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Conceptualizing the Effects of Anti-Asian Racism on Health and Mental Well-being in the Social Media Space

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Abstract

Asian Canadians have a long history in Canada but continue to face racism and discrimination. The current pandemic has exacerbated and, in some way, normalized anti-Asian racism. This racism has also permeated social media, which has become an increasingly prominent source of information and space for communication. While the link between racial discrimination and one's health and mental well-being has been clearly established, less is known regarding the potential impact of racial discrimination occurring in the social media space and the health and mental well-being of Canadians—particularly Chinese and other Asian ethnic groups. This paper seeks to provide a conceptual framework to better understand the potential impacts of racism and discrimination on one's health and mental well-being in the social media space.

Asian Canadians – or persons of Asian descent – represent a significant presence in Canada, accounting for 13% of the nation's population in 2016 (Statistics Canada 2017). Throughout their history in Canada, Asians have faced a long history of "othering" and xenophobia, racism and discrimination (e.g., Chinese Immigration Act of 1923 and internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II). Despite their long history, tremendous population growth, and prominent presence in today's Canadian society, Asian Canadians continue to be viewed as "perpetual foreigners" (Cui and Kelly 2012) and face both overt and subtle forms of discrimination, such as microaggressions (Edge and Newbold 2013; Houshmand et al. 2014; Noh et al. 1999).

History has clearly shown that xenophobia is often exacerbated during challenging times. The COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented time in history, resulting

in economic turmoil for millions of Canadians, increased sickness and deaths, and high levels of anxiety and uncertainty, and consequently, the scapegoating of Chinese and other Asian communities. The unfortunate framing of COVID-19 — as "the Chinese virus" by some global leaders — may all be contributing to this increasingly anti-Asian sentiment. Similar hostility towards Chinese and Southeast Asian communities also emerged during the outbreak and aftermath of SARS, which like COVID-19, first appeared in China in the early 2000s (Lee 2013; Leung and Guan 2004; Person et al. 2004).

Since the pandemic started, Asian Canadians have and continue to face increased incidences of racial discrimination, ranging from verbal harassment to violence. This has not only impacted Chinese Canadians but also other ethnic groups who may be perceived by others as being Chinese. While the term "Asian" is often used an umbrella term to represent anybody of Asian descent, Asian Canadians encompasses a tremendously heterogeneous collection of countries, histories, cultures, and languages. However, Asians are often viewed as a monolithic population, although individuals may be attacking or blaming China for the virus, the attacks often impact Asian Canadians more broadly. For example, the Fight COVID Racism project (https://www.covidracism.ca) has collected over one thousand incidences, reported by individuals of East, Southeast, and South Asian descent alike. Based on its crowdsourcing data, Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada 2020) found the majority of Koreans (64%), Chinese (60%), and Southeast Asians (53%) reported experiencing discrimination or being treated unfairly during the pandemic.

At the same time, we have also seen a similar rise in the anti-Chinese and broader anti-Asian sentiment across the various social media platforms. For example, in just the five months between December 2019 and March 2020, there was a 900% increase in hate speech on Twitter/X towards China and/or Chinese persons (L1ght 2020). In the past decade or so, social media has increasingly been used as a forum or space for a broad range of voices and discourse, including ones of a racially discriminatory nature. While the link between racial discrimination and one's health and mental well-being has been clearly established, less is known regarding the potential impact of racial discrimination occurring in the social media space and the health and mental well-being of Canadians—particularly Chinese and other Asian Canadians.

The goal of this paper is to develop a conceptual framework to better understand the potential impacts of racism and discrimination on one's health and mental well-being in the social media space. In doing so, we hope to provide a framework that can support further research, as well as help to inform practice and policymaking. The paper is divided into several sections. First, we highlight the rise of anti-Asian racism on social media during the pandemic, specifically on Twitter/X. Second, we examine the link between racism and health and mental well-being, followed by specific discussions regarding the broad impact of racism on social media—an area of limited research—and the potential role of bystanders in the social media context. Finally, we present our conceptual framework that builds upon and brings these topics together.

Rise of Anti-Asian Racism in Twitter/X

A growing body of research has emerged that documents the significant rise of anti-Asian sentiment on Twitter/X specifically (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020; Nguyen et al. 2020; Tahmasbi et al. 2020). These studies utilize a sentiment analytical approach to distinguish between negative and positive tweets, but for the most part, are focused on documenting the numerical or percentage change of tweets. For example, Tahmasbi et al. (2020) found a rise of Sinophobic slurs among English-language tweets during key moments between December 2019 and March 2020, specifically two peaks corresponding to when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency and when then-US President Donald Trump tweeted the term, "Chinese Virus."

Hswen et al. (2021) found that half of the hashtags with #chinesevirus showed an anti-Asian sentiment in the week after former President Trump's "Chinese Virus" tweet. Nguyen et al. (2020) also found that the share of posts negatively referencing Asians increased by 68.4% between November 2019 and March 2020, from 9.8% to 16.5%. Among tweets referencing COVID, 13% include the term "Chinese virus" and based on a thematic analysis, they found about 20% of a random sample of tweets expressed racism or blame, which was directly not only to China or Chinese nationals but also US-based Chinese persons and other Asian groups (e.g., Vietnamese, Koreans, etc.). In contrast, Nguyen et al. (2020) also found increasing levels of "anti-racism" tweets, i.e., posts that were critical of former President Trump's use of "Chinese virus" or spoke out against racism towards Asians. By April 2020, they observed more posts that condemned anti-Asian racism, vs. racist or scapegoating-related posts.

Racial Discrimination, Health and Mental Well-Being

The link between racism and health and mental well-being is well-documented in the literature (Lewis et al. 2015; Paradies 2006). Experiencing racial discrimination has been linked to worsening mental health, e.g., in the form of increased rates of depression in African Americans (Chou et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2007), Pacific Islanders (Allen et al., 2017), Indigenous women (Benoit et al., 2016), and Latinx populations (Araújo & Borrell, 2006; Chou et al., 2012; Pieterse et al., 2012). Indeed, ongoing experiences of racial discrimination have been described as resulting in a chronic state of "racial battle fatigue" that taxes the mental and emotional resources of people of color (Smith et al., 2011, p. 64). Racial trauma, or race-based stress, carries deep psychological and physiological effects on the human body such as: hypervigilance, flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance, suspiciousness, headaches, heart palpations (Comas-Diaz et al, 2019). These symptoms worsen when there is constant direct or indirect re-exposure to racial trauma and minority stress, which ultimately creates hidden wounds in people and communities (Comas-Diaz et al, 2019).

Whenever trauma is experienced, shame also becomes part of a victim's lived reality. Bullying, discrimination, and violence are forms of aggressive assaults on people's identity. When victims feel labelled as inadequate or deficient, these feelings become

inscribed on their psyche and neurocognitive functioning (Martocci, 2021). Trauma and shame have the potential to sever connections, isolate people from their families and communities, and break important social bonds that humans need to survive. Ruptured connections that come from rejection, public humiliation, and shaming ultimately leave victims feeling like social pariahs.

Less research has focused on how racism affects the health and mental well-being of Asian Canadians, but still, there is sufficient evidence to its negative effects (Edge & Newbold, 2013). More research has been conducted with Asian American (vs. Canadian) populations, highlighting a clear relationship between racism and mental health (e.g., Lee & Ahn, 2011). A few studies also found significant correlations between racism and mental well-being among specific Asian ethnic groups living in Canada, e.g., depression among Korean immigrants (Noh, Kaspar, & Wickrama, 2007) and Southeast Asian refugees (Noh et al., 1999). Wu, Kennedy, Qian, and Wilkes (2022) have also found that native-born Asians had a higher level of sensitivity towards discrimination, compared to foreign-born Asians.

While much of the literature focuses on mental health, there may also be detrimental effects on one's physical health. Discrimination is a significant social determinant of health inequities (Davis, 2020), impacting one's health via one of three potential mechanisms or pathways: psychosocial stress, access to services, and violence. Discrimination has been found to be associated with poorer health outcomes and/or health-related behaviors, e.g., poorer self-rated health (a strong predictor of mortality) (Nicholson 2020), negative eating behaviors, such as consumption of sweets (Nadimpalli et al. 2017), avoiding needed health care (McMurtry 2019), substance abuse (Tran, Lee, and Burgess 2010), and less sleep (Ogbenna et al. 2021). The resulting stress and/or anxiety can lead to further diminishing health outcomes, such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, and hypertension,

Minority stress theory draws attention to the social environment in which minority group members have to contend and cope with the conflict between their values and dominant values (Dentato 2012). For example, this theory would posit that racial/ethnic minorities – and Asian Canadians, in this case – live in a racist, xenophobic culture and external stressors, such as incidences of racial discrimination, can eventually lead to a broad array of health and mental health problems. Meyer (2003) further argues that both major incidents and "daily hassles" (which tend to be pervasive) can impact one's health and mental well-being. These daily hassles or microaggressions are "brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities" (Houshmand et al. 2014, 378), such as being treated as a "second class citizen" or being made to feel overlooked or invisible (Sue et al. 2009).

Building on the minority stress theory's notion of the social environment, one can argue that incidences of racial discrimination can also indirectly impact the health and mental well-being of individuals, including those who weren't involved in the actual incidence. Either watching and reading about incidents in the news can also cause stress

and anxiety. This "chilling" effect, in turn, can also contribute to an increasingly hostile environment that can have a detrimental effect on the health of a broader community (Meyer 2003). For example, incidences reported in the media can cause individuals—not directly experiencing the incidences—to become more anxious and stressed, leading them to alter their behaviors or to become more vigilant. Under the COVID context, such events or conditions—whether directly experienced by an individual or not (e.g., reading about an incident in the news)—could further exacerbate already uncertain circumstances. This increased stress, in turn, could lead to diminishing levels of health and mental well-being.

As a person perceives their own environment as increasingly hostile, the consequences can be that of increasing social closure, a process in which they begin to participate less in society (Muntaner et al. 2013). Increasing fear and anxiety can often lead to a person neglecting their own emotional or physiological health needs, due to fear of going out to access services. Simple chores, such as grocery shopping or banking, become increasingly more challenging and stress-building. Over the long-term, this can begin to have a wearing effect on a person. Further, this type of environment can also lead to increased social isolation among the population, which in turn can result in poorer mental and physical health, such as increased anxiety, depression, poorer sleep quality and decreased physical activity (Jang et al. 2021; Sepúlveda-Loyola et al. 2020).

Racial Discrimination in Social Media Spaces

Social media may also have a significant influence in creating or contributing to the hostile environment for Asian Canadians. With the pandemic, the slew of social distancing measures, travel bans, self-quarantine, and business closures are changing how individuals communicate with one another. Prior to the pandemic, social media platforms, such as Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, etc. were already becoming more widely utilized spaces for users to communicate publicly and anonymously providing a platform to discuss politics, news, and various agendas (Chen, Lerman and Ferrara 2020). Thus, more people were already connecting to others online and getting their news through social media platforms (Hitlin and Olmstead 2018). Recent data shows that 75% of Canadians were using the internet more since the pandemic began (Bilodeau, Kehler and Minnema 2021) and 47% reported that most of the time was spent going on social media (CIRA 2021). Like most other spaces in one's life, social media platforms also reflect the pulse of the society. Unfortunately, the past several years have seen a rise—and normalization—of racist and discriminatory values and behaviors, which coupled with the racial undertones of COVID and the pandemic. This, in turn, has led to a rise in anti-Asian sentiment and the social media space is no exception.

Social media has become a prime space for hate speech. While the large majority of Twitter/X content is harmless, Ott (2017, 60) argues that "the danger arises from the other 20% when issues of social, cultural, and political import are filtered through the lens of Twitter/X, for Twitter/X infects public discourse like a social cancer". This is a

consequence of several key features of Twitter/X, i.e., simplicity, impulsivity and incivility. Because tweets are short (due to character limitations), it is challenging to convey detail and complexity. The ease with which someone can post a message can also result in impulsive responses, which eventually can evolve to incivility due to the informal and depersonalized nature of Twitter/X.

Online users may perceive that the internet provides a space of anonymity and safety, which has allowed social media to become a prime forum for hate speech (Keum and Miller 2018). The internet tends to be a refuge for many to express themselves. With this anonymous self-expression comes the lack of civility and public awareness when compared with offline face-to-face interactions. Coupled with the lack of content moderation on the internet, online anonymity has allowed users to freely disclose their racist ideologies with little accountability or supervision (Hughey and Daniels 2013; Tynes, Reynolds and Greenfield 2004). These conditions may influence people who may have otherwise restrained themselves from making racist comments in offline in-person interactions. Communication methods employed by many social media platforms for their users—such as comments, likes, retweets, shares etc.—can influence the popularity of certain posts that can negatively impact concerned communities. In most cases, perpetuators may not be directing their posts at a specific person, but simply posting or endorsing a particular opinion or viewpoint. Therefore, whether they are the direct recipient or not, social media users can experience racial discrimination and virtual trauma through the constant exposure to micro or macro aggressions like stereotypes or explicitly racist online content about racialized groups (Criss et al. 2020).

Online racism is a universal, enduring, and evolving phenomenon, which can have chronic and detrimental impacts on people's mental well-being (Keum and Miller 2018). A study conducted by Kerum (2017) suggested that online racism is experienced frequently on a daily basis due to the greater accessibility and convenience that is found on the web. It has been contended that racism persists more visibly and commonly on the internet. Finally, the solitary nature of internet use can leave victims of racial harassment feeling isolated and fending for themselves, which in turn affects their health and mental well-being and potentially may lead to increased fear and anxiety in engaging with the offline world. In the online space, the same harassment can be replayed, saved, liked, retweeted, and live online for days or weeks. This chronic exposure means that people may not only witness them conveniently on the internet but also potentially be exposed for prolonged periods of time.

Research in coping with racism in the social media space is lacking. The internet provides some level of control for users who are navigating various social media platforms. Most social media platforms allow users to selectively limit the information they access (e.g. Twitter/X allows users to "mute" other users or limit responses from those outside their network). The user may also engage directly with the perpetrator or organization by responding to the message or educating the perpetrators. The act of making a stance and entering a dialogue of racial conflict is not for everyone. For some, this strategy may induce stress and anger in dealing with the perpetrator, as well as fear and anxiety of

subsequent responses by the perpetrator and others. However, the nature of anonymity may lead to the user having more "virtual courage", which in turn, may make it easier for them to respond to racist posts (Keum 2017). Users can also seek and find support from various groups promoting racial equity. These online spaces can provide a safe and empowering environment for people to share their experiences of racism.

Bystander Effect in the Social Media Space

Racist attacks, whether in-person or virtually, represent group processes involving three parties: the perpetrators, the victims, and the bystanders who witness the inflicted aggression and social pain (Byers 2016). Regardless of their response, bystanders to racism and discrimination (i.e., witnesses to violent behavior) play a critical role in further escalating or circumventing aggressive behaviors (Staub 2019). Overwhelming research suggests that in most circumstances and especially online, bystanders try to excuse themselves, pass responsibility onto other witnesses ("diffusion of responsibility"), or avoid understanding the impact of the violence which occurred (Byers 2016; Keum et al .2018; Murrell 2020; Staub 2019). The bystander effect posits that individuals are less likely to intervene as the number of bystanders in the group continues to grow larger (Byers 2016; Staub 2019). Like in-person situations, the fear of being judged or relying on the reactions of others on social media may also shape how a witness defines and responds to racism or violence. This phenomenon —"pluralistic ignorance" — describes how group cohesion pressures or conformity strongly influences bystanders and produces or strengthens racial biases (Murrell 2020).

Unfortunately, passive inaction allows the racist behaviors to occur without consequence and the victim is often left to fend for themselves. Thus, racism and discrimination are not only committed by perpetrators of violence, but also by well-intentioned witnesses who fail to intercede or act on behalf of the victim; a phenomenon referred to as "aversive racism" (Murrell 2020). While bystander dynamics in online settings are a relatively new area of research, many scholars note that cyber-bystanders are complicit audience members to witnessing aggression and social pain (Byers 2016; Keum and Miller 2018; Murrell 2020).

Arguably, the negative impacts of bystander effect may be much stronger in online spaces because of the pervasive reach of digital technologies and social media (Byers 2016). The bystander effect is also magnified on social media because of the public nature of online platforms and large group behaviors amongst online social communities. While anonymity enables people to engage in racist behavior with little perceived risk (Keum and Miller 2018), a racist undercurrent is further sustained through the influence of how other bystanders respond. Most commonly, bystanders fail to properly acknowledge or address racist social media posts (i.e. gaslighting), which can leave victims feeling invalidated and disconnected. This, in turn, may elevate and exacerbate racial trauma and minority stress because social media users with similar perspectives

follow and corroborate each other's views, which creates an echo chamber where racism is strengthened and normalized (Criss et al. 2020).

Thus, the bystander effect has a significant influence in contributing to minority stress and virtual trauma for racialized communities, which in turn impacts health and mental well-being. Bystander effects have an influence on the formation of hostile environments, which in turn contribute to social closure (Muntaner et al. 2013). Social closure is a serious issue, as it deters "victims" from a range of society's resources and opportunities. The narrower their opportunities are, the more different their communities become. And the more different their communities become, the narrower their opportunities. Therefore, bystanders have the power to either initiate or halt a cascading chain of events that leads to vicious cycles of marginalization. More research is needed to theorize how social media bystanders exert their effects in race relations, especially in scenarios where Asian Canadians are placed in the reticle of harm.

However, bystanders also may also play an important role in discouraging or buffering racism in the social media space, and in turn, contributing to an online environment where victims and the broader community can feel safe and supported. Unlike in in-person situations, the anonymity of the internet may also afford a certain level of safety or "cover" for bystanders to support victims and respond against racist postings. However, while many bystanders feel empathy and compassion for victims of violence and trauma, they may lack social self-efficacy or fear repercussions that may come with responding against a racist posting (Byers 2016). Bystanders are well-positioned to help and often see themselves as good, moral, and decent human beings capable of helping, but they have minimal awareness of themselves as racial/cultural beings implicated in systemic and institutional racism (Sue et al. 2019). Lack of self-awareness makes it difficult for bystanders to recognize bias or discrimination in others or see how institutional policies and practices disadvantage racialized populations. This often leads to bystanders dissociating from moral dilemmas to avoid the emotional discomfort they feel when witnessing conflict (Byers 2016). In the context of trauma, it is important for bystanders to focus on disrupting cycles of traumatic interaction within peer groups by providing empathic and accountable recognition for the victim's social pain.

Sue et al. (2019) provides a helpful framework that seeks to validate a victim's experiential reality, value them as a person, affirm their racial or group identity, and reassure they are not alone. This framework includes four specific strategies: 1) "make the invisible visible" (e.g., challenging stereotypes) 2) "disarm the microaggression" (e.g., expressing disagreement, interrupting, etc.) 3) "educate the perpetrator" (e.g., promoting empathy) and 4) "seek external reinforcement or support" (e.g. seeking counseling or spiritual support) (128). These intervention strategies can enhance psychological well-being and arm victims, allies, and bystanders with self-validation and control. The intention of these interpersonal tools is to counteract, change, or stop microaggressions by subtly or overtly confronting and educating the perpetrator. While these strategies could occur when witnessing in-person or online incidents, the online social media space may provide an opportunity for bystanders to support victims in ways that may be more

sustainable (e.g. sending a direct message of support, connecting them with services and resources, and/or checking-in at a later time). With in-person incidents, direct intervention is considered the riskiest (iHollaback 2021), but the online space may offer some level of safety for a bystander to directly address the posting and/or perpetrator.

Another potential model is currently being used in community-based advocacy and bystander trainings by iHollaback!, a global, people-powered movement whose mission is to end harassment in all forms by building the power of everyday people to create safe and welcoming environments for all (iHollaback, 2021). Their approach consists of the five D's: distraction, delegation, document, direct, and delay, which can also be applied in social media space. Bystanders are particularly important players because their response can serve to shift the burden of anti-Asian racism away from the victim or target (Nelson et al. 2011). Responses from bystanders (non-Asians, in this case) may also be effective because it helps to validate the reality of the victim(s) and challenges or disrupts what might otherwise be normalized thinking or sentiment (Nelson et al. 2011; Sue et al. 2019).

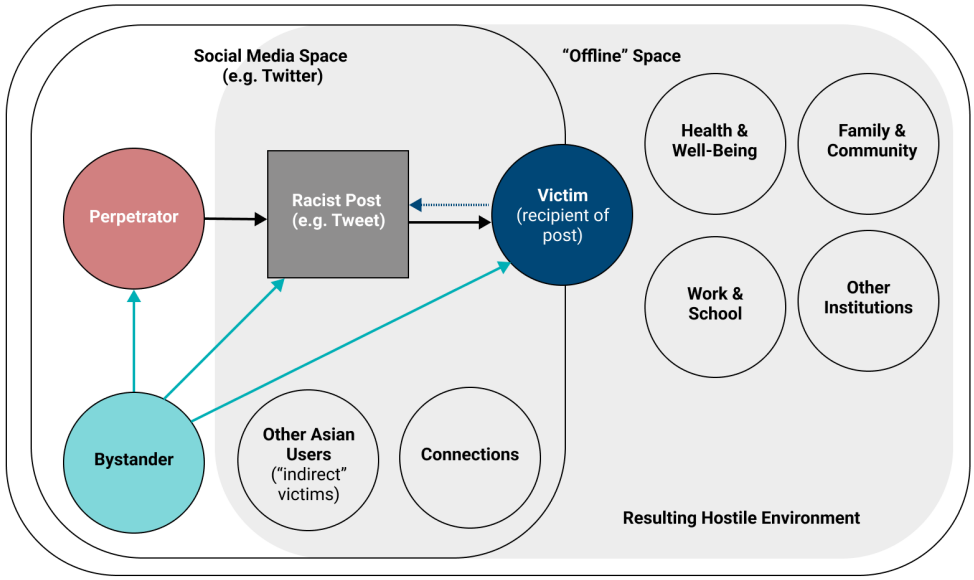
Bringing it Altogether: A Conceptual Model

Based on the previous discussion, we propose the following conceptual model to help our understanding of the relationship between racism and health and mental well-being in the social media space (see Figure below). For most users, the social media space is just one aspect of one's life, however, with the pandemic, the virtual or online world (including social media) has become more prominent. When a victim views a racist post put forth by the perpetrator, they may be impacted in various ways. Drawing from minority stress theory, this incident (or combination of incidents) could have negative effect on their health and mental well-being, e.g., via increased racial trauma or stress.

Most notably, we believe that the racist posts on a social media platform can have a "chilling" effect, fostering a hostile environment for not only the victim but indirectly affecting other Asian users (represented by the gray area). Moreover, this impact does not remain within the platform but can also permeate other aspects of the victim's and/or other users' lives, more broadly. Online racism can negatively affect the health and mental well-being of individuals, not only directly but also affecting their level or form of engagement with family, community, work/school, and other institutions (e.g., health care, shopping, etc.). For example, Asian Canadians may feel the need to be more vigilant when going out for medical appointments or even basic errands, such as grocery shopping, or avoid those activities altogether. Higher levels of vigilance during the COVID context have been shown to be significantly related to increased depression and anxiety among Asian Americans (Chae et al. 2021).

Unfortunately, there is very little research on the impacts of racism on one's health or health and mental well-being in the social media space. There are significant challenges, of course, in conducting research to directly assess the health or health and mental well-being of victims of racism on a social media platform, such as Twitter/X.

FIGURE 1: Conceptual Framework: Effects of Racism on Health and Mental Well-being in the Social Media Space



However, recent studies are starting to emerge. For example, based on a sample of Asian Americans, a recent study (Pan et al. 2021) found that a positive association exists between racism-related social media use and depression and that worry about discrimination moderated this relationship. Another study found that posting and commenting on social media was related to improved subjective well-being, while social media browsing was related to poorer outcomes (Yang, Tsai, and Pan 2020). Such studies highlight the need for more research in this area.

Victims can respond directly to the racist post or perpetrator, but this approach often requires some level of self-efficacy. While the anonymity of the internet provides some cover, the fear of further attacks or other repercussions may still prevent most victims from responding—especially given the unpredictable nature of the social media space. Other users (including the victim's connections) belonging to the same ethnic communities may also feel compelled to respond, but like the victim, may feel vulnerable. In contrast, bystanders are commonly not members of the victim's community (e.g., Asian Canadian) and thus, may be in a better position to respond and "push back" on the racist post and/or perpetrator directly, or try to support the victim.

Conclusion

Social media platforms, such as Twitter/X and Facebook, appear to be at a critical crossroads in determining its role in society. On one hand, these platforms have taken some steps to be more responsible spaces against hate speech. On the other hand, these platforms are facing pressure to be more open in the name of free speech. Whatever

direction these platforms take has real consequences and thus, serious implications for policy and practice. The first step, however, is improved understanding on the impact of racism in the social media space.

This paper presents a conceptual model that could potentially be helpful in informing future research. Asian Canadians have been facing racial discrimination and marginalization throughout history, but all of this has been significantly exacerbated during the COVID context. This anti-Asian sentiment has become increasingly prevalent in the social media space, which in turn, contributes to the overall hostile environment under which Asian Canadians are currently enduring. The associated stress and racial trauma can have adverse effects on their health and health and mental well-being. Interventions should seek to empower Asian Canadian social media users and help to increase their self-efficacy in navigating and responding with racism occurring in the social media space. Together, both Asian Canadians and their allies can help to push back on the rise of racism in the social media space. However, the impact of racism based on the social media space on the health and mental well-being of Asian Canadians is still not fully understood.

We developed this conceptual model primarily hoping to inform an emerging body of research, focused on the intersection of racism, social media, and health and mental well-being. We believe it does so in several ways. First, the conceptual model builds on the minority stress theory, drawing attention to the potential role of the hostile environment created within the social media platform. Once created, these external stressors remain not only within the platform, but can have a lingering effect on the health and mental well-being of the users. Second, this model distinguishes between the user who is the direct recipient of a hateful or racist post and the users who are indirectly impacted by viewing such a post. This "chilling" effect is particularly poignant in the case of social media, given its wider reach and accessibility. While the direct recipient is often (and understandably) the subject of broader research on racism, the broader indirect impact of racism warrants some attention. Finally, the model highlights the important role that bystanders can play in the social media space, an area that has garnered limited attention to date. Bystanders play an important role, either in their nonresponse (which further promotes racial trauma) or their response against racist posts (which could help to buffer the potential impacts on a victim).

The conceptual model has at least two key limitations. First, our conceptual model is largely based on our understanding of Twitter/X, its mechanisms, and how its users potentially interact with each. However, social media is a broad term that refers to a number of different platforms on the internet. One reason is that most research on social media has focused on Twitter/X, possibly due to the relative openness of the platform, followed by Facebook (Matamoros-Fernández and Farkas 2021). Second, our conceptual model was developed specifically within the context of the rising anti-Asian racism during the pandemic. Nonetheless, we would argue that basic concepts of the models, as discussed above, are similar and thus, generalizable to other platforms, such as Facebook. Similarly, we believe the conceptual model could be adapted to inform research on other racial/ethnic minorities and the effects of racism in the social media space.

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