campus] student. I do not know if the extra tensions and hostilities are COVID or younger students, or a combination of both” (Hard to Connect).
The reason for the cyberbullying event is unclear, and the policy as currently written does not include harassment, cyberbullying, or other online behaviors. The policy dictates evidence collection of wrongdoing from “university-sponsored platforms,” including the Learning Management System and social media platforms when a complaint or report is filed. The rules, roles, and norms of the larger system are rooted in traditional manners of higher education and normed whiteness. Hidden expectations are that students will act and behave in certain ways, as guided by the university policies. An expectation exists that same rules, roles, and norms influence the online students’ behavior even when the experience between systems is dissimilar. The dissimilarity means the tools are not mediating actions in the same ways. For example, Hard to Connect would not find cyberbullying included in the student code of conduct but would find physical and verbal conduct related to harassment. With CHAT, “the division of labour is the explicit and implicit organisation of a community as related to the transformation process of the object into the outcome” (Issroff & Scanlon, 2002, p. 78). The unregulated interactions between students leaves the online community disorganized and disconnected from the larger system.

The community survey showed some online students had faced discrimination. Additionally, the community survey reported students in online education were more likely to experience discrimination about their age, disability, and military status than the total university results showed (see Appendix L). Though online students did not “hear” remarks as frequently as the rest of the university, the remarks are more likely to come from other students (40%) than from faculty (14%) and administration (9%) ranking responses of rarely, sometimes, often, and very often. Results from my study showed a pattern similar that other students were also likely the source of insensitivity ($\mu=1.37$) and not faculty ($\mu=1.17$). The low mean scores indicated few students experienced had this experience, though even one student suffering discrimination is too many.

Table 5- 1: Count of Student Responses of Racial Insensitivity Experiences from Faculty and Students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Race &amp; Ethnicity</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th></th>
<th>Students</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
American Indian or Alaska Native 1 - 1 -
Asian or Asian American 8 - 7 1
Black or African American 5 1 3 3
Hispanic or LatinX 7 - 6 1
White 35 1 33 1
International 3 - 2 1
Prefer Not to Disclose 1 - 1 -

Two students agreed they experienced racial insensitivity from faculty, and seven students agreed they experienced racial insensitivity from other students (see Table 5-1). One student shared:

The only problem I see is that sometimes my classmates are insensitive to racial disparities and it shows in discussions. I can’t [sic] change that, even though I sometimes feel out of place (Classmates are Insensitive)

The student example above conveyed a lack of agency or feeling like there was no outlet for help.

Community survey results showed only 16% of all students at Research University and no students from the Global Campus reported the incident of harassment or disparaging remarks (Appendix L). All three professional staff at Global Campus shared that in their experience when students who felt discrimination did not file an official report. RU maintains mechanisms to report wrongdoing about harmful educational equity incidents and, in doing so, conveys these are important values to the larger system. The Global Campus is listed as a location to report the incident through student conduct, though excluded from the online crime reporting mechanism with campus police. Nevertheless, these policies were not explicitly presented to students in their online classes. The infrequent inclusion of race and ethnicity for online students in the documentary data, the low visibility of the educational equity statement, and policy language creates a sense that students are unaware of policies related to harassment or discrimination in online classes.

During data collection for this study, Global Campus hired a professional staff person to build programming that supports and addresses diversity and inclusion for the student population. Some programs have started including panel discussions and mediated conversations between students with different perspectives. Participation in these new efforts is relatively low, with few numbers of students
attending each program. Programs such as these will help extend a racial awareness to online students, give organized interactions between others, and serve as another type of tool for students. Tools in the system develop “structural relation in which cultural (mediated) and natural (unmediated) routes operate synergistically” and influence peoples’ actions within the system (Cole, 1998). The newly developed resources and programs will provide mediation between students (subjects) and the goal of the system through co-curricular activities. The co-curricular programs and the syllabi serve different purposes based on the activity and mediate the situation (see Cole, 1998). The new hire (division of labor), combined with these additional tools has potential to mediate the object of the system, potentially curtailing instances of racialization and color-evasiveness in online education.

Unregulated Groups Work

Wesp, Kash, Sandry, and Patton (2013) found that syllabi do not always include expected classroom behaviors because instructors assume universal rules. When this happens in an online classroom at a PWI, whiteness is likely to be normed. Course policies and expectations contain the expected frequency of interactions students should have but stop short of setting expectations for student classroom behaviors. The included expectations were listed as regularly “logging in” to the class, attending virtual meetings when applicable, confirming the LMS as the official platform for communication. Some syllabi said to “stay in contact with group members.” This expectation only sets the manner for how students correspond and does not define rules of engagement with no language about racial equity, which is evidence of color-evasiveness by RU and GC. This study and the community survey showed online students experienced racialization in their online classrooms and that the online classroom is not color-blind.

The documentary data contained little information about students' interactions in a “diverse” setting online. The majority of classes in the College of Computers require group work. Groups are either formed by the instructor or by student self-selection. A group project contract template included certain
responsibilities for each group member, deadlines, and other product-focused actions but did not contain details about communication or peer interactions. Group work does not use a standard communication platform, and faculty said the LMS was the last choice by groups. A previous study by Deng and Tavares (2013) showed that student behavior was more formal when using the LMS. Students in their study preferred to use a social media site for online discussions, likely because the tool was more familiar and easier to use and allowed for more synchronous communication than the official LMS. The LMS was considered formal and difficult to use, which decreased students’ motivation to engage with each other. Deng and Tavers (2013) explained: “the technologies played a vital part in shaping their online activities (rules) and their roles in the community” (p. 174). Unlike in physical classrooms, the mediating tool of online classroom communication is heavily controlled by the rules or limitations of the software.

Students in my study were also not likely to use the LMS when working with each other. Interviewed faculty explained most of the groups connect over text-based programs, such as Google.docs or WhatsApp. One student explained:

While also working with other students in [Global Campus] on group work, we have never actually seen each other. Everything has been done via text or Canvas messages (Disconnected)

The interviewed faculty said they did not provide any rules of engagement for peer interactions. I did not find the syllabi included examples of appropriate language, statements regarding showing respect for others, or other professional communication for groups. Different messages included in the syllabi related to group work. Two faculty members included the phrase “slackers beware,” imprinting the importance of grading for group participation. One faculty member reassigned group members if performance became an issue. Those interviewed at the College said no student had ever complained about a group interaction related to race and ethnicity. Instead, a lack of participation was a common thread in the interviews and students’ open-ended responses. One student shared:

Group work grading is extremely frustrating. I have notified the professor's in three courses that a group member was doing extremely poor work, or barely participating. The group had to pick up the slack and do their work, then everyone gets the same grade. There are no repercussions to low quality work or minimal participation and the other members who care about their evaluations have to redo all of their work to turn in a presentable assignment. I have even went as far as to
remove the offending students work and include it as an appendix to the completed project. They still got the same grade. Extremely frustrating and I would say unfair to the group members (Frustrated with Groups)

Some group members do not take their work as seriously and this leads to tensions (Hard to Connect). When students formed groups online, the College administrator I interviewed said similar patterns to in-residence students, with gender and race and ethnicity affinity grouping emerged. A faculty member said students sometimes asked to be paired with people they know. One student shared something similar:

Unless there's a group assignment interaction among students is incredibly limited; it's formed organically among like-minded individuals who wouldn't be treating others unfairly to begin with - why would they form if they didn't like each other? (Academic Tribalism).

Academic Tribalism stated that students chose to form groups based on similarities, leading to “fair” treatment. Students agreed they felt like their peers treated them as serious students (µ=3.5) and did not feel out of place in the course (µ=1.67) (see Figure 4-11). Still, the interactions between each other were regarded as few:

… I am in a [Global Campus] degree program so I cannot know if my treatment is disparate from that of other students since we do not know each other. In terms of other students being unfair, the interactions, with the exception of group projects, are not significant enough to be treated unfairly. For group projects, when someone is a jerk or does not pull their weight, that is not unfair but rather the typical group work experience. (Suffered Microaggressions)

The main focus for Suffered Microaggressions was on academic ability and the participation of others. The group project was a significant portion of the final grade, including a peer review process, so students have a vested interest in participating with the group. The interest in good grades may not be enough to produce positive experiences. One of the professional staff members from Global Campus shared a story of a Black woman who was working with her group through the Google.doc application. When a user is not signed in, the software randomly assigns an animal and for this student. She was assigned a monkey. A classmate referred to her as that animal, unknowingly recalling historical discriminatory language and causing a great deal of harm to the student. The hurt student reportedly had a difficult time finishing the
semester. This story highlights that even with technology-afforded invisibility, racialized practices hurt students.

The lack of definition and clear expectations for student interactions in online spaces leaves room for white dominant culture and microaggressions in the online classroom. As Table 5-1 shows and as reported by the community survey, students are more likely to experience disparaging comments from other students. When efforts to control interactions between students are left unregulated, unguided, and uncontrolled by efforts expressed in the larger system's policies, students are left to define the roles and norms of interactions. The unregulated interactions require concern for how students normalize behaviors in the online classroom that lead to harmful experiences. Whiteness can make racism seem like it is only a problem for people who suffer from racist practices (Cleaver, 1997), so students may not regulate this on their own. Students of color often feel invisible on college campuses, which is exacerbated by online education's anonymity. The existing rules are in a system focused on traditional experiences with physical presence. When technology is used as a central point in a learning environment, the rules of the mediating tool must be adjusted to fit the context.

**Students’ Color-evasiveness Influences**

The statistics did not demonstrate a relationship between students’ perceptions of colorblindness and the General Campus Climate, Academic Climate, and Racial Climate. Regardless of the colorblindness score, the overall means for the General Campus Climate ($\mu=3.29$), Academic Climate ($\mu=3.4$), and Racial Climate ($\mu=3.56$) leaned toward positive perceptions. Nevertheless, the lack of statistical relationship does not mean that color-evasive practices are acceptable or that racialized experiences are absent in online education. Instead, it means that these online students’ experiences of racialization were not necessarily related to that of the online classroom, as measured by these scales.

High and low colorblindness scores categorized students, and open-ended responses were analyzed to see what color-evasive practices were present in the survey answers. Table 5-2 shows more
students of color fell into the lower 25% percentile of colorblind scores, whereas white students were nearly equal between all percentiles. The lower 25% percentile carried a mean of less than 1.5 ($\mu<1.5$), and the highest percentile carried a mean over 2.42 ($\mu>2.42$) which indicates a higher level of color-evasiveness.

Table 5-2: Percentage by Race and Ethnicity Represented in Percentiles of Colorblindness Scores (Respective Cases in Parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race &amp; Ethnicity</th>
<th>$Q_1$ 25%</th>
<th>$Q_2$ 50%</th>
<th>$Q_3$ 75%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native (n=1)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian American (n=8)</td>
<td>50 (4)</td>
<td>37.5 (3)</td>
<td>12.5 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American (n=6)</td>
<td>83.3 (5)</td>
<td>16.7 (1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or LatinX (n=7)</td>
<td>42.9 (3)</td>
<td>14.3 (1)</td>
<td>42.9 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (n=36)</td>
<td>30.5 (11)</td>
<td>36.1 (13)</td>
<td>33.3 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International (n=3)</td>
<td>33.3 (1)</td>
<td>33.3 (1)</td>
<td>33.3 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer Not to Disclose (n=1)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-3 shows demographic details and scores by individuals. Those students whose open-ended prompts are used to explore perceptions of colorblindness are bolded.
Table 5-3: Description of Students by Pseudonym with Selected Cases in Bold Font.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Global Campus Student</th>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Race &amp; Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>In-State</th>
<th>Avatar</th>
<th>Anonymous Online</th>
<th>Colorblindness Percentile</th>
<th>General Campus Climate</th>
<th>Academic Climate</th>
<th>Racial Climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Invited and Welcomed</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AIAK</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just an Older Student</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ASN</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair Treatment</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>BLK</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban Female Suffered</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>BLK</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microaggressions</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>BLK</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invited and Welcomed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classmates are InSensitive*</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned for Mental Health</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Island to Yourself Same as</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Students</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Spouse</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>3.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classmates are InSensitive*</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerned for Mental Health</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing in Person Classes</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ASN</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring Instructors</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>ASN</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not a Social Butterfly</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ASN</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
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<td>Race</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disconnected</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>ASN</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different Social Experience</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ASN</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected Through Global Campus</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ASN</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zero Tolerance</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>BLK</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Pride</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>BLK</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Female</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>LAX</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>University Cheer</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>LAX</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Male</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>INTL</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubric Concerns</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed Fulltime</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Second Class Citizen</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Hard to Connect</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>18-24</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not on Campus</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>Getting A's</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Less Motivated</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>ASN</td>
<td>25-34</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>Frustrated with Group</td>
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<td>PND</td>
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<td>45+</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Treated Equally</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>LAX</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>LAX</td>
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<td>Judged by Academics</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>INTL</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>PND</td>
<td>PND</td>
<td>18-24</td>
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<td>75</td>
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<td>3.38</td>
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<td>School is Family</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>3.63</td>
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<td>Right Pace</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can't Access Same Opportunities</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>3.38</td>
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<td>Minimal Interactions</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>Veteran</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>3.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Same Opportunities</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Ability</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comfortable with Online Classes</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>WHI</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Student selected white in demographics but refers to himself as a “Black man” in the open-ended responses. Note: AIAK = American Indian or Alaska Native; ASN = Asian or Asian American; BLK = Black or African American; DA = Did Not Answer; INTL = International Student; LAX = Hispanic or LatinX; PND = Prefer Not to Disclose; WHI = White. Y = Yes; N = No. Avatar 1 = Avatar that looks like me; 2 = An avatar that does not look like me; 3 = A real picture; 4 = Nothing, no avatar or picture; 5 = Did not answer.
Higher percentile. Students (n=18) who had colorblindness scores in the 75% percentile strongly disagreed with experiencing racial insensitivity from other students or faculty (µ=1.12 and µ=1.28 respectively) and disagreed the campus was more racist than most (µ=1.24). This group of students also disagreed students from other races and ethnicities are uncomfortable around them (µ=1.22). Students with higher colorblindness scores agreed the institution made a genuine effort to recruit students of color, with an average score the same as the overall sample mean (µ=3.17).

Some open-ended answers used language that extends color-evasive ideas as it relates to other students. Students said:

All people are treated equally and where there is no focus on race, gender, sexuality or religion but a focus on being part of a community instead (Treated Equally)

Being apart [sic] of a community that fosters everyone no matter who they are or where they come from (Community Focused)

…you will be judged and graded on your work not your ethnic background or skin color (Judged by Academics)

I am offered the same opportunities as everyone else (Same Opportunities)

The answers discount race and ethnicity and, in doing so, negate the differences in socio-cultural influences found in higher education. It places the idea of equality over differences and either diminishes or removes the institutional responsibility of creating a system as an equitable environment. One student responded with:

I just don't think that I've been treated any different than any other student. If I have, it is my own doing. As long as I am involved in my education the [Research University] has given me a fair shake at excelling there (Fair Shake)

The sense of equality in Fair Shake’s statement conceals the differences other students may face because of institutionalized racism and color-evasive practices. The student alluded to a sense of
self-responsibility in this statement, weakening the institution’s role in providing equitable learning environments.

**Lower percentile.** Students with lower colorblindness scores (µ <1.52) answered survey questions similar to those with higher scores. Students disagreed with experiencing racial insensitivity from students and faculty (µ=1.44 and µ=1.19 respectively) and felt that the interracial climate was not more racist than most other campuses (µ=1.23). This group of students also disagreed that people of different races and ethnic groups felt uncomfortable around the student respondent (µ=1.3). Those students with lower colorblindness scores maintained color-evasive language in their answers and expressed ideas about equal opportunities for all.

Color-evasive practices were created to hide the ugly truths about racist practices in our society and pretend that racist practices did not exist (Jayakumar, 2015). As a society, we carry notions of fairness that come with hard work and success, irrespective of race and ethnicity. Several students felt their hard work, based on quality, was judged more fairly because of the online modality. For example:

> It would take quite a terrible person to discriminate on me or others without seeing them. If such were the case, then I'm sure someone would raise concerns so I think my work is evaluated fairly. *(Graded Fairly)*

> It’s easier to complete work based on quality. At physical schools sometimes professors could know students years before and have gotten chances to talk to them or help them and it can impact other students. *(Quality Matters)*

> I have no idea if the assignments are being graded unfairly as I am [global campus]. I do think they are being graded fairly, and not based on any prejudices *(Classmates are Insensitive)*

> I often find that I have great working relationships in groups when it is based solely on the quality of work and we have not seen each other on a video conferencing platform. However, as soon as I am forced to present and they realize that I am an African American woman, my groups tend to treat me differently in subtle microaggressive ways such as cutting me off when I speak or restating something I have already said as if it was their original idea…I do not feel out of place in my courses largely because outside of group work, the interactions with my classmates are sight unseen and I demonstrate my
capabilities. I know I would feel differently if I were sitting in the classroom with students who are younger than me, whiter than me, and likely male. *Suffered Microaggressions*

*Suffered Microaggressions* perceived that the online environment allows her work to be graded, unrelated to her gender and race. Her statement also includes a brief look into how her in-person history carried into the online classroom. When the virtual veil lifts, her experience changes.

Knight (2006) wrote: “A great deal of what defines race in culture is visual” (p. 324). The majority of students in this study agreed that online education made them feel more anonymous (75%) than on campus, but as this student details, her online experience includes visual cues.

Students in the community survey also said they sometimes feel their physical appearance leads to discrimination and harassment. Technology may provide students with anonymity but does not remove racism in online education based on physical attributes. At least one student recognized race as it relates to the institutional responsibility of creating an inclusive environment. He said:

> I feel as though the campus must foster an equal environment where different ethnicities are given the same opportunities as the white students. *Same as White Students*

Regardless of their colorblindness score or race and ethnicity, students agreed their work was evaluated fairly ($\mu=3.48$) (see Figure 4-10). Survey results show positive climate perceptions (see Figures 4-4 and 4-5) and a mid-range colorblindness attitude ($\mu=2.05$). Nevertheless, as these quotes above show, color-evasiveness beliefs extend into the online classroom.

**Overall Colorblindness Scores.** The colorblindness scores, coupled with the other climate scores, provide a portion of students’ racialized experiences. Those experiences did not necessarily translate into different scores on the survey for some students, even when racialized experiences were evident. Overall, the students’ colorblindness scores did not explain as much about the racialized experience as anticipated. The scores are helpful to understand the socio-
cultural influences students bring with them to the system of online education and require interrogation of the individual experiences.

Despite colorblindness scores, students said a lack of interaction with other students and instructors likely influenced answers. As Suffered Microaggressions summed:

In terms of other students being unfair, the interactions, with the exception of group projects, are not significant enough to be treated unfairly” (Suffered Microaggressions)

The feelings from the comments above may not be exposed in the online classroom because the interactions and affect are too subtle for online classrooms. Racist practices found in online spaces may differ and may feel differently than as in-person. Technology allows people to connect more directly and extend racist beliefs through images, text, and videos, exposing people to vicarious or secondhand racism (Keum & Miller, 2017). Ortiz (2020) found that college students felt racism was considered physical, so online experiences were not classified as racism. Instead, these students said free speech protects behaviors and actions (Ortiz, 2020). Classmates are Insensitive said he felt out of place sometimes when classmates made disparaging remarks but did not rank less favorably on the racial climate.

A theme emerged that students feel responsible for their online education success, even when faced with a color-evasive environment. Tucker (2014) and Hall (2017) showed that students of color developed invisibility strategies to be successful in their online classes and found students believed their work was graded more fairly because of it. The larger system carries a responsibility of acknowledging bias and color-evasive practices in online education and should not leave it up to the students to find ways to cope through harmful environments. While the survey responses showed a positive perception of the general campus, academic, and racial climates, the results should not mean students are protected or supported by a colorblind environment. Data from this study and the community survey demonstrate students suffered
racialized experiences in their online classrooms. These experiences are intensified, in part, because educational equity is underrepresented, leaving students to regulate their interactions, as students carry color-evasive beliefs with them to the online classroom.

**“Virtual Campus” Environment**

The virtual campus environment is both an extension and bifurcation of the university. This dual role means control by the rules, roles, and norms does not necessarily have the same access to addressing or altering the system because control is maintained by the larger system. The activity systems’ shared goal is ultimately an educated student, as proven by awarding the diploma, and serves as a key motivation to both systems. Though differences between the larger and sub-system were evident, that makes this bifurcation distinct. The data showed students felt both included and excluded from the campus and university. This (dis)connection means the community is experienced differently for online students, mainly because non-physical spaces heavily influence the college experience. While not explicitly about race and ethnicity, this section establishes the cultural aspects of a “virtual campus” that lead to different experiences. Leaders must consider how the sense of belonging within a virtual context shapes student experiences to move towards more equitable education.

**Belonging to Campus**

Distance education has a long history at Research University. When brought to the foreground of the system, the history gives a sense of commitment, nostalgia, and knowledge. Students see heavy branding and language associated with the larger community of the university.
Pictures of old administration buildings and the physical campus were used throughout the Global Campus website, acknowledging RU has a long and venerated history of supplying quality education. The branding, logos, and colors were on nearly every webpage, and pictures of students engaging with each other on campus made the physical campus a real and attainable place. The university has a strong athletic identity, and the mascot image was replicated frequently and represented school pride and membership to an elite group. A strong alumni network was available to online students for engagement while enrolled and for membership after graduation. Throughout the websites and institutional messaging, the messaging considered and invited online students to be part of this group. Likewise, the resource document from the syllabi stated:

We believe that every [Research University Global Campus] student should feel supported when taking courses online. You're part of [our] family; know that we are here to support you as you navigate [RU] from a distance. (Syllabi resource page, College of Computers)

The interviewed faculty, administrator, and professional staff believed online students are part of the larger university, and students’ responses partially supported this idea. About half of the students said they thought of the Global Campus (51.5%) when answering on the survey. In contrast, about a third said they were thinking about the online and larger university together (35.9%), and few students only thought about the physical campus(es) (12.52%). For some students, activities and opportunities were essential to support the feeling of belonging. One student offered:

The school does a good job making [Global Campus] students feel involved with major events such [as] Homecoming (Suburban Female)

For other students, the idea of access to resources was more important:

Because I think whenever I needed anything from this university, I found it. So I never felt left out of things (Missing Lectures).
One student even said that he:

…would choose this university again because of the family atmosphere we share (School is Family)

Students strongly agreed that they would choose Research University again (µ=3.55) and that in general, they feel like they “fit in with other students” (µ=3.12). When combined, students feel as if they were included and belonged. Likewise, the community survey showed most Global Campus students (94%) were satisfied with their sense of belonging to the campus, which was slightly higher than that of the whole university surveyed (see Appendix L).

The abstract sense of belongingness or sense of inclusion from students’ responses is not necessarily the same as a “campus.” Students associated the concept of “campus” with a physical connection. This physical connection included interactions, opportunities, and activities. Research University celebrates Global Campus at sporting events and opens facilities to Global Campus students with their student ID, if near a physical campus. As the website states: “All [Global Campus] students are welcome at any [RU] library!” (GC, library webpage). Many significant events were made available via live-streaming to students at a distance. The academic adviser said GC students could claim they are students of the “Research University” without the online-modality caveat and invited to participate in the in-person graduation ceremonies and receive a diploma that looks identical to the credential earned on campus. The social media review showed resources and opportunities were made available to online students, with the College and Global Campus posting professional development, student services, and accolades with frequency. Online students were considered to be part of the larger system, although gaps in the systems exist. This seemingly strong connection between the university and Global Campus does not necessarily mean students felt a sense of belonging.
“Be Longing” for Campus

Data provided examples and reasons as to why students felt like they did not belong. Students gave a somewhat disagree response to feeling left out of the university (µ=2.03). The majority of students agreed they felt more anonymous in an online class (75%) (see Table 4-10), leading to feelings of disconnect from the campus and the community. Students’ responses about few and weak interactions with faculty and other students had a mid-range coding frequency (n=34). Mostly, the surveyed students seem to equate community with what happens on a physical campus. For many students, the lack of physical access to opportunities and campus activities made students feel less belonging or excluded. Students shared:

Not being physically on a campus, you lose out on a lot of the things the actual school has to offer (Community Focused)

All of the typical college tomfoolery withstanding, I feel I have less access to greater resources, as well as the ability to interact with professors/instructors face to face (Minimal Interactions)

I feel left out in some of the events that on campus students get to do. (Fits in Well)

Most of the courses don’t offer lecture and there is an obvious lack of community. (Same Opportunities)

Even when presented with options to participate in various functions, opportunities, and activities, the connections between the virtual and physical campus seemed to be few and according to some students, of the wrong type. These efforts of inclusion were not enough to counteract the sense of exclusion. As one student said:

having a student ID without a photo is always a constant little thorn reminding [GC] students that they in fact are not quite full [RU] students (Judged by Academics)

The same student ID card that allows an online student into facilities also gave this student the sense of hierarchy between on-campus and online students.
A disconnection exists between what the students report they miss out on and what is made public. The pandemic may have increased this sense of exclusion in unintentional ways. During the fall semester of 2020, most speakers and guest lectures were publicized through social media and hosted virtually because of the physical campus limited students, faculty, staff, and visitors. The opening of these opportunities showed students how much they miss under normal circumstances. When asked how COVID impacted her experience, one student said:

The closure of the physical campus did not really have a negative impact on me, but rather a more positive one. As previously stated in an earlier question, I enjoyed being invited to participate in my one professor’s guest lectures as well as working with other students in breakout rooms on zoom. The interaction was a nice change being able to see and speak with other students rather than just communicating via text and email (Disconnected)

The pandemic created different opportunities for traditionally held classes to be conducted remotely, yet it does not seem that GC students are provided the same opportunity to take these classes. Instead, the GC students have seen an increase in younger students in their online classes. As one student shared:

It does appear that there are situations where an inschool [sic] student can take [Global Campus] classes while a [Global Campus] student can't take online classes that are designed only for in-school students. An online class should be offered to all (Can’t Access Same Opportunities)

This student identified a norm of the institution: the on-campus students have more access to resources and choice than online students, even when the opportunity is already formatted for distance engagement. For some students, Can’t Access Same Opportunities’ comment is an external display of internal feelings RU has for no reason other than they are online students. One student offered:

I have had at least two experiences where I, not as a person, but as a [Global Campus] student, was treated as a second-class citizen. This is to say that despite assertions that a [Global Campus] students are equal members of the [Research University] community ("you receive the same … diploma", e.g.), the truth is quite different (Second Class Citizen).
Online students expressed displeasure by comparing their access as online students to in-residence students. This situation is not simply an issue of access to tools but rather access to the community. The tools students have, both online and in-person, are nearly identical—instead, the division of labor by functional aspects of the system separate online students. For example, the faculty and the College administrator were unsure of support services for online students and were aware of how to get students help, which was not the same for their in-person classes. Help for online students from the College centered around a single liaison for the Global Campus. This division of labor creates an exclusion of Global Campus students from the larger system's community and creates a tension in the system.

The tension stems from the expressed belief that online students are part of the community. Nevertheless, students feel as if this community excludes them for no reason other than physical separation. Students agreed on the survey that faculty treated them as serious students ($\mu=3.47$) and disagreed to being treated unfairly on campus ($\mu=1.31$) and still offered:

We are distance education students. There isn't anyway to duplicate the atmosphere of the college campus in your daily 40 hour workplace, or your home. I have never felt part of the university and still do not. As hard as they may try, they still treat the [Global Campus] and their students and afterthoughts (Afterthought).

Being distance learning provides it's [own] sets of challenges that don't allow for students to participate and be included (Sane as White Students)

I am a [GC] student, so your traditional campus events I cannot participate in (Military Spouse)

This tension is not about race and ethnicity, per se, but exposes a negative internal culture towards online education. The college administrator said online students are just not “socialized into conversations” at college-level planning; someone has to remember to include online students and consider implications when making decisions. The physical campus's socio-cultural
influences affect the decision-making that further develops the rules, roles, and norms of the system.

The development of the sub-system elements matters for educational equity issues because the online students are controlled and subjected to the same decision-making at the university. Though online students are routinely removed from the decision-making process. The rules and norms created by others in the system are unlikely to meet the specialized needs of a virtual student experience. Tools, such as those used in online education, must be designed and adapted with the end result in mind (Newman & Holzman, 1993). As an institution of higher education interested in decreasing racism and reducing bias on campus, RU must also consider and include online education as part of the end result. The end result or object of the larger system must also be passed on to the sub-system. Without doing so, technology can reinforce socio-cultural practices, such as whiteness, in online classrooms. Students will continue to have experiences of racialization in online classroom until the disturbance between community and subject is resolved.

**Racialized Experiences in Context**

**Online and Anonymous**

Distance and online education physically separate students from each other and the instructor, which fundamentally changes the interactions and communication Students felt their racial invisibility leads them to think their grades are a true reflection of their academic ability. Two students offered:
Well. As I am in [Global Campus], what basis do instructors have to evaluate me on? Unless a student has a picture up, you have no idea if the person is male or female, and unless you have a very different name, like my last name, there’s no way to determine that I am "different." (Graded Fairly)

I’d say "somewhat fairly" because there is always implicit bias involved in the instructor's processes and, when answers are limited to multiple choice and/or don't allow for students to explain their answers - this creates confusion when "multiple answers" could actually be correct given the logic and circumstance. Thus, the process itself creates a lack of "fairness" regardless of online or in-person classes. (Implicit Bias)

The bias in grading was mentioned only once; nevertheless, students conceptualized it when answering the question. At least one student thought about how race and ethnicity may play a part:

I have no way of knowing how other students are evaluated. I also do not think my instructors are aware of my race or gender unless we meet in a video conference which rarely happens in my [Global Campus] courses. (Suffered Microaggressions)

The faculty members confirmed what Suffered Microaggressions said - they had no way of knowing a students’ race and ethnicity. One faculty member remembered a picture of a student’s dog as the LMS profile picture but believed most students do not use anything. His memory is different than what students reported. When asked, over 63% of survey respondents used a real picture of themselves, 7.8% used an avatar that does not look like me, 3% used an avatar that looks like me, and 21% said either do not use anything or use an avatar that doesn't look like them.

Table 5-4: Count of avatar use by surveyed students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race &amp; Ethnicity</th>
<th>A real picture (n=40)</th>
<th>An avatar that looks like me (n=2)</th>
<th>An avatar that does not look like me (n=5)</th>
<th>Nothing, no avatar or picture (n=16)</th>
<th>Did Not Answer (n=1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian American</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Black or African American 4 1 - 1 -
Hispanic or LatinX 6 1 - - -
White 23 - 4 9 -
International - - 1 2 -
Prefer not to disclose - - - 1 -
Did Not Answer - - - 1 1

Still, not knowing a student’s race and ethnicity does not mean racist incidents are absent. If anything, the lack of knowledge of race and ethnicity defines active color-evasive practices and supports the notion that racialized experiences in online education can exist. Results from the community survey showed students in the online campus had experiences related to race and ethnicity (Appendix L). Though online students said they were less aware of their peers’ race and ethnicity than total university responses, respondents indicated some experiences of discrimination and harassment. Additionally, some online students answered that they felt discriminated against because of their physical appearance. These results run counter to previous literature that suggests online education is a colorblind environment because it removes physical appearance.

The removal of physical presence created by online education was acknowledged by several students. One student offered her view about anonymity:

Overall, I feel that being online almost makes it better no one can see or hear you so all they are experiencing with you is your work and comments. I feel that sometimes I wouldn't be in some groups if we were meeting in person. They have to take you at the work you produce. (*Academic Ability*)

*Academic Ability* shared what she believes would happen if her group members saw her, although being white did not necessarily play a central part in her statement. In a similar view, but from a Black or African American woman, race and ethnicity were important:

I often find that I have great working relationships in groups when it is based solely on the quality of work and we have not seen each other on a video conferencing platform.
However, as soon as I am forced to present and they realize that I am an African American woman, my groups tend to treat me differently in subtle microaggressive ways such as cutting me off when I speak or restating something I have already said as if it was their original idea (Suffered Microaggressions)

Hall (2014) said that if a student has to hide their race and ethnicity in a learning environment, it cannot be an environment free of discrimination. These two students acknowledge their identities are hidden through technology. Although Academic Ability used a real picture and Suffered Microaggressions did not, both students agreed that being online provides a deeper anonymity level. While the sentiment of anonymity is the same, the use of a real picture versus no picture provides more evidence of what Suffered Microaggressions may be feeling differently than Academic Ability. The impact Suffered Microaggressions feels from this anonymity was not necessarily captured in the Racial Climate scale. Her score was above the sample mean ($\mu=3.25$), and her colorblindness score was below the sample mean ($\mu=1.32$). Her results should not mean that this student is happy or safe within the online racial climate because her statement indicates that she experienced microaggressions in her online class. Irrespective of the amount of anonymity or invisibility created by an online classroom, students are not completely free from a racialized environment.

Anonymity takes on a different form with online education because it is not just individual anonymity. Also hidden are faculty, and in general, online students are treated as an anonymous group. Students agreed they felt comfortable approaching instructors ($\mu=3.52$) and participating in class with questions and comments ($\mu=3.56$) but showed less agreement that instructors encouraged the students to major in their field ($\mu=2.40$). As two students said:

Three years studying at [Research University’s Global Campus] and I have only ever seen and heard two of my professors (Disconnected)

[Studying online] makes it difficult to develop relationships with professors and to get more hands on experience and access to resources in areas like obtaining an internship (Judged by Academics)
Students did not reference long-term relations with each other, either, as two students explained:

I can't say that I've ever experienced a real community as part of [Global Campus]. There are certainly transient connections I have made with other students, but nothing that has lasted very long. *(Suffered Microaggressions)*

Being a student on [Global Campus] feels like being an island to yourself. I rarely see the same students in subsequent courses *(An Island to Yourself)*

Online experiences change interactions and as such, “we cannot assume that conventional understandings of relationships apply equally in different contexts” *(Hollenbaugh & Everett, 2013, p. 283)*. Anonymity plays a salient role in the online education experience.

The concept of anonymity was associated with students, yet the rest of the system is also hidden. The names of staff working at Global Campus are absent. Faculty members only provide their name and email, and the connection back to the College weakens the academic home's visibility. Office hours and location, phone numbers, and biographies were absent from the majority of Global Campus syllabi. Very few instructors provided information about themselves beyond name and email on the syllabi; only one faculty member included a link to a biography page. Another offered a short educational biography. The absence of faculty details adds another type of anonymity not commonly found in face-to-face classes. As explained by faculty, at issue is the desire to create a consistent look and feel of the online education and make classes a “cookie-cutter” or standardized. Unlike in-person classes, a tight control around online classes leads to different normed behaviors.

The division of labor in online classes has moved away from the faculty member and reassigned to learning design professionals. The rule to standardize classes limits the instructors’ ability to change the classroom and leads to the norm of an anonymous online class. It was unclear if the sub-system or larger system controlled syllabi designs and classroom format. Nevertheless, interviewed faculty found teaching online enjoyable and that the students work
hard. One faculty member was surprised to see so many more students in the online class receive the letter grade A than those in-residence and said he prefers the attitude and work ethic of online students. Both faculty members stressed the material, and academic rigor was identical, but modality changed the interaction and teacher presence. This is not to mean instructor presence is absent, it changes because of the delivery mechanism. For example, Garrison (2007) explains the subtle difference between direct instruction and facilitation that may go unnoticed by online students and thus unreflected in their reported experiences.

One faculty member shared a story about integrating Global Campus students with on-campus students in a research project. He reported the online students loved having deep interactions and connections with other students through the research opportunity. The on-campus students enjoyed meeting the online students because they were from all over the world and provided different perspectives. The faculty member explained that this research project is in the final stages of publication. The experience was so enjoyable that he hoped to do something like this again in the future. These online students shared a unique experience, as the division between the online student population and the in-residence was made clear through the documentary data. Online students are seemingly anonymous to the campus, too.

The separation between the online and on-campus students was prevalent by website language and use, syllabi, policy, and interviews. For example, during data collection the College created numerous scholarships dedicated to diversity and inclusion to increase enrollment and support for students of color. However, Global Campus students are ineligible for these scholarships. Students' exclusion from diversity scholarships is an example of how online students are invisible to the physical campus and of color-evasive practices found in online education. This example also highlights how the rules, roles, and norms of the larger system
dedicated to supporting a diverse student population are withdrawn from the sub-system of online
education.

The anonymity provided by online education should not be taken as verification that students benefit from color-evasive environments. The previously included quotes showed this was not the case. Instead, students believe anonymity allows for their work to be graded fairly and judged by academic performance. Students applied a conceptual tool to mediate the environment of the online classroom. Society places value on grades and in turn, influences the cultural relevance of how people think about their own academic success. In this way, students were able to construct a psychological belief that anonymity and invisibility afforded through technology removed any preconceived or cultural context from their academic work. Online students, as toolmakers, according to Newman and Holzman (1993) make their own tool:

The inner cognitive, attitudinal, creative, linguistic tools developed from the toolmaker type of social tools are incomplete, unapplied, unnamed and, perhaps, unnameable. Expressed more positively, they are inseparable from results in that their essential character (their defining feature) is the activity of their development rather than their function (p. 5).

Racism is pervasive and institutionalized, so this conceptual tool of anonymity is unlikely to be used in other areas in American society. Students view this conceptual tool of technology-aided invisibility as a potential benefit because they believe the other social constructs around race are less salient. The “benefit” of this colorblindness does not relinquish the institution’s responsibility of providing environments free of harm. In fact, the mere existence of such a tool as a necessary artifact of online learning exposes a racialized space. The tool was rendered useless and no longer worked when students became visible. It is evident through several student responses that online spaces are not free from racialization, even though students conceptualized the anonymity as a benefit.
“There is No Actual Campus”

The concept of the campus is a complicated question for this group of students. Students did not think about Research University physical campus(es) (12.5%) as much as they thought about Research University and the Global Campus as one (35.9%) and the Global Campus (51.6%). Students described the “virtual campus” as a means to an end or as a vehicle to achieve the goal of a completed degree program. Many students cited the tradeoff between the traditional, on-campus college experience for the benefits of convenience and flexibility of their online education. Students said:

With online classes, there is a lack of in-person communication. It's difficult to make lasting connections with other students. However, the ability to attend college while working full time makes these trade-offs worth it (Employed Full-time)

Attending online classes has allowed me to pursue my dream of going back to school while still being able to work and care for my children (Community Focused)

I entered an online program, with the understand [sic] that I would not receive the 'full inclusive' [Research University] experiences. I feel that I benefit from curriculum and access to resources, but because of remote attendance I never anticipated the full [Research University] college experience…[College] is something I ‘do’ rather than something I ‘live’ (Minimal Interactions)

Students did not expect to have the same type of experience because they were attending online.

One student pointed out that I, as the researcher, should:

realize there is no actual campus to be treated unfairly on in terms of [Global Campus], correct? (Academic Tribalism)

This sense of a campus that is not really a campus helps identify the context of students’ experiences.

The normed expectation present in the document analysis and interviews supposes that online students are part of the larger university. The inclusion is conveyed through branding, history, and academic rigor and performance. Still, the difference between internal community and
external community for the online education system is profoundly different. External community is defined for these purposes as outside of the institution. It includes the family, friends, local community, and organizations that the student interacts with outside of their educational pursuits. Where the external community is expressed in the documentary data, it did not include socio-cultural influences, such as race and ethnicity, as prominent factors of enrollment. Literature in higher education shows that educational experiences and outcomes differ by race and ethnicity (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016) and that students of different race and ethnicities experience the classroom differently (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Instead, the focus was on general characteristics of online students, such as parents or working full-time, and mitigates the importance of these socio-cultural influences. The Global Campus presented information about dependents, veterans, and work responsibilities many adult students have outside of their education.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides this perspective in action. The external community was not readily present in the information collected from the larger system. Only two syllabi contained information about counseling services, and only one included a COVID modifier. Online students were subjected to the same institutional COVID testing, regardless of where they lived (though this decision changed later). Tuition was not adjusted for these students like it was for in-residence students. Messages like the following were posted online:

Since [Global Campus] programs are already optimized for online delivery, this change does not impact our courses (GC, COVID)

While the functional operation of the system continued, external lives of nearly everyone in the world were disrupted. Though no student reported a disruption to their education because of campus closure, most schools closed, sending children home to parents, changes to employment, and sick relatives or selves.

The material and interviews at Global Campus focused heavily on the needs associated with the external community. Emergency counseling and additional financial support were available to
online students because of the pandemic. The professional staff explained students, who would typically be the family's source of income, lost jobs, cared for or lost loved ones, or the student fell ill during the fall semester. Students felt an impact on their external lives, and for one student, it was too much:

I took Summer Semester 2020 off after the death of George Floyd and subsequent nationwide unrest. The stress of work, pandemic, protests, upcoming election, and current political climate was just too much and began to affect my coursework and GPA (An Island to Yourself)

The external community for online students cannot be discounted. The Global Campus made accommodations for the pandemic, recognizing needs are different for online students, but the overarching system did not. The external community for online students is different than it is for on-campus students. The larger system treats online students as a monolithic identity, regardless of socio-cultural influences, such as race or ethnicity. This does not mean the sub-system approach is unsuccessful; the sub-system tailors its focus to address the online students' needs. While able to control certain aspects, Global Campus is not the authority and is subjected to the larger system's culture and community. At issue are the rules, roles, and norms set by an entity with little in common with the sub-system. In turn, this creates a tension in the system for how the rules, roles, and norms set by the larger system might influence the community for online students.

Contradictions & Critical Disturbance

Levant (2018) writes that if we use CHAT from a "dialectal perspective, the unit of analysis is the key to the whole, not to the local" (p. 104). We cannot look at the online student experience without considering how the online student experience fits within all other students'
experiences. The investigation into the local activity of the sub-system of online education exposes contradictions or “historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems” (Engeström, 2018, p. 50). These contradictions exist between a color-evasive environment and an institutional desire to decrease racism. The contradictions are further extended because of the differences between physical and virtual presence. These contradictions, in turn, challenge the institution’s stated aspirations of decreasing racism and bias because online students are excluded. The exclusion leads to a critical disturbance between the subjects and community.

Research University was designed to support multi-campus endeavors, including that of Global Campus. The system supports over 70,000 students and maintains central control and policies for all. The document analysis showed all students are considered members of Research University, regardless of campus location, through branding and images, academic rigor, external networks, and institutional history. As a sub-system of Research University, Global Campus provides services for online students of all disciplines and levels. The support services are available to students through the website, and most services are specifically designed for online students' needs. This is appropriate, as the larger system is unable to meet the 24/7 needs of online students; yet this sub-system approach limits the exposure students have with the College and the larger university. Online students are directed and redirected from the larger university back to the Global Campus for all things, except for the classroom. The exposure students have to the community in the system is limited to peer and instructor interactions, which according to this study are few.

Engeström (2019) details the existence of four types of contradictions; to fully understand the activity, all four must be realized. Foot and Groleau (2011) write that each layer is different but still must interact with the other contradiction in the system. The contradictions found in this
system include the exchange value and use value online education; the combination of a new
technology into traditionally held beliefs about higher education; cultural changes to society’s
views on racism and the acceptance of color-evasiveness in online education; and higher
education’s desire to decrease racism in a society that upholds racist beliefs and structures.

Primary contradictions stem from the “use value” and the “exchange value” (Engeström, 2019, p. 70) and take place in the corners of the activity triangle (see Figure 5-2). Primary contradictions are “dual construction of everything and everyone as both having inherent worth and being a commodity within market” (Foot & Groleau, 2011, para. 18). Online education’s worth (use value) is that it provides access to those students who otherwise might not be able to attend college; simultaneously, the exchange value in the education marketplace generates revenue for Research University and provides legitimate credentials for students. As Ray (2109,) citing Sewell, describes, this relationship between exchange and use values is the “schema of commodification, ‘the conversion of use value to exchange value’” (p. 31). The development of online spaces as colorblind environments (see Nakamura, 2000), and by extension online education (see Enger, 2006; Salvo, Shelton, & Welch, 2017; Palloff & Pratt, 1999), provided the logic of building online education. Ray (2019) writes when logics, resources, and schemas (or organizational rules) come together in racialized structures, “segregation [becomes] a schema limiting (or granting) access to material and social resources” (p. 32). Like segregation, assimilation, homogenization, and standardization found in online education limits access of racialized students online from available resources that are otherwise available to their on-campus peers. Because online student enrollment is only a small portion of Research University’s overall enrollment, the effects of racialization in this environment are not prioritized in the same ways as other elements within the system might be. Online education has not yet realized use value in achieving the stated goals of decreasing racism and bias within the larger system. The use value
of online education technology as a cultural tool has not yet impacted the exchange value. When the commodity of online education no longer has the exchange value to offset the experiences of racialization, a resolution of contradiction will be forced.

Engeström (2018) also writes that “[w]hen an activity system adopts a new element from the outside….it often leads to an aggravated secondary contradiction where some old element…collides with the new one” (p. 50). The traditional method of higher education that relies on physical presence intersects with technology for a virtual presence and creates a secondary contradiction. A secondary contradiction exists between “the corners” of the activity triangle (Engeström, 2019, p. 70) and holds traditional methods in place. The motivation of the online system calls for replication of the larger system so that online education can establish legitimacy. Unfortunately, though, replicating the traditions of higher education conflicts with technology. The corners of the activity triangle, division of labor, and rules, roles, and norms change because of the tool of technology taking a more salient position for the online students. The sub-system is controlled by the limitations for how instructors and students use the technology in ways unfound in the larger activity system. Said differently, the rules change the division of labor because of the tools. Teaching, learning, and interacting through online education are different from in the physical classroom. Data in this study show that students have racialized experiences. Students also still find academic success, which potentially decreases urgency in addressing racialized experiences in online education. When coupled with the primary contradiction, the value-added benefit of addressing the secondary contradiction more easily
establishes the tertiary contradiction.

Figure 5-2: Levels of contradictions (adapted from Engeström, 2019, p. 71).

Tertiary contradictions introduce a more “culturally advanced” motive (Engeström, 2019, p. 70) and transforms the central activity “to account for new motives or ways of working” (Turner & Turner, 2001, p.3). In this study, the tertiary contradiction is characterized by the general acceptance of colorblindness and race-neutrality in online education and the culturally advanced motive of diversity, access, and inclusion. The development of the internet is firmly rooted as a color-evasive or race-neutral space and, in the same vein, online education was designed for standardized experiences. The standardization treats the student population as homogenous. This intentional design comes with unintentional consequences, such as de-identifying students of their socio-cultural backgrounds which does not create a more race-conscious educational environment. A shift in race relationships happened during the data collection of this study that led leadership of Research University to nominate committees, task forces, and give official statements dedicating resources for increasing diversity and equity, while
seeking to decrease racial bias on campus. The influences on campus to move the educational process to more equitable outcomes require the institution to view students as more than just a homogenous population and to pay attention to socio-cultural influences and demographics as factors within the online classroom. To resolve this contradiction requires acknowledgement that the online classroom is not race-neutral or beneficially color-blind.

A quaternary contradiction exists “between the central activity and its neighbor activities” (Engeström, 2019, p. 71). The interacting systems in this study were conceptualized as racialization in higher education and in broad society interconnected through a globally linked world. Racism in higher education is pervasive and institutionalized and embedded in our socio-cultural lives. Online education as an extension of the university is not immune to these practices. Engeström (2018) explains that the history of the activity system developed over time and issues within the system can only be “understood against their own history” (p. 50). Quaternary contradictions transpire “when a new form of practice is employed based on a reformed and/or expanded object” of the central and neighboring activity systems (Foot & Groleau, 2011, para. 25). For example, the object of the central system that addresses systemic racism in higher education, including online education, ultimately impacts the neighboring system of broad society. Racism places a hierarchy in society that is hard for people to let go of (Bell, 1991). Engeström (2019) explains that when the object of the central activity is changing, “conflicts and resistance” can emerge (p. 72). As American colleges and universities have made efforts to address these issues, pushback and protest have increased, including numerous state laws banning the teaching of Critical Race Theory (see Florido, 2021).

A recent report from national leaders in online education stated institutions must be “willing to rethink and let go of the parts of the system that are valued but actually part of the problem… if they are truly committed to creating an equitable institution of education for all
students” (Joosten, Harness, Poulin, Davis, & Baker, 2021, p. 24). This means that Research University must be willing to let go of preconceived notions that online education is a beneficially color-blind or culturally neutral environment to address the color-evasiveness found in the online education system.

The four contradictions found in this study lead to a critical disturbance. The critical disturbance is realized between the internal community of the larger system and the subjects of the sub-system. A critical disturbance "must be addressed at the level of values and meaning-making about an organization's purpose" (James, 2011, p. 30). The value-laden change is necessary by those in charge of the system so that online students are not "afterthoughts” and not treated as a homogenous student population. Resolution to the critical disturbance requires those in positions of authority to address beliefs about the online modality as a functioning extension of the university that replicates racialized environments, even when unseen or seemingly unproblematic.

**Summary of Interpretative Results and Findings**

Global Campus is a sub-system of the larger system of Research University. The object of the systems is similar, though differences exist. The intention is for a seamless transition between the sub-system and the larger system and for Research University to present itself as a single institution to all internal and external communities. The promotion of online students as included, and part of the RU, does not make for a smooth transition. Tensions occur that make the transition disjointed and lead to disturbances in the system. It is this transition or disturbance that manifests when an answer to the following is explored:
What are the classroom experiences of racialization of undergraduate students attending college online?

Experiences of racialization in online education are nuanced and different than what an on-campus student might experience. Online student experiences cannot be removed from the virtual campus and physically separated from campus. The online classroom practices color-evasiveness through tool design, which leaves students feeling disconnected from the community. Students experience a loss of identity through technology-aided invisibility and use anonymity to adapt in a color-evasive environment.

The context of the virtual “campus” influenced experiences of racialization. Students felt included when they could access tools (i.e., activities and resources) and institutional history (i.e., graduation). Students felt excluded because of physical separation. Activities and opportunities not extended via technology or otherwise not replicated for distance use made students feel a disconnection from the campus. The disconnection was not just because of tools and history but also because online students are treated as different subjects, not embraced by the system's internal community. Online students are treated as other subjects and disassociated from the internal community of the larger system when a homogenized student population is created.

A color-evasive environment influenced experiences of racialization. Research University is invested in promoting educational equity for faculty, students, and staff, though these efforts' visibility is low in the sub-system. Online students were treated uniformly and without regard to their race and ethnicity. The tools for online students do not readily present the values associated with RU’s educational equity, wrongdoing or bias reporting, or explicitly stated in university policy. Arguably, one of the most important material and conceptual tools is the syllabus. It is provided to each student and serves as a contract and communication tool between the instructor or institution and the student (see Lundy, Brackenbury, Folkins, Peet, &
Langedorfer, 2016; Matejka & Kurke, 1994). As an outward expression of internal values, the syllabi did not openly express values associated with protecting students from harmful or discriminatory practices. Students suffered from racially insensitive experiences in part because interactions between students were unregulated. Without clear rules, roles, and norms in the classroom, students develop their own practices based on previous educational experiences and socio-cultural influences. Survey results showed a range of students’ perceptions of colorblindness, with some aware of racial attitudes and others less aware of how racialized our society is. Students shared their stories and beliefs that exposed harmful experiences beyond what was captured by the selected scales. Students reported that interactions between each other were few.

The anonymity of online students influenced experiences of racialization in different ways. The virtual campus creates anonymity because of a physical separation and sense of individual invisibility. Students found the invisibility created an environment that supported academic performance over any race-based bias. Institutions cannot exploit this belief as an excuse to dismiss the institution’s responsibility to create equitable education. Students’ anonymity is only beneficial if students believe it is and not because the system treats them as anonymous. Online students are not “socialized” into decision-making and excluded from certain activities and opportunities for no reason other than being online students. Members of the internal community were also hidden; few faculty members include introductions about themselves, and Global Campus staff list the office name and not the individuals who work there. The virtual “campus” is not really a campus, but it is a sub-system, deeply rooted and connected to Research University. This connection means Global Campus is subjected to the rules, roles, and norms of the larger system, even when subjects and community are not shared. The
anonymity afforded to students presents Research University with a unique opportunity and challenge to decrease racialized experiences.

The next chapter brings these findings into conversation with literature and presents implications for practice and theory before concluding with future research and final thoughts.
Chapter 6

Conclusion and Implications

When students enroll in online classes, they bring with them their experiences and socio-cultural influences. In the early days of the Internet, society anticipated online interactions to be homogenous and "colorblind" (Nakamura, 2000). Technology is a cultural tool, influenced by those who made it (Feenberg, 2017) and creates a different socialized world (Feenberg, 2005). As with other forms of education, socio-cultural values and beliefs shape online education, including harmful racism practices. Jayakumar (2005) describes colorblind educational environments as detrimental to students. Online education, on the other hand, has been promoted to be beneficially colorblind. A nuanced understanding of students’ experiences is warranted to ensure institutions are not unknowingly recreating harmful environments in their online classrooms.

Results from this study suggest online education mitigates some experiences of racialization and harm but does not mean racialized experiences are absent. A recently published opinion piece explained: "The shift to online learning didn't eliminate racism on campus, but it did ensure that I no longer had to deal with it in the same way" (Burton, 2021, para. 19). This student's remote learning experience allowed her to turn off the camera and walk away, something she cannot do in a physical campus setting (Burton, 2021). Burton described adopting anonymity through the virtual veil, or the physical, auditory, and visual separation generated by technology-based interventions. Students in this sample echoed similar sentiments. This technology-aided invisibility is not the same as a beneficial colorblindness (color-evasive): the invisibility created through technology presents as a conceptual tool for students, whereas color-evasiveness is a systemic issue of racialization. The confusion by educators and researchers
between the tool and racialized practices has likely led to the idea that online education is a color-blind environment.

This study sought to understand:

What are the classroom experiences of racialization of undergraduate students attending college online?

In this concluding chapter, I detail how the "virtual campus" sub-system is shaped by the racialization of the larger system and contextualized the students' experience in online classrooms. A power dynamic by administrators and leadership hold control over tools impact the ways racialized experiences are addressed. Second, students experienced racialization in their online classrooms as attempted homogenization, enabled by a color-evasive system. Third, anonymity of online education is offered as a conceptual tool for how students move through the system and as a pitfall for online education, to be falsely labeled as a beneficially color-blind environment. Next, the implications for practice are guided by other institutions that wish to extend educational equity to their student body, ensuring that online students are included. I offer the addition of critical theory of technology (Feenberg, 2005, 2017) to CHAT to recenter traditional beliefs that technology is not neutral. Last, I offer concluding thoughts about future research advancing our understanding of students' online education experiences with focused survey tools designed for the inherently different online education learning environment.

**Virtual Campus**

Engeström (2000) stated, "the distinction between short-lived goal-directed action and durable, object-oriented activity is of central importance" (p. 964). The American tradition of higher education is a durable system built after hundreds of years, giving meaning to college degrees, regardless of the actions taken to achieve them, such as those used in online education.
He further wrote that the system's goal-oriented aspect is a "subordinate unit of analysis" that can be understood when viewed against the larger activity system. Online education developed from the other aspects of the larger system of Research University and, in the process, created a sub-system. The history, reputation, and membership to the larger university extend to the sub-system; so too do the institutionalized policies and practices that support and maintain a white-centric educational system. Motivations of the larger system and sub-system are shared, making the object similar. The object is both material (i.e., degree completion) and abstract (i.e., cognitive development). This contradiction between technology and tradition factors into the students’ experiences.

Magda, Capranos, and Aslanian (2020) found, "Online college students are motivated by their careers, including career changes or earning raises. Therefore, they are looking for the quickest way to achieve their goals" (p. 9). The concept of trading a traditional college experience to achieve a college degree still was worth it to students in this sample. Students in my study shared they could benefit from the educational experience and finish their degree with minimal disruption to the other parts of their lives. Students referenced price, travel time, and having more flexibility in their daily lives as part of the tradeoff. The purpose of colleges and universities is multifaceted, encompassing more than one goal of the system. These purposes range from effective communication, problem-solving, developing tolerant citizens (see Bok, 2006), and much more. Online students believe they develop soft skills from their online education experience (Aslanian, Clinefelter, & Magda, 2019). The material and abstract object of the sub-system is similar to the larger system's object, though the actions required to achieve the goal are different.

Distance and online education can provide an accessible form of education for those who might otherwise not attend college but is not free of racialized practices. Feenberg (2017)
explains that the social context influences technology and that technology cannot merely be a way to develop efficiency. Instead, technology aggregates the creators' biases and their "interpretations of the nature of the problem to be solved" (p. 4). As an extension of the home institution, online education is influenced by higher education and society's systems, absorbing cultural influences and making the "function … inseparable from the activity of their development" (Newman & Holzman, 1993, p. 5). Since no organization is race-neutral and exerts control over resources from the top for racist practices (Ray, 2019), online education adapted color-evasive practices and expected assimilation. Those with power over the activity system use the rules, roles, and norms to control the system's tools.

Tools can be both material and conceptual (Cole, 1998). Syllabi, university policies, and academic resources are some of the material tools available to online students. The Learning Management System (LMS) is the main tool used by online students to interact with their peers and class content. The tool becomes the online educational environment. The online environment
is often undefined in literature (Boston, Ice, & Gibson, 2011) or loosely defined by the action of logging into a classroom (Kupczynski et al., 2011). There is more to the online college experience than just logging into the classroom.

Online education as a sub-system was designed to be like the larger higher education system in prestige, function, and policy and replicated socio-cultural practices. The replication of these elements was necessary to give the object of the sub-system meaning in the larger society. Access to the elements is not a form of sharing. Instead, the sub-system adapts under the control of the larger system. The sub-system of Global Campus is not the authority. While some authority subsists through the division of labor, the larger system maintains control. Because of this control, both the material and abstract object of the system remains the same and relies on the larger system to set the societal meaning. For example, Global Campus emphasizes that the word "online" does not show on the diploma. The specified terminology indicates an important distinction in society. Online students earn the same diploma as students on-campus, which carries prestige, access to social and professional networks, and valid academic credentials from a venerated institution. If the sub-system was uncontrolled by the larger system or otherwise separated, these factors could not extend to the online students. This separation would change the object. This replication is not unique to Research University; public universities make up the largest distance education providers (Allen & Seaman, 2016) and rely on institutional reputation and history to grow the online enrollment (see Carey, 2019; Hill, 2020).

American colleges and universities hold long histories of systemic racism. The university in this study, like many others, was making changes to the cultural environment of the institution through interventions and policy changes to decrease racism, discrimination, and bias. Though, it is unclear how these changes will transform online students' experiences. The contradictions exposed in the system warrant deeper understanding of how technology replicates racialization
through standardization and the dual presence of physical and virtual students within the organization.

**Racialized Experiences Enabled by a Color-Evasive System**

The sub-system of online education that I studied took a color-evasive approach. The statement on the Global Campus website states the university is “inclusive and welcoming for all” and all student backgrounds are welcomed. Online students’ race and ethnicity are not captured in informative ways, making online students appear as a monolithic group of students. Socio-cultural influences are transmitted to the online classroom, and when no tools or rules were presented to counteract the color-evasive environment some students had experiences of racialization. The absence of these tools and rules does not create a race-neutral space. Ray (2019) writes that racialized structures, such as higher education organizations, will “differentially advantage racial groups” (p. 34). The online classroom will unconsciously claim the rules, roles, and norms of the larger system, dominated by whiteness, and of particular concern when the academic ability is centered, as evident in this study. Robin Diangelo (2006) warns of this unconscious reproduction of whiteness in classrooms:

> By focusing primarily on the academic performance of students of color and ignoring the defining relationship between that performance and the production of Whiteness in the classroom, racial inequity is externalized. This approach reinforces the “‘otherness’” of difference and leaves the operation of power neutralized, unquestioned, and intact (p. 1987).

The judgment on academic ability and not other parts of identity was salient to many students. Students’ survey responses about the campus climate did not directly link to their personal stories offered in the open-ended responses. Though the instances of unsavory experiences were few in this study, the environment is apt to reproduce institutionalized racist practices.
Deidentified. Higher education has a vested interest in students' socio-cultural influences, and developed interventions focused on Pell Grant recipients, first-generation students, and students from historically underrepresented groups. Unlike students on-campus, the online student's immediate socio-cultural influences are removed when educators treat race and ethnicity as unimportant in online education. This removal erases personal identity, creating a homogenous student body. Gusa (2010) wrote that when "homogenizing practices sustain the structure of domination and oppression, they allow institutional policies and practices to be seen as unproblematic or inevitable and thereby perpetuate hostile racial climates" (p. 465). Online student enrollment is aggregated, removing the differentiation of individuals. The Global Campus website only includes the number of countries represented in the enrollment. Arguably, educational settings with long histories of institutionalized racist practices should not remove or collapse the online students' race and ethnicity because it renders (already invisible) students' racial disparities invisible. Other areas of the sub-system were inattentive to race and ethnicity; no Global Campus social media posts or blog posts were specific to diversity and inclusion initiatives or student services. Global Campus's definition of diversity for the online students was generic in showing concern for "adult students" and their "diverse needs."

The homogenizing practice in online education provides for color-evasive practices in online education, which creates false instances of equality and "hides the commonplace and more covert forms of racism" (Harper, Patton, & Wooden, 2009, p. 391). Students expressed ideas of equality because they were given a fair chance, in which race and ethnicity were seemingly absent. Race and ethnicity are never fully absent, as racism is pervasive in our socio-cultural lives. Instead, the general default reverts to white-centric privilege that renders whiteness as race-neutral (Iverson, 2007). The color-evasive environment can lead to an increased racist environment and acts as a "major form of microinvalidation" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 278), which is
of particular concern when the interactions that led to these feelings happen between students. A microinvalidation, such as saying a “White [sic] student telling a peer of color that the White student does not ‘see’ race” (Linley, 2018, p. 25). The technology-aided invisibility moves statements like this to a literal interpretation of race-consciousness.

Students' identity and emotional responses will create different experiences. Vygotsky (1934) believed individual experiences and the environment are relevant to the learning process or perezhivanie, which refers to the change in emotional experiences in an environment that is seemingly unchanged. Vygotsky (1934) wrote that the same experience, when "refracted through the prism" of individuals, is different even within the same environment (p. 2). Online education appears to provide the same controlled environment through the Learning Management System, as the actions students take are the same (e.g. submit an assignment). Additionally, the syllabi in this study provided an example of this standardization and faculty reported a "cookie-cutter" approach to the online classroom. Vygotsky (1934) wrote: "Imagine I possess certain constitutional characteristics – clearly, I will experience this situation in one way, and if I possess different characteristics, it is equally clear that I will experience it in quite a different way" (p. 5). Vygotsky was writing from a linguistic perspective; nevertheless, the extension to treating online students in a deidentified way is similar.

American educational systems built on racist practices mean students of color likely experience some form of discrimination, bias, or racialization during their education and this educational experience informs their experience in online classrooms. The white-dominant structures serve as the normalized practices from which to compare all other students’ experiences and increases the chance of harm to students “who do not share the norms of White [sic] culture” (Iverson, 2007, p. 471). The results from this study and previous studies (Hall, 2017; Ke & Kwak, 2013; Tucker, 2014) showed that students of color face a form of racialization
in their online classrooms as they adapt to a form of conceptual tool for the anonymity in online education. White students, arguably, do not have to do so. Online education, as a shared environment, seemingly identical for all students, will yield different experiences based on the individual student's characteristics (Veresov & Mok, 2018)—this is the perezhivanie of an online classroom.

Our classroom environments are influenced by those who manage and control them and take on society's characteristics like color-evasiveness. No space is ever truly race-neutral, and pretending otherwise leaves racism unattended, which allows for "racial hostility and discrimination" to continue (Gusa, 2010, p. 465). The inattention to race leads the way for whiteness to norm behaviors and expectations. This expected “conformity to racialized organizational scripts, can often reproduce structures of inequality” (Ray, 2019, p. 36). Once promoted as a "culturally-void" and "colorblind" space, online education can no longer be treated as a neutral space free from racialization because students of color do not experience it as such. Instead, we must look at the online environment through the perezhivanie of all students, but particularly the students of color or those who are harmed by color-evasive environments.

**Students’ Interactions Online.** Ke and Kwak (2013) found that it was important for faculty to explicitly state expectations for student-student interactions to bridge any potential harm caused by miscommunication across cultural differences. The syllabus can "destabilize attitudes and redirect behaviors" (Sulik & Keys, 2014, p. 156) when utilized, regardless of modality.

Overall, students in my study had positive perceptions about the academic climate. Previous studies also showed students associate positive perceptions between academic success and experience. Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) found academic climate was more important than the racial climate. Similarly, Picciano (2002) showed a positive association between the way students perceived their academic work and the quality of education. The student views expressed
in this study and those previous (Picciano, 2002; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003) make it seem as if online education is "unproblematic." This perspective should be treated with care because the students' responses and stories illustrate that racialized experiences are likely between students.

White students in the sample and the study population hold a majority. Merryfield (2001) explains in her study about teaching multicultural education online that she must "orchestrate norms of behavior in my classes or that middle-class, white majority will marginalize or even silence some people of color" (p. 293). Syllabi I reviewed did not include expectations for how groups work together, which is concerning because the community survey administered by the university in my case study also showed online students were likely to hear disparaging remarks from other students. The interactions between students in this sample were few and potentially limited this notion of privilege between peers. For example, students in this sample indicated they were more likely to experience racial insensitivity from other students than faculty. These averages are very low, but half of the Black students in the sample are represented here. The total number in my study who identified as Black was small, only six, but the implication that Black students are suffering from other students is crucial to understanding these experiences.

Whiteness influences how we approach disciplines and reward learning in the classroom (Maher & Tetreault, 1997). Ke and Kwak (2013) showed that Latino and Native American students were uncomfortable posting in public discussion boards, which is problematic when this type of participation is rewarded in the grading system. Richardson (2012) found that white students received higher grades than any other student from varying racial and ethnic groups, and the statistics do not explain why. Richardson's previous work (2010) showed that students received different grades, likely because knowledge construction is viewed differently along race and ethnicity and thus not rewarded. His work suggests that something else is happening in the online classroom that is unexplained by these traditional methods of measuring success. The
classroom environment, as formed and reasserted by whiteness might explain the differences in student success. Without clearly marked practices, rules, and roles that promote diverse learning environments, the default race will be white. Whiteness is detrimental to students' success, particularly when interacting with others, and is not make for a race-neutral classroom.

**Anonymity in Online Education**

**Student Anonymity.** In my study, seventy-five percent of students felt online classes were more anonymous than on-campus classes. Unlike other educational settings, the physical separation hides characteristics and attributes, creating a space with invisible users and without eye contact (Lapido-Leffler & Barak, 2012) or other identifying personal characteristics. Society relies on phenotyping for racial categorization (Song, 2020), so when we engage in online spaces traditionally held ideas about others change because the observable aspects change.

The change to phenotyping afforded by anonymity in online education does not mean an environment is free of racialized practices. For example, Hall (2017) argues that if students have to hide their identity, then the environment is not free of discrimination. Phirangee and Malec (2017) found students felt "othered" in their online classrooms because of their ethnicity, though the authors did not equate the experiences as "racialized." No student in this sample directly linked their experience in online classrooms with racism, but several students referenced racism while on physical campuses. Students shared they would feel differently sitting in a classroom because students do not "hear" racist comments or have to perform in certain ways in the online classroom. Even still, total anonymity in any college setting is not likely. The institution collects demographic information on each student that is available to faculty. Students may post personal information on discussion boards in class or connect with others through social media. On one
hand, students found this anonymity to be beneficial because it protected them in certain ways from more traditional forms of racism. On the other hand, anonymity in online spaces may also create an environment apt for racialized behaviors.

Our communication changes based on the face-to-face environment or asynchronous environment. Asynchronous communications alter the immediate response typically found in face-to-face situations. The Global Campus formats most classes as asynchronous. While asynchronicity provides flexibility for students to complete their schoolwork on their own schedule, it may also increase the feelings of anonymity. Students reported not knowing their classmates or their instructors. In a study about Native American students, the students felt like they were unable to express or represent their identity in their online class because no opportunity was presented (Hunt & Oyarzun, 2019). The lack of opportunity for personal identification makes connecting with others more difficult. An expectation for knowing and engaging with others is an important part of the educational process, though the online format changes those communication practices. Students in a white-centric curriculum may have to keep their identity anonymous, not on purpose but because there is no connection between the material and personal experience (see Hunt & Oyarzun, 2019). Traditional methods of face-to-face interactions that might otherwise offer the opportunity to limit the feeling of anonymity are unreliable.

Anonymity in online spaces increases disinhibition in several different ways, including invisibility and removing the immediacy found in face-to-face communication (Suler, 2004). The disinhibition effect of online spaces means people feel less accountability for their actions and behavior online and potentially increases sharing that otherwise would not happen in a physical setting (Hollenbauh & Everett, 2013; Suler, 2004). Eschmann (2019) offers:

[o]nline environments characterized by increased perceived anonymity, less moderation, and fewer perceived social consequences than in face-to-face interactions can structure a more explicit style of racial discourse as users are disconnected from the societal norms that make overt racism taboo in many mainstream spaces. (p. 419)
Eschmann describes how online spaces no longer use covert or indirect forms of racism, in part because the technological and social anonymity afforded removes any social repercussions otherwise given in face-to-face situations.

The sense of anonymity factors into the online learning experience in multi-layered ways and may explain why online racism was felt differently than face-to-face racism. New work by Ortiz (2020) found students did not consider online racism to be racism. Vicarious racism, or secondhand racism experienced through multimedia sharing, is frequent and normalized in online spaces, altering the perception of racism. Students in Ortiz's study delegitimized their experiences and feelings when they experienced racism online because the physical presence and violence typically associated with racist behaviors was absent. Ortiz (202) offers "entitlement racism" to describe the phenomenon. Entitlement racism can be described as being able to say whatever to whomever online under the guise of protected speech. The sense of protection increases when anonymity online is all but guaranteed. This phenomenon might help explain why no correlation between the general campus and academic climates with the racial climate was found in this study.

Anonymity in online education is a unique phenomenon that challenges previous notions of how students interact and connect with each other. For example, students shared that because classmates do not see each other, they are only judged by their academic work and not by race or ethnicity. Similarly, Tucker (2014) found students believed that by being invisible online, online education provided an "equal playing field" (p. 98). Hall (2017) also found that students' perceptions of being invisible or anonymous increased their sense of fair treatment. In general, students in this study reported they felt they were treated fairly. Their perceptions of fair treatment does not mean harmful institutionalized practices should be left in place. Instead, students used the concepts of colorblindness as a conceptual tool to develop a type of
coping mechanism in their online classes. Tools can be used for thinking (Issroff & Scanlon, 2002) and the concept of anonymity and invisibility gave students the impression that their academic work was graded without influence from other social constructs.

Students of color in a study conducted by Linley (2018) experienced a dual role as coveted and entrusted ambassadors to the university and sufferers of a racialized campus. The navigation by these students is similar to students in this study, as university statements dedicated to anti-racist practices and educational equity are seemingly incongruent and at odds. Linley’s (2018) student participants said their work as ambassadors “came at a psychological price” (p. 32). For students of color in online education, a psychological price might also be paid for the loss of identity and conformity to a standardized environment. Tucker (2014) wrote the “colorblind environment requires [students] of color to invent an altered reality to succeed academically” (p. 179) and that students were “desensitized to discriminatory practices” because of anonymity and “colorblindness” (p. 178). Students used the concepts of colorblindness as a conceptual tool to develop coping mechanisms for success in their online classes. Tools are often created with the product in mind, inseparable from the activity for which it is meant to solve (Newman & Holzman, 1993). This conceptual tool is akin to what Leonardo and Manning (2017) describe as a form of re-mediation:

In the US educational system, where a majority of teachers are white, teachers socialize children through a white-normed meaning system. This racial mediation is empowering for white students, who move along the axis of whiteness, and in turn enforce the assumed legitimacy of whiteness. For students of color and anti-racist white students, this learning promotes a veritable schizophrenia whereby the tools they are offered cannot solve the problems they perceive (p. 22).

Online students in this study appear to have developed a “colorblind” approach as a conceptual tool to find success in an otherwise color-evasive environment. The environment is created by the division of labor, the artifacts of pedagogy and curriculum, and those within the community, such
as faculty, other students, and course designers. The university budget and resource allocation may depend on this approach to make delivery of online courses feasible with existing personnel.

The feelings of anonymity should not be misinterpreted to mean color-evasive environments are beneficial. When institutions make this misinterpretation, institutional responsibility moves to the student. While students have ownership and accountability in their academic success, the institution also has the responsibility for creating safe learning environments for all students to succeed. Instead, institutions should interrogate how their institutionalized racism replicates into the sub-systems of their online offerings. This interrogation means institutions must also acknowledge how internal culture perceives online students and adjust values to have the same opportunities and access as other students on-campus. The problem must be addressed within the internal community, because otherwise online students remain anonymous to the larger system, making potential changes harder to achieve.

**System Anonymity.** Anonymity in online education is not just found at the student-level. At the meso-level anonymity was also found. The sub-system of online education, though deeply connected to the larger system, functions with anonymous feature. For example, faculty and others in the system were anonymous to the students. Few faculty members provided biographies on the syllabi, and Global Campus only publicized office names, not the individuals. The faculty explained that the online modality removes the lecture-based pedagogy, where most student-teacher interactions happen in physical classes. One student gave the example of how a live lecture was made available to online students because of the pandemic. The lecture moved the student to an asynchronous experience where interactions with other students and the faculty could be seen and heard. Interactions through a mediated technology can be just as meaningful to online learners, yet online learners have fewer opportunities afforded to them to interact with
each other (Paulsen & McCormick, 2020). Technology allows education to transcend time and space in ways never seen before, creating new opportunities.

Students felt both a sense of belonging and exclusion from the university. The sense of belonging was attributed to activities and opportunities, which stresses a physical presence on campus. Changes made because of COVID showed the institution could extend opportunities to students through technology and that intentionally altering the work involved is not the critical component; remembering to include the online student is. As the administrator said, online students are not socialized into conversations or, said differently; online students are forgotten or are anonymous to those in the community. Tools can be modified to decrease the system-level anonymity for online students, bringing them closer to the campus and increasing the sense of belonging, if the system is motivated to do so. The system seems interested in addressing race-related tensions and conflicts on the campus with numerous committees, task forces, and resources dedicated to decreasing racism and bias on campus. Online education should be included in that effort.

Terblanché (2015) calls for online instructors to "exercise private visibility – it removes anonymity and is a conspicuous designator of social presence because it illustrates an educator's awareness of the individual learner and his/her contribution(s) to course discussions" (p. 549). Some faculty, particularly those faculty from historically marginalized groups, may find the invisibility afforded to online students a benefit. Faculty also face racialized classroom environment, in part from students’ formal evaluations (see Gatwiri, Anderson, & Townsend-Cross, 2020). Like students, faculty may also develop a type of conceptual tool to protect themselves from unsavory experiences and interactions. Still, faculty can make positive impressions on students by introducing themselves (see Ke & Kwak, 2013), while physically separated and maintaining privacy. The nature of online education requires faculty interactions
and connections with online students to be done differently than with those students online. As one student describes, online students cannot stop by for office hours or meet up with classmates outside of class. While online students are welcome to in-person visits on campus, it is certainly easier for students already physically present.

The survey results showed students feel included on campus through resources and excluded from campus by missing out on educational activities and opportunities. Other pedagogical experiments and ideas for connections tailored for online students are warranted. A commitment to decreasing anonymity in and of the online environment honors the individuals' educational experience and invites students to be more involved with the internal community. In turn, this begins to address the monolithic view of online students.

Implications for Practice

This study shares a powerful lesson for administrators about racialized experiences in online education and helps guide institutions interested in addressing the color-evasive practices in online education. Online education providers can no longer assume a colorblind environment or rely on students to find anonymity as a tool for successful academic outcomes for online students. Instead, institutions should interrogate the replication of color-evasive into the sub-systems of their online offerings. Before anything else, the institution must acknowledge how internal culture perceives online students and adjust values to view online students' identity as central to their educational experience. Only after adjustments to the internal culture and acknowledgement that online students are included in the community, can other changes be made.
Tools related to educational equity efforts, such as policies and scholarships should be made explicit and available to online students. Vague language may not be enough to support an online classroom and be outdated for today's cyber-connected world. Ke and Kwak (2013) found that it was important for faculty to explicitly state expectations for student-student interactions to bridge any potential harm caused by miscommunication across cultural differences. The syllabus can "destabilize attitudes and redirect behaviors" (Sulik & Keys, 2014, p. 156) when utilized, regardless of modality. Interactions between peers through a mediated technology can be just as meaningful to online learners, and opportunities to connect should be given (Paulsen & McCormick, 2020). A study in 2018 showed over fifty percent of students felt peer interactions were critical to their academic success (Magda & Aslanian, 2018). Though, when these interactions are unguided and uninformed by institutional tools, students can experience racialized harm. University policies should specifically include online students and online educational spaces in students' codes of conduct and otherwise think about how the university represents itself to their online students.

Teachers play a significant role in the online classroom, even when the modality prohibits more traditional forms of lecture-based pedagogy. The modality changes interactions with students and requires instructors to "remain visibly and actively involved in the learning, maybe even to a greater degree than in the traditional classroom" (Young, 2010). Changes to the class during the semester are not as easily accomplished as in person, as classes are typically organized and structured before the semester. The division of labor changes between face-to-face classes and online. Although online education increases student freedom in their time management and learning style, it does not make the instructor's role any less important. Online education presents as self-directed, and as such, the instructor's role changes from a lecturer to a facilitator (Rovai, 2004). Students carry different perceptions of satisfaction with them to their online classrooms,
such as timeliness in response from faculty and a clearly outlined syllabus (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2016, 2018). The online class's tightly controlled environment potentially limits instructors' ability to change tools and personalize the classroom. While the interviewed faculty in this study conveyed deep interest and appreciation for teaching online, the reviewed documents did not reflect these feelings. The use of written text becomes more salient in the online classroom environment, such as written communication by instructors, student interactions, or tools like the syllabus. Modification for how these tools are developed and used relies on a change to the system's rules. As Than and Thorius (2019) found, the "rules and division of labor components within the activity system are prime locations for unearthing equity issues" (p. 1000). Schools interested in promoting equity in online education should convey to faculty that the same institutional responsibility for students exists in online classrooms, even though the division of labor changes some behaviors.

Research University is making changes to the institution's cultural environment through interventions and policy changes to decrease racism, discrimination, and bias. Changes like these are necessary to address the organizational rules that allocate resources in ways that reaffirm racialized structures (Ray, 2019). While collecting data for this study, the Global Campus hired a director for diversity and inclusion to help students address educational inequity issues. Positions such as these can address individual student experiences, collect data, and make trends to decrease persistent problems of racialization in online education. Not all institutions will have the resources to hire a professional into this role, so concerted effort by faculty, staff, and administrators to include, think, and prioritize online students is necessary. In a color-evasive system, when online students are routinely excluded from decision-making and the larger system, racialized experiences may go unnoticed and unaddressed. When the critical disturbance with community is addressed, it will help realign the online student as a subject within the broader
system. The rules, roles, and norms will be more readily transferred through the sub-system and may make the technical disturbances easier to change.

Implications for Theory

Andrew Feenberg's (2005) work in critical theory of technology reminds us that technologies are not neutral, "exhibiting biases derived from their place in society" (p. 47) and serve as tools "to reproduce the rule of the few over the many" (p. 48). Additionally, he offers instrumentalization theory to think about how the layers of technology move from "functional relation to reality and the level of design and implementation" (p. 50). As a sub-system of higher education, online education encompasses both points of non-neutrality and control, and produces a layering of student interaction of functionality controlled by those who design the system. This duality factors in when using CHAT for online education purposes and helps contextualize the student experience.

Vygotsky believed in dialectics, and this is evident in his original work of stimulus → response as an iterative process. This process is then mediated by a tool. The tool becomes part of the process, and relevancy for the tool is reaffirmed through socio-cultural influences. If we are to believe Vygotsky’s original work, then the system never stops informing on itself and helps us understand how the interconnectedness of these elements influence the other elements in the same system (see Dafermos, 2015). This iterative process is a form of dialectics. Newman and Holzman (1993) state tools are made with what is ultimately produced in mind. The development of online education was motivated by the extension of the college experience through a mediated form of technology. Critical theory of technology distinguishes between the difference of technology as a mechanism and technology as a culturally reflective tool.
Technology is "socially constructed and imbued with society biases and interests" and allows for user identity to play a role (Hendrickson, 2000, p. 2). Feenberg (2005) writes that “those [who are] excluded from the design process eventually suffer the undesirable consequences of technologies” (p. 49). The individual experience is reintroduced into the system and the personal history will inform on the experience or perezhivanie. Studies like this demonstrate that students-as-individuals in online learning environments have different experiences.

Critical theory of technology aligns with CHAT by stressing the influence of socio-cultural factors and extends to include the individual experience. Engeström (2000) refocused CHAT into a systems view and away from the individual. Bedny, Seglin, and Meister (2000) describe the individual in cultural-historical activity theory as "not so much as an agent, but a subject adjusting and adapting to the normative standards and requirements of activity" (p. 172). Similar to what Feenberg (2005) suggests about control by the few in power to many people, students enrolled in online education adapt to an environment, controlled by a larger university predicated on white norms. Technology in online education is a culturally formed and informed tool that was imagined and built on principles of colorblindness and serve as a replication of our higher education systems.

Technology is deeply rooted in society’s needs and not simply for efficiency (Feenberg, 2017). CHAT centralizes history and tradition into the system, and as a society, our stories center around dominant groups (SIG-Cultural Historical, 2021). The tradition of excluding distance education is built into the system because there was no ability to include them from a distance. Our technologies of online education have changed that and can no longer be central to the story of the experience. Online education decontextualizes students from campus when it is treated as simply a tool for efficiency and not a culturally reflective tool or an extension of campus.
Scholars researching online education must move beyond online education as an efficient delivery mechanism and think about how institutionalized practices replicate in these alternative modalities. The decontextualization of online students from the institution’s campus minimizes the impact of harmful institutionalized practices on students. When students are decontextualized, the educational object is delegitimized, removing the connection between the sub-system and larger system. The value of an online credential requires the reputation of the larger system and in turn, the value of the online credential helps reaffirm the status and prestige of the system. This symbiotic relationship is informed by the duality of technology, as framed by Feenberg, and is more than just an efficiency solution.

Future online education studies that wish to use CHAT should move past technology as a material tool and recognize it for its complex and philosophical history (Feenberg, 2005) that embodies institutionalized practices. In doing so, researchers will encompass technology as a socio-cultural tool controlled by those in power, and only then can the genuine interrogation of institutionalized practices happen. Online education replicates institutional practices because it has to maintain legitimacy, but without careful consideration to the socio-cultural influence on tools it will also replicate harmful practices.

**Future Research**

Distance education has existed for hundreds of years. Still, there are issues that have largely been unaddressed by the educational system about the student experience. The pandemic forced many institutions to reconsider how their on-campus students interact with each other and members of the internal community. This same attention is clearly necessary for online students.
Future research should investigate the interactions between students and faculty and find new ways to increase the level of engagement with the campus. Recent work by Paulsen and McCormick (2020) shows that online modalities have lower instances of student collaboration. Emerging technologies and college adaptations because of COVID show collaboration through technology is possible. Future research should study how the type of interactions impact student experiences. For example, Deng and Tavares (2013) investigated how student interactions changed by technology application, showing that students' behavior changes and impacts the learning experience when platforms change from the official and formal to the informal. A potential question might be: how are informal interactions more or less likely to contain racist comments or microaggressions? Richardson (2010, 2012) showed students of color receive different grades and pose questions about the instructor relationships and historical racism that cause a disparity in academic success. The relationship between instructors and students in online education changes, so understanding how implicit bias plays into assessment is essential. Interventions based on these studies could help target and mitigate instances of racialization, bias, and discrimination between students and decrease disparities in academic success.

This study serves as a starting point for understanding racialized experiences, but additional work should clarify the root cause of racialized experiences in online education. Work like Baker, Dee, Evens, and John (2018) point to the need for faculty development and training to address the bias that may exist in grading, material selection, and interactions in online education. Ortiz's (2020) work on entitlement racism points to a unique observation of how power and identity play a part of racist behaviors online. Feelings of anonymity in a college setting warrants further investigation to better understand how the racial invisibility, as created by technology, reaffirms color-evasive practices. Without fully addressing how color-evasive practices are extended through online mediums, colleges and universities run the risk of validating color-
evasiveness (see Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2017) in the online learning environment. Work dedicated to efforts of how racism, bias, and discrimination plays out in discussion posts, content and material, and student interactions, would expand our understanding of how race and ethnicity matter in online education.

The survey used in this study was adapted to fit an online student experience and fell short in some areas. The Academic Climate subscale, Perceptions of Respect, carried such a low Cronbach's alpha (α=.378) that it could hardly be considered a scale. The Likert ranking was changed from the original work, and that may have impacted the inter-item reliability. It seems more likely that the items on this scale did not resonate with adult online students; for example, the item about being treated unfairly on campus may have confused students based on their abstract understanding of what a "campus" is for online students. Future studies could provide open-ended prompts for students to explain their responses about colorblindness perceptions and address specific instances of how that transpired in the online campus.

New surveys specific to online education are needed to fully understand the relationship students have to their educational experience, perceptions, and the role the larger university plays in developing those feelings while attending online. For example, the recent work by Stephanie Ortiz (2020) shows students do not feel as if the experience of racism online is “real” racism and conceptualizes this phenomenon as “entitlement racism.” She writes: “If colourblind racism is used to maintain whites’ perceptions of themselves as good, non-racist people, then entitlement racism allows people to rationalize the right to support and engage in racist practices which they perceive as morally and legally legitimate” (p. 16). Her work points to the normalization of racist behaviors, protected by the freedom of speech, and the disassociation between real-life and online racism. As this statement shows, the perceptions of these environments are different, so understanding how real-life interventions work online is necessary. Other cyber-racism scales do
not attend to the typical adult-aged student. For example, some items on the Online Victimization Scale were developed for adolescents (Tynes, Rose, & Williams, 2010) and assumes those impacted by online behavior also share a physical presence with others. In her essay about remote learning during COVID, Elizabeth Burton (2021) explains she can close her laptop and walk away from the racism she faces on campus. These educational technologies could promote more equitable learning environments, but assuming the same factors online as in-person is not likely to address or resolve the racist situations.

Current literature about anonymity in online spaces does not fully align with the online educational system. Anonymity in online classrooms is not the same as other online spaces as the intention is to gain an education and then use it in real life. Other online spaces do not have to translate to real life in the same ways. The boundary between the educational environment and real-life requires a connection that is unlike other online spaces. Students who attend online will not keep their online educational activities in the online classroom but rather transition the learning and experiences into economic or personal gain that comes with a college degree. How students feel about being more anonymous in their online classrooms and the meaning it has to students’ success should be further explored. Examining experiences of anonymity in educational context and how students make meaning of these feelings or use this as a conceptual tool would help expose other ways institutions can develop and extend the sense of community and belonging for their online students.

As institutions continue to grow online enrollment offerings, attention must be paid to online students and their experiences of racialization. Future research should consider how outsourcing portions of the student experience further mediate interactions between students and the instructor or institution. The Online Program Manager (OPM) outsourcing option is one way to scale and provide online education. Yet, this additional layer of mediation means nuanced
instances of racialization may go unnoticed and unaddressed. The technology involved is not a
delivery mechanism; it is an electronically delivered representation of the institution. As
institutions struggle to reconcile harmful racialized pasts, it is unlikely the OPM shares the same
mission or educational equity values of the university. The misalignment of goals and outsourced
facilitation potentially blurs the responsibility of the reproduction and perpetuation of harmful
practices. Institutions that chose to engage in online education cannot count on student autonomy
to supersede racist practices, even if students are still reaching degree completion.

**Concluding Thoughts**

This study used a mixed-method case study to understand the experiences of racialization
students had in their online undergraduate classes. In this study, I offered evidence that online
students have racialized experiences in their online classrooms and challenge the notion that
online education is a culturally neutral or colorblind environment. Color-evasive practices extend
to online education with an absence of educational equity, unregulated groups, and students' perceptions of race and ethnicity. Students expressed a sense of belonging and not belonging to
the larger university, reflecting the internal culture of the university's feelings about online
education. Students feel more anonymous in online classes. Other areas of the system are also anonymous, which allows for color-evasive practices to be extended to the sub-system online education. The anonymity students feel, because technology removes the process of phenotyping, cannot be exploited by the institution in lieu of equitable education. Racialized experiences cannot be left up to the responsibility of students to manage or mitigate, which requires the
system of higher education to acknowledge and change practices.
Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) stated that "the question of whether race matters to students in university settings has been supplanted by the question of how race matters" (p. 264). This study finds it does matter, though not in the ways easily measured. The survey results did not necessarily show that the color-evasive beliefs, as measured by the colorblindness scale, influenced the perceptions of the general campus, academic, and racial climate. This should not be taken to mean that race does not matter in the online classroom. Instead, these results should be taken to mean that racialized experiences in online education may not be best measured by existing scales. Online education is unique and requires new ways of researching and thinking about mediated actions in educational processes. Technology is not simply a mechanism but rather a culturally informed tool.

CHAT showed contradictions between the sub-system and larger system. When these contradictions are addressed, online education has potential to be an equitable experience. The critical disturbance will likely be more difficult to solve than the technical disturbances, as it requires changes to values applied to online education. If the technical disturbances are done without addressing the critical disturbance, online students' experiences will always be less than ideal and institutional goals will go unrealized.

Online education providers have a responsibility to ensure online students are not harmed because of their educational experience. Ray (2019) writes that viewing the racialized organization “helps explain mechanisms that reproduce racial inequality in the absence of conscious discriminatory intent” (p. 34). As higher education providers continue to grow and expand their online offerings, the student experience cannot just be defined by the modality. Technology and the way it is used are a reflection of our society and socio-cultural influences. Online education has great potential to be used as an equitable educational modality. Until our socio-cultural practices of racism are interrogated and addressed in all educational systems, the
sub-system of online education will replicate harmful educational practices, and students will experience racialization.
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Appendix A

Student Sample

This table explains the filtering process by field, as found in the student information system, of the student sample.

- Campus location = Global Campus
- Career = UG
- Academic Program = COC
- Enroll credits < 0
- Total earned credits > 3
- Birthyear > 2001
- Semester = Summer 2020, Fall 2020
Appendix B

Informed Consent

Thank you for your interest in this research study! Your responses are important to understand the students’ experience of attending online education. This research provides a way to understand the experiences from the point of view of students and will ultimately help institutions of higher education think about how to better serve online students.

We will not be collecting any identifying information such as names, emails, or your student IDs but will ask broad demographic questions. All answers will be anonymous and aggregated for analysis and reporting. The survey should only take you between 10-20 minutes.

Your answers will be collected electronically and stored in an institutionally approved and protected location. No other persons will have access to this data. Some questions may be harder to answer than others. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Your participation is completely voluntary and refusal to participate will not result in any consequences or any loss of benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board. If you have any research related concerns, please contact the Office for Research Protections at 814-865-1775 or orp@psu.edu. Results from this survey will be used to complete the dissertation work of Sarah Zipf; the dissertation work should be available by January 2021.

Thank you in advance for helping us with this important research. By clicking on “Yes, I give my consent” you are agreeing to participate in the survey and that you are 18 years of age or older, enrolled as an undergraduate student in one of the following courses (COC and CS) and in residence in the US.

Sincerely,

Sarah Zipf, (stz2@psu.edu), Ph.D. student, Higher Education
Dr. Alicia Dowd (acd5439@psu.edu) Professor of Education, Higher Education, adviser

Sarah T. Zipf
Higher Education, Ph.D. Student
Department of Education Policy Studies, Graduate Assistant
4th Floor Rackley Building
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
Appendix C

Student Survey Instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 1: Unawareness of Racial Privilege (URP)</th>
<th>The next set of questions helps us understand how you think about and perceive race and ethnicity. There are twenty (20) questions, separated into three sections.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Race plays a major role in the type of social services (such as type of health care or day care) that people receive in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Race is very important in determining who is successful and who is not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Racial and ethnic minorities do not have the same opportunities as White people in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>White people in the United States have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>White people are more to blame for racial discrimination in the United States than racial and ethnic minorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>Race plays an important role in who gets sent to prison.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Matrix: strongly disagree to strongly agree, please indicate your answer to the statements that follow.

(Change: Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 2: Unawareness of Institutional</th>
<th>It is important that people begin to think of themselves as American and not African American, Mexican American, or Italian American.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Due to racial discrimination, programs such as affirmative action are necessary to help create equality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Change: remove question)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discrimination (UID)</th>
<th>1.9 White people in the United States are discriminated against because of the color of their skin. Immigrants should try to fit into the culture and adopt the values of the United States.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.13 English should be the only official language in the United States. Social policies, such as affirmative action, discriminate unfairly against White people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.14 Racial and ethnic minorities in the United States have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor 3: Unawareness of Blatant Racial Issues (UBRI)</th>
<th>1.5 Racism is a major problem in the United States. Racism may have been a problem in the past, but it is not an important problem today.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.7 Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension. It is important for leaders to talk about racism to help work through or solve society’s problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.10 It is important for schools to teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.19 Racial problems in the United States are rare, isolated situations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**We are interested in learning more about your experience as an online student. There are six subsections to this part of the survey and some questions are open-ended. Please think about your current or previous semester as you answer the following questions.**

**Matrix: strongly disagree to strongly agree**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General</th>
<th>2.1 In general, I fit in with other students at this university.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 If I had to do it all over again, I would still attend this university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 I have found the atmosphere at this university to be very friendly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Change: It is important for political leaders to talk about racism to help work through or solve society’s problems) (Change: It is important for public schools to teach about the history and contributions of racial and ethnic minorities.)

(change: here to “at this university”) (change: the to “this”)
2.4 I feel left out of things here at this university.  
You indicated that you feel left out of things at this university. What made you answer in this way?  

We are interested in learning more about your experience as an online student. There are six subsections to this part of the survey and some questions are open-ended. Please think about your current or previous semester as you answer the following questions.  

Matrix: strongly disagree to strongly agree  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Perceptions of Seriousness</th>
<th>Perceptions of Respect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 I feel my instructors show little interest in my opinions.</td>
<td>3.8 My instructors view me as a serious student.</td>
<td>3.15 Other students make fun of me sometimes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 In general, my instructors help me feel confident of my abilities.</td>
<td>3.9 Other students view me as a serious student.</td>
<td>3.16 I have had instructors encourage me to major in their field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The advisors here are sensitive to student needs.</td>
<td>3.10 I am progressing as well as the other students in my major.</td>
<td>3.17 When I participate in class, my comments are sometimes ignored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 My work is evaluated fairly.</td>
<td>3.11 I feel somewhat out of place in the course.</td>
<td>(change from: I am called on in class as often as other students.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 You indicated that your work is not evaluated fairly. What made you answer in this way?</td>
<td>3.12 You answered that you feel out of place in the course. Why did you answer in that way?</td>
<td>(change: open ended follow up)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 I feel comfortable approaching my instructors for advice and assistance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 I feel free to participate in this course by asking questions or making comments.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.13 My comments are responded to in the course as often as other students.  
(Change from: When I try to speak up in class, I am)
You answered that you have been treated unfairly on the campus. Why did you answer in that way? Is there a particular reason or experience you can share? (change: open ended follow up)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Experiences</th>
<th>4.1 I have experienced racial insensitivity from other students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.2 I have experienced racial insensitivity from faculty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.3 The interracial climate on this campus is tense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.4 In my opinion, this campus is more racist than most.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5 What campus were you thinking about when you answered the previous questions? Global Campus only; Global Campus and Research University; Research University physical campus(es) only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.6 Students of other races or ethnic groups seem uncomfortable around me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University Perceptions</th>
<th>4.7 The university makes a genuine effort to recruit racial and ethnic minority students.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.8 The university fosters respect for cultural differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.9 The university has made a special effort to help racial and ethnic minority students feel like they “belong” on campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.10 The [Native American] school mascot is an appropriate symbol for the university.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.11 In what ways do you think attending online classes changes your college experience?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(change: remove question)

(change: open ended follow up)
4.12 Due to the pandemic, how has the closure of the physical campus impacted your online education or influenced the online course experience? (change: open ended)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>The following questions help us understand more about you. The details provided here will be used for descriptive analysis only.</th>
<th>Multiple Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>What is your gender identity?</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>What is your race/ethnicity identity?</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>How would you classify where you currently live?</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Including this one, how many online colleges or universities have you attended?</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>How many credits have you earned toward your degree? (Please count all previous and current credits, including transfer credits)</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>Sometimes people want to use a picture or an icon to show something about themselves. These icons are typically called an “avatar” and can</td>
<td>Multiple Choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Demographic and Enrollment Characteristics**

**Front question**

Are you enrolled entirely online with the Global Campus? If are taking or will take hybrid or in-residence courses, please mark YES. If you’re taking courses at any of the other Research University campuses, then please mark NO. No, Yes, I don't know
be a drawing, cartoon, or even a picture. From the list below, please select what you have decided to use on Canvas.

An avatar that looks like me; An avatar that does not look like me; A real picture; Nothing, no avatar or picture

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.9</strong></td>
<td>Being online can create the feeling of anonymity. Do you feel as if you are more anonymous in an online course than a course held in-person?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Definitely yes, Probably yes, Probably not, Definitely not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>5.10</strong></th>
<th>Are you currently receiving the Pell Grant?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, Yes, I don't know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Likert Scale (change: Do you feel as if you are more anonymous in the online classroom than in a traditional classroom?)

Multiple Choice
Appendix D

Faculty & Staff Interview Protocol

Warm up questions – I would like to record our conversation so that I focus on our discussion without the distraction of notes. This recording will only be heard by me and my adviser, will not be transcribed, and will be destroyed after I have written my memos and updated the material I am going to share with you.

1. Can you please describe your role in the college? I’m interested in what you do in the college?
2. [I’ve been looking at things online and so I understand a little bit about the college but I’m interested to hear from you about your involvement in online education] Can you please describe how you interact with the online education programs and/or students?
3. In what ways is working with students online different for you from working with students face-to-face?
4. Did you receive any training or other type of support prior to teaching online?
5. How often do you utilize the discussion posts as a learning opportunity or pedagogical tool?

1) Describe a typical first class. If I were a student in your on-line classroom, what would I experience in the first class or week?
2) Based on your experience, how do the racial and ethnic characteristics of students in the on-line environment matter?
   a. How do you know? [here looking for description of what the respondent has observed or of what students have said to them.]
   b. [If respondent describes a student who felt targeted because of their race or ethnicity] How did you react? What resources did you draw on? What resources did you advise the student to draw on?
   c. [If respondent describes observing negatively racialized patterns of engagement or interaction in the class] How did you react? What resources did you draw on to address the issue? What resources did you provide to students in the class to become aware of it?
3) Now I would like to share some items summarizing the types of documents I have reviewed to prepare for this interview. Provide/show document
4) I have some excerpts from these documents that I’d like to ask you about.

CLICK> I made this slide as a way to showcase the three components or elements of a student’s experience in the Global Campus. The college, the Global Campus, and the University.
CLICK> In many documented places, students are told their degree from Global Campus is no different than any other Research University degree. I saw that Global Campus students are included and celebrated with the graduation notices for all students in the college.

Do you consider Global Campus students to be part of your college, part of the campus, or part of the university at large? What do you think Global Campus students would say?

Global Campus students are included in activities, such as graduation and student IDs and even at football games, that connects the virtual and physical campuses. Think about the physical campus and how you might describe it to someone who is unfamiliar with it.

How would you describe the virtual campus to a new student? I am looking for how faculty members confirm or disconfirm the idea of self-help and if they consider it an extension of the campus or not.

[If respondent describes campus at student-level only] How is this similar or different than the physical campus?

[If respondent describes campus with faculty, staff, and students] How is this similar or different than the physical campus?

What other areas of connections between the virtual and physical campuses exist?

CLICK>> I saw that Global Campus students are always directed or re-directed back to the Global Campus website. I was unable to find a type of link, either by hyperlink or language, directing students back to the college from the Global Campus website.

Is there anything you do in your class to direct Global Campus students to the college website over the Global Campus website or vice versa?

Global Campus provides a lot of services for online students. Have you had students ask you for additional academic support? What did you do? What resources did you draw on?

Is there a difference with how you might direct a WC student vs a student just taking a Global Campus course?

5) CLICK>> The Global Campus uses a lot of positive messaging such as “you got this” and “you can do it” and states that “classes are designed with your busy schedule in mind, providing the flexibility you need to study at the times most convenient to you.”

Can you give examples or describe how your classes are flexible and convenient?
Based on your experience teaching online students, in what ways do you see online students’ either taking responsibility or not taking responsibility for their own academic success?

[If respondent answers generally without regard to online status] In what ways do you think the institution has a responsibility for ensuring online student success?

[If respondent answers specifically to online students] In what ways do you think the physical separation from campus impacts this level of responsibility for online students?

6) CLICK>> I reviewed the Global Campus syllabi and know that a standardized syllabus is used.

Do you know if or do you use the same syllabus for F2F classes? Is there anything different about the syllabus for F2F classes?

I noticed that the standardized syllabus doesn’t include the official statements regarding educational equity, reporting of wrong-doing, or CAPS and instead provides a link to a google doc and then directs students to the official policies.

Is there some other way in your classes that you express the values found in these statements?

Do you incorporate awareness of race/ethnicity of students during instruction in some other way?

7) CLICK> I am interested to know about how students interact with each other. The Global Campus website includes a new social platform for students and other social media accounts. Otherwise, it does not include how students might interact with each other in classes. I see peer reviews are included in the “evaluations” section on the syllabus.

Can you provide a short description of this peer review process? Do the students receive any guidance or a rubric prior to starting this peer review?

[Does the professor indicate a rule/role/norm process by way of rubric or explanation or something else?] Have you ever experienced a problem between students in the peer review? What happened? How did you respond?

Are you aware of other types of interactions between online students? In your online classes or in general?

[If yes to discussion posts] Before you start these discussion posts, what sorts of examples or help do you give to students on how to interact with other students?

[If yes to group work] Before you start the group projects, what kinds of materials do you provide to students for group work?
[If other spaces] Have you ever had a student tell you about a negative experience in [other space?]

8) Those are all of my questions. Do you have any questions for me? Thank participant for time.
Appendix E

Documentary Data Matrix

This table represents a visual reproduction of the work conducted with the qualitative software tool NVivo. Aspects and details such as those shown here, were classified in the qualitative database and merged with the quantitative data from SPSS for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>CHAT Element(s) and Codes</th>
<th>Document description and context</th>
<th>Thematic Codes</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e.g. Syllabus</td>
<td>Semester syllabus for course</td>
<td>Online classroom/LMS</td>
<td>Tool</td>
<td>Unique to class; standardized syllabus template.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Coded by syllabus matrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How does this syllabus influence how faculty set expectations for the online classroom? For example, the instructor says no late work will be accepted, regardless of the documented reason.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. About COC, COC</td>
<td>Introduction to the College of Computers</td>
<td>Main webpage for the College of Computers</td>
<td>Object; History; Division of Labor; Rules, Roles, &amp; Norms</td>
<td>short introduction about the college, pictures and text underneath include logo and menu are at the top and bottom; includes social media</td>
<td>Branding, racial climate</td>
<td>Not sure if online students are ever directed to this webpage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear [faculty member],

We are pleased to announce that our college has agreed to serve as a site location for an important study about online education. Sarah Zipf, a Ph.D. candidate in higher education, is interested in researching the racialized experiences of online undergraduate students. It is not yet known how socio-cultural influences impact students’ experiences in online courses.

The study consists of two parts, a survey and a short interview, and will take a minimal amount of your time. First, we ask that you send the attached message to your students encouraging them to participate in a short survey on or around [insert appropriate date]. Second, Sarah will be conducting short and informal interviews with faculty members about a document she creates. She will be in touch with you individually at a later date and we hope you consider meeting with her.

Our online education portfolio continues to grow, and we need your help determining how to best help our students. This unique research project is the dissertation work of a student and we are excited to be involved in such a worthwhile study.

College of Computers Liaison
## Appendix G

### Administrative Data

The following table describes the selection process for filtering the administrative data within the student information system. The fields are the identified locations within the student information system from which the desired data will be pulled.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection</th>
<th>Fields</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Year=19-20, 20-21</td>
<td>Max age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term= Summer, Fall, Spring</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus location = Global Campus</td>
<td>Prior institutions count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic College= College of Computers</td>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses = Previously selected</td>
<td>Enrolled status (F, T, H, L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remove duplicates from multiple enrollments in fall semester</td>
<td>Cumulative total earned credits (include PLA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State, Country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Campus location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Class standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Previous semester indicator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix H

Email Invitation to be Posted in Class

FYI – The College of Computers is partnering with Sarah Zipf on research about online students’ experiences. Please see her message below. [Sent by college liaison]

My name is Sarah Zipf and I am a fifth year Ph.D. student in higher education at the Pennsylvania State University. I am conducting research about online education and I need your help. I am asking you to complete a survey about your experience as an online student. The survey should only take between 10 and 20 minutes and all answers are anonymous. I will randomly select twenty completed surveys to receive a $75 gift card from Amazon on November 1.

Thank you in advance for your help with my research! To get started, simply follow this [embedded link] to the survey or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser: [link]

Best wishes on a successful semester,
Sarah

Sarah T. Zipf
Higher Education, Ph.D. candidate
Department of Education Policy Studies, Graduate & Research Assistant
4th Floor Rackley Building
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
IRB STUDY 00014749
Funding for this project is provided by the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center as a Research Award to Reduce Racism and Promote Antiracism.
Appendix I

Faculty Email Reminder

Professor [Name],

Thank you again for your support with my survey collection this fall semester. I am nearing the end of my data collection and request your help posting the reminder below for my study in Canvas or via email to your class roster(s).

I wanted to share that this research was selected for funding from the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center as a “Research Award to Reduce Racism and Promote Antiracism” and was highlighted recently in PSU News.

Kindly,
Sarah Zipf

Dear student,

Recently you received an invitation to participate in a survey about your experience as an online student. It is not too late! The lottery drawing for your chance to win one of twenty $75 Amazon gift cards will take place on November 1. To get started, simply follow this link: [link]

Enjoy the rest of your semester,
Sarah T. Zipf
Higher Education, Ph.D. candidate
Department of Education Policy Studies, Graduate Assistant
4th Floor Rackley Building
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
(she, her, hers)

Funding provided by the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center as a Research Award to Reduce Racism and Promote Antiracism.
Appendix J

Student Characteristics as a Percentage of the Sample (Respective Cases in Parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Study Population (n=647)</th>
<th>Survey Respondents (n=64)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>78.7 (509)</td>
<td>61.5 (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20.9 (135)</td>
<td>32.3 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undisclosed/ Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>.5 (3)</td>
<td>3.1 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>36.5 (236)</td>
<td>26.2 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>39.7 (257)</td>
<td>36.9 (24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>16.1 (104)</td>
<td>20 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 and older</td>
<td>7.7 (50)</td>
<td>12.3 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer/ Missing</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race &amp; Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>.3 (2)</td>
<td>1.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian American</td>
<td>10.0 (65)</td>
<td>12.5 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African</td>
<td>6.5 (42)</td>
<td>9.4 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or LatinX</td>
<td>7.4 (48)</td>
<td>10.96 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>.2 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>65.7 (425)</td>
<td>56.3 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Race &amp; Ethnicities</td>
<td>2.5 (16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA Resident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>47.4 (307)</td>
<td>50.0 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>52.6 (340)</td>
<td>48.4 (31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester Standing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First year (0-29)</td>
<td>.9 (6)</td>
<td>1.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore (30-59)</td>
<td>6.6 (43)</td>
<td>1.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior (60-89)</td>
<td>23.0 (149)</td>
<td>15.6 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior (90+)</td>
<td>69.34 (449)</td>
<td>79.7 (51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer</td>
<td>1.6 (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Online Schools Attended</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4 or more</th>
<th>Did not answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42.3 (274)</td>
<td>31.7 (205)</td>
<td>15.8 (102)</td>
<td>10.2 (66)</td>
<td>1.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48.4 (31)</td>
<td>28.1 (18)</td>
<td>12.5 (8)</td>
<td>9.4 (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(a\) The race and ethnicity field in the administrative data is captured by the student on the application for admission and is not required.

\(b\) One student answered he was a white male on the survey but stated he was a Black male in the open-ended answers. I left the student’s answer in original form.
Appendix K

Faculty & Staff Email Interview Request

Hello, Professor [Name]-

Thank you again for helping administer the survey for my dissertation research - I was able to collect about 65 fully complete surveys between the summer and fall and am looking forward to analyzing the data.

I wonder if I might ask for your help again. My research includes a short, informal interview with faculty members. Would you be willing to visit with me and discuss information I found during my document analysis phase? I do not expect it to take more than one hour. I know it’s a very busy time for you and I appreciate your willingness to share some of your time with me. Below are some days and times - are any of these convenient for your schedule?

Tuesday - 11/17 3:30-5:00
Wednesday – 11/18 8:30-5:00
Thursday – 11/19 8:30-11:30, 1:30-5:30
Friday – 11/20 8:30-10:30, 12:30-5:00

If these dates and times do not work and you are willing to visit with me, please let me know what is convenient for you.

Thank you and take care,

Sarah T. Zipf
Higher Education, Ph.D. candidate
Department of Education Policy Studies, Graduate Assistant
4th Floor Rackley Building
The Pennsylvania State University
University Park, PA 16802
(she, her, hers)
Appendix L
Selected Items and Results from the Community Survey

Research University conducted a survey with all students, faculty, and staff during spring 2020. Below are selected items and results used for this study as captured on the publicly available report and dashboard. Data were filtered to show Global Campus students when applicable.

Table 8. Aggregate racial and ethnic categories by role: All respondents regardless of citizenship. (Check all that apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aggregate group</th>
<th>Exec/admin</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Faculty/postdoc</th>
<th>Grad/prof student</th>
<th>Undergrad. student</th>
<th>All respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>23.2%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>80.8%</td>
<td>63.7%</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>79.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
- Individual race and ethnicity selections from the survey were collapsed into aggregate groups for reporting in order to break information out by role without presenting any individual demographic group (e.g., Exec/admin Native Americans) where respondents numbered less than 20. Asian includes those who identified as Asian, Asian American, South Asian, and/or Southeast Asian. Black includes those who identified as African, African American, Black, Caribbean, and/or West Indian. Latinx includes those who identified as Hispanic, Latina, and/or Latin American. Indigenous includes those who identified as Alaska Native, Native American, American Indian, Native Hawaiian, and/or other Pacific Islander.
- Values are suppressed where a specific group of respondents is <20 or where the presentation of the value for one group would allow for the calculation of the smaller group.

Figure L-1: Percentage of respondents from Research University by race and ethnicity.

Figure L-2: The extent to which you experience a sense of belonging or community at your campus.
Figure L-3: How often have you heard insensitive or disparaging remark about: People who have a particular racial and/or ethnic identity.

Figure L-4: Have you ever been discriminated against or harassed on your [Research University] campus, at an off-campus residence, or at an off-campus program?
Figure L- 5: How often was the source of [disparaging] remark a member of the following groups: Students.

Figure L- 6: How often have you been discriminated against or harassed for the following reasons: Because of my military status.
Figure L-7: How often have you been discriminated against or harassed for the following reasons: Because of my disability.

Figure L-8: How often have you been discriminated against or harassed for the following reasons: because of my age.
VITA

Sarah T. Zipf

EDUCATION
Doctor of Philosophy, Higher Education 2021
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
Master in Education; Secondary Education Curriculum & Instruction 2007
Bachelor of Arts; Architecture, Spanish 2003
Drury University, Springfield, MO

AWARDS
Dissertation research funding provide by the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Research Award to Reduce Racism and Promote Antiracism, 2020-21
Miriam E. Gray Scholarship, student scholarship, 2020-21

SELECTED EXPERIENCE
Graduate & Research Assistant 2018-Present
Education Policy Studies, The Pennsylvania State University
Graduate Assistant 2016-2018
Outreach & Online Education, The Pennsylvania State University
Associate Director, Compliance & Financial Aid 2010-2016
Outreach & Online Education; Penn State World Campus The Pennsylvania State University

HIGHER EDUCATION CONSULTING
Messiah College: Campus Climate survey follow-up Spring 2019
Penn State Auxiliary Business Services Fall 2019
Office of Compliance & Contracts Summer 2020

SELECTED SERVICE
Journal of Student Financial Aid, Rising Scholar Editorial Board member 2021- current
American Center for the Study of Distance Education, Emerging Scholars 2020- current
Cross-Border Education Research Team, research and project administration 2018- current

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS
