"They Just Don't Get It": Towards Social Technologies for Coping with Interpersonal Racism

ALEXANDRA TO, Carnegie Mellon University, USA
WENXIA SWEENEY, Coe College, USA
JESSICA HAMMER, Carnegie Mellon University, USA
GEOFF KAUFMAN, Carnegie Mellon University, USA

Over 35% of Americans belong to racial minority groups. Racism targeting these individuals results in a range of harmful physical, psychological, and practical consequences. The present work aims to shed light on the current sense-making and support-seeking practices exhibited by targets of racism, as well as to identify the core needs and barriers that future socio-technical interventions could potentially address. The long-term goal of this work is to understand how CSCW researchers and designers could best support members of marginalized groups to make sense of and to seek support for experiences with racism. Narrative episode interviews with targets of racism revealed a number of key entry points for intervention. For example, participants' personal stories confirmed that uncertainty, both about the nature and consequences of the experience of racism, is a key motivator for support-seeking. In addition, despite the need for support, participants largely do not trust public forms of social media for support-seeking. We discuss how participants' accounts of the complex labor involved in determining who "gets it" in identifying potential supporters, and in navigating the complexities of trust and agency in sharing their experiences, present clear implications for the design of new socio-technical platforms for members of racial minority groups.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**; *Empirical studies in HCI*; • **Social and professional topics** → *Race and ethnicity*.

Keywords: racism; microaggressions; social support; uncertainty; communication; traumatic experiences; coping; interviews;

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1 INTRODUCTION

"*So I appreciate her for trying to help me, but I was like... yeah she just don't really get it.*" -P02

Racism continues to be a devastating social problem experienced on a persistent basis by people from racial minority groups, which currently make up more than 35 percent of the United States population. Experiences with racism, which are either overtly or subtly embedded in many everyday social contexts and interactions, profoundly affect individuals' physical, mental, and emotional

Authors' addresses: Alexandra To, Carnegie Mellon University, 5000 Forbes Ave. Pittsburgh, PA, USA, aato@cs.cmu.edu; Wenxia Sweeney, Coe College, USA, wenxiasweeney@gmail.com; Jessica Hammer, Carnegie Mellon University, USA, hammerj@cs.cmu.edu; Geoff Kaufman, Carnegie Mellon University, USA, gfk@cs.cmu.edu.

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well-being [42]. For example, amongst a host of other destructive outcomes, these experiences can, in their immediate aftermath, cause overwhelming cognitive load and anxiety [25] and, in the long-term, impair belonging and advancement in professional and academic environments [9, 94] and contribute to decrements to heart health [14]. Despite the serious consequences of dealing with racism, a lack of research focus on the unique experiences of racial minorities has been a specific point of critique within HCI and CSCW [49]. As of a 2016 review, an ACM digital library search for the term 'racism' only returned six results [49]. While we find it encouraging that as of today (October 2019) that number has more than tripled, we as a field have still only scratched the surface. There is a rapidly growing conversation that calls attention to the pervasive racism in technology [10, 65, 66] as well as calls for incorporating frames of justice and equity into HCI research work [4, 66]. We embrace the call to action from the paper "Does Technology Have Race?" [49] which asks HCI researchers to acknowledge the racial bias and inequality often built into our technology, and asserts that there is a moral and ethical imperative for HCI to address bias and push for inclusive design.

At the same time, there is a strong foundation of research within HCI, and CSCW in particular, that has investigated the complexities entailed with processing and communicating experiences related to marginalized or stigmatized identities. This work has revealed that social platforms, both private and public, are frequently used to cope with and navigate the disclosure of unpleasant and even traumatic personal experiences. Social support and coping have been studied through lenses of gender identity (e.g., [48]), queer identity (e.g., [15]), and through perspectives on mental and physical health (e.g., [1]). Social support has also been proposed as a key coping mechanism for dealing with racism. However, experiences with racism and racial identity have been historically understudied [49] and people of color have been historically erased from computing histories [63].

With an eye toward understanding how CSCW researchers and designers could best support members of marginalized groups to make sense of and to seek support for experiences with racism, the present work aims to shed light on the current sense-making and support-seeking practices exhibited by targets of racism, as well as to identify the core needs and barriers that future socio-technical interventions could potentially address. What factors affect targets' choice to communicate those experiences in the first place? How do targets decide with whom and through what medium to communicate and seek support? How do targets of racism consider risks and benefits associated with specific social technologies when seeking support?

In the Coping After Racist Experiences (CARE) project, we aim to understand the complexities and nuances involved in seeking social support for experiences with racism. The CARE project builds on HCI and CSCW literature on social support in online contexts by examining the specific needs of those targeted by racism. Our long-term goal is to identify how the design of CSCW tools and methods might help support coping and processing. However, it is first necessary to investigate the existing communication norms and barriers in seeking social support following racist experiences.

This work represents an early step in understanding support-seeking and sense-making needs that experiences with racism trigger. We conducted a qualitative study that explored people's experiences of racism, their approach to coping with it, as well as the extent and the means by which computing platforms served to create a space for these conversations to occur. We focus on two questions:

RQ1 *After experiencing racism, what social support-seeking behaviors do targets engage in?*
RQ2 *What opportunities and barriers do current communication and social technologies provide in terms of social support related to racism?*

In the study, we conducted narrative episode interviews (i.e., a person-centric method that allows participants to freely share their experiences [8]) followed by semi-structured interviews. We used these methods in order to empower participants in sharing their stories of experiencing racism and in guiding our discussion of their practices and processes following racist experiences.

It is important to recognize that while the present study focuses largely on subtle, 'everyday' forms of prejudice, racism can and does continue to take the form of extreme, overt acts of violence and trauma. Racism also exists in large-scale systemic and institutional injustice. These forms of racism likely have vastly different social support needs (e.g., community organizing such as activism, campaigning, and protest [52], group and individual therapy [58], etc.). These methods fall beyond our scope, but we acknowledge that there are many important and differing components to the overall process of coping with racism.

Our findings center on the motivation behind support-seeking and means by which support-seekers utilize and curate social systems. We found uncertainty was the biggest motivator for support-seeking behavior. We discuss how targets use social processes to reduce uncertainty as a form of coping with and processing racist experiences. Finally, we see that targets of racism engage in a cyclical process of finding and curating trusted communities and individuals (people who "get it") with whom to share their experiences in the future. We explore implications and considerations for how targets of racism determine who "gets it", the experience of sharing, and trust and agency considerations in using and designing sociotechnical platforms for support-seeking. Our approach to promoting digital wellbeing online focuses on empowering marginalized people by amplifying and supporting their existing best practices in coping with racist trauma [88]. Our desire is that this work contributes to the growing body of anti-racist HCI research and design work.

2 BACKGROUND

As important context for this work, we describe modern theories of race and racism, particularly as they pertain to the United States. We emphasize theories and research explaining how subtle forms of racism manifest and impact people from racial minority groups. We also discuss the role of social support in processing and coping with those experiences, as well as prior research on communications through self-disclosure, and tools for online social support.

2.1 Theories of Race and Racism

A large portion of the population in the U.S. deals with racism on a near-daily basis. For the purpose of this paper, we are focusing on the construct of race from a U.S. perspective and acknowledge that racial and ethnic identity often operate differently and have entirely different historical contexts in other parts of the globe. In the U.S. race and racism have been at the forefront of the country's formation and continuation. Governmental policies (e.g., Jim Crow laws, redlining, voter policy, etc.) as well as economic incentives are often constructed to both subtly and unsubtly enforce oppression which, over the course of many generations, has created severe social inequality [5, 21]. For example, median incomes for Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Native American peoples are about 65% of White income [56, 93]. Most recently, U.S. immigration policies target people of color, stigmatizing, excluding, and vilifying people from Muslim-majority countries and refugees [47].

Racism can be defined in three parts: 1) one group believes itself to be superior, 2) the group that believes itself to be superior has the power to carry out racist oppressive behavior, and 3) racism affects multiple racial and ethnic groups [81]. Racism can be perpetrated by individuals and groups of individuals, but also by institutions and larger systems of power [29]. The belief of superiority need not even be conscious in order to perpetuate racism. For example, in situations of aversive racism, a person's denial of their racial prejudices (which are often reinforced through

sociocultural processes) may manifest in interactions with racial minority members as discomfort, fear, uneasiness, disgust, and/or avoidance [37].

In fact, race scholars state that in modern society racism has not gone away, but, rather, it has morphed [29, 36, 64]. Derald Wing Sue defines "modern racism" (aka *aversive racism*, *racial microaggressions*, *symbolic racism*, etc.) as: 1) "highly disguised, invisible, and subtle forms that lie outside the level of conscious awareness," 2) "hiding in the invisible assumptions and beliefs of individuals," and 3) "embedded in the policies and structures of our institutions" [83]. Modern racism is covert, implicit, and not always under conscious control [38, 55, 64].

Microaggressions can refer to unintentional insults in regards to race (as well as gender, sexuality, etc.) [62]. For example, complimenting an Asian American person on their "good" English language skills betrays an expectation of poor command of the language and, in the process, negates the target's U.S. heritage, reinforcing their status as a perpetual foreigner [84]. To provide another illustrative example, a microaggression that Black women frequently experience is a request from another person to touch their hair. This request implies, among other things, that Black women's hair is foreign and exotic which objectifies and "others" the targets of the request [85].

In these experiences, the target of racism may feel uncertain whether or not the person who made the request is a generally racist person or whether they were just curious and unaware of the negative impact of the request. Whether or not the slight was intended, the target may also feel uncertain how to respond both in the moment and in the future. Pushing back and saying no poses risks (e.g., further harassment, harm to professional relationships and opportunities, etc.), but an acquiescence may incorrectly signal approval of the request and invite future microaggressive behavior. Additionally, while this solo experience is certainly unpleasant on its own, the persistent accumulation of microaggressions can harm wellbeing in the long-term [28].

The often unintended nature of microaggressions makes them inherently ambiguous, complicating coping processes. For targets, ambiguously negative experiences, especially those that are easy to dismiss as "small" such as microaggressions, tend to linger longer and weigh heavier in a person's mind [44]. In fact, cardiovascular responses are notably elevated in response to ambiguously racist events compared to overtly racist ones and subtle racism erodes heart health over time through psychological stress [61]. Does the subtlety and ambiguity of microaggressions affect who targets share their experiences with? Does it influence support-seeking behaviors? Supporters responses?

Validation of the target's experience is crucial. Targets of racism may often question whether they are being overly sensitive or petty, rather than accepting that the interaction was a microaggression [84], especially in ambiguous situations. In these instances, the 'sanity check' is the most frequent and necessary social support a target desires. It allows a person to reaffirm their experiential reality, feel that others share their experiences, and immunizes them against future microaggressions by forming the notion of a shared group experience [83]. In this work we hope to uncover other forms of useful social coping.

While we know communicating these experiences to others and seeking their support can be a critical part of coping with the event, on many occasions, the process of relaying an experience with racial microaggression can be discouraging. Specifically, the person to whom the target communicates their experience might display *microinvalidations* - subtle cues that signal a lack of belief or acceptance of the subjective reality of a marginalized person and directly negate, rather than validate, the target's lived experience [85]. This work additionally seeks to understand how ambiguity and uncertainty as experienced by the targets of the racist experience impact their processing, meaning-making, coping, and social support-seeking related to the event.

A final point to acknowledge about race and racism is its intersectionality. Intersectionality is an identity framework that asserts that we cannot treat aspects of our identity (e.g., race, gender, religion, sexuality, (dis)ability, citizenship, etc.) discretely [23, 77]. The unique combinations of these

identities define our social positions and affect our individual experiences of power, oppression, and vulnerability [73]. In the canonical example, treating the experiences of Black women as a combination of the experiences of Black men and the experiences of White women results in the erasure of the unique experiences, opportunities, and barriers of Black women. In this paper we focus on racial experiences, but readers will see that for many of our participants, experiences with racism are inextricably tied to other aspects of identity which may complicate support-seeking tendencies.

2.2 Social Support-Seeking

Social support, as a proactive coping strategy [46], serves as a key mediator of stress by providing a "buffer" against the potentially adverse effects of stressful, uncontrollable or emotionally difficult situations [79]. Social support can occur through a variety of avenues, including both face-to-face interactions and various forms of mediated communication (e.g., online forums, phone calls, etc.), and can be sought through both formal and informal means. For people who experience racism, the availability of such social resources has been shown to reduce race-related stress [90].

A number of factors can influence support-seeking behaviors and there are benefits and tradeoffs to both online and offline options, as well as both formal and informal support mechanisms. For instance, formal means of social support, such as support groups and counseling, may pose legal or financial obstacles or the association of stigma and shame. These barriers prevent some from utilizing formal support as frequently as they might otherwise [7, 31]. In these cases, informal support options may be preferable. For example, simply engaging in social acts of meaning-making through conversations with friends or family members has been shown to contribute positively to trauma survivors' coping processes [67].

The increasing availability of online social support mechanisms has lowered logistical and psychological barriers to entry. Online support options may utilize social networking sites such as Facebook to privately message those in their immediate network, to post to their entire network through a status update, or to reach out beyond their network to the community at large [40]. People who do not actively post, but instead "lurk", may also reap the benefits of social support vicariously through exposure to other's experiences that may be similar to their own, as they gain access to comforting words of advice or group discussions to assist in coping [59]. Online forums also provide unique technological opportunities. Appropriately labeling posts (e.g., with tags like 'racism') can lead to validation, motivation to seek support, as well as applying new social norms to the community [12]. Even in formal social support contexts, such as online therapy, clients have reported feeling less self-conscious, less inhibited, and better able to express themselves than in face-to-face therapy experiences [60]. Anonymity means that individuals have more freedom to share potentially stigmatizing experiences without fear of disapproval [31].

The potentially global reach of social media brings with it a great volume and range of community resources and immediate support options [2, 26]. However, when facing a broad and partly unknown audience, people avoid writing negative posts and/or indirectly referencing negative emotions and events due to potential stigma [91]. Specifically, in disclosing personally sensitive information, support-seekers are often concerned about amplified risk of harassment, damage to reputation, and rejection [26] and thus have a need to use tools to curate and target particular audiences. Indirect posts about sensitive topics (providing explicit and personal details through the acting lens of another or third-person) allow posters to selectively address audience members who understand their message while filtering out those who may criticize the poster [2]. Typically, direct self-disclosures about sensitive topics are posted in private groups or communities that are built around the specific topic, mitigating the risks of public alienation. Research in this area has examined

many contexts of marginalization that include experiences that intersect with race. However, there remains a need to examine sensitive self-disclosure specific to race and racism.

Online spaces can provide unique benefits when discussing race. For example, accessing racial-ethnic communities online can allow for connection as a way to construct and explore identity at a large scale (e.g., [35]). Online spaces can provide unique access to communities of color that racial minorities might not otherwise have a chance to interact within their daily lives (e.g., [18]).

However, anonymous nature of online interactions entail concerns about a lack of accountability for bad actors, dubious quality of attempted social support, and potential violations of anonymity or confidentiality [43, 51]. Ironically, an individual seeking support for traumatic experiences may find themselves the target of further interpersonal aggression. In particular, when discussing racism online, anonymity often gives way to the expression of negative racial attitudes and an eschewing of the normal constraints of accountability and social desirability that curtail the expression of racist views [45, 82]. For context, four in ten Americans have experienced online harassment that appear in various forms of abusive conduct [12]. Although everyone may be susceptible to online harassment, it can be especially overwhelming for marginalized minority groups. A survey by Pew in 2014 states 59 percent of Black Americans have experienced some form of online harassment. 25 percent of Black users and 10 percent of Hispanic users have been targets of online harassment due to their race, in contrast to 3 percent of White users [39].

In many ways, online forums prioritize and protect people with racial biases and those who want to enact harm to people from racial minority groups. Technological advances and the accessibility of social media has allowed researchers to keep track of online racism, this shows us that both overt and covert racism is abundant in the online realm [16]. Discussion of race and racism often draws online harassment. Online forums have begun integrating moderation tools and guidelines in order to properly classify and report instances of online harassment, but these mechanisms have yet to provide a fail-safe solution [76]. Online racial harassment often results in echo chambers of like-minded individuals that further alienates those who are discriminated against [41]. While the operations and effects of online racism are well studied, the use of social technologies to deal with or combat online racism is not.

In this work, we seek to understand what offline and online sources of support targets of racism turn to as well as how the medium of communication affects their experiences. Previous studies have shown that social support of racial minority groups provide various positive benefits: It can provide social ties in the workplace that increase fulfillment and job satisfaction [80], reduce the negative psychological impacts of racism that students of color face by providing them a functional and validating network of friendships with other students who have experienced similar acts of racism, [17], and even show signs of improved physical well-being among Black communities with lowered chances of hypertension as well as other signs of healthier vascular reactivity [19, 20]. Given the number of potential benefits for support seeking, we were motivated to understand choices made by targets of racism in deciding if, where, how, and whom to seek support.

3 METHODS

To answer our first research question (*After experiencing racism, what social support-seeking behaviors do targets engage in?*), we conducted narrative episode interviews with 14 people who self-identified as having experienced racism. To answer our second research question (*What opportunities and barriers do communication and social technologies provide in terms of social support related to racism?*), we conducted semi-structured interviews about their relationships with various communication and social technologies. Below we detail our recruitment and study procedures, as well as ethical considerations in planning and performing this research work.

3.1 Recruitment

Participants were recruited via flyers and advertisements across Pittsburgh, PA, USA and through social media posts on various online platforms such as Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, and large text message groups. Recruitment materials specified that the study would involve sharing personal experiences with racism in interpersonal interactions, and that eligible participants were required to be 18 years or older and capable of completing all study measures (interviews and survey) in English. Participants were compensated ($15 cash or Amazon gift card) for taking part in the study. Respondents to our ads were then invited via email to sign up for an hour-long Skype or in-person interview with the researchers.

3.2 Participants

As called for in the paper on "Intersectional HCI" [77]we report demographic data that likely impact our participants' lived experiences relevant to our findings (Table 1). Our sample (n=14) included 9 Black or African American participants, 4 Asian or Asian American participants, and 1 Hispanic or Latinx participant (listed by self-identified racial identity in Table 1). Their ages ranged between 18 and 45 (average = 29). All participants received or were currently pursuing Bachelor's degrees. The respondents were primary residents of Pittsburgh, PA - a mid-sized U.S. city. Three of these interviews were conducted online while the rest were conducted in person.

ID[1]	Racial-Ethnic Group	Age	Gender	Highest Degree	MEIM EI	MEIM OGO	MEIM Overall	Interview Location[2]
P02	Black	26	Male	Master's Degree	4.20	4.43	4.33	In-Person
P05	Black/African-American	30	Female	Master's Degree	4.20	4.57	4.42	In-Person
P09	African American	28	Female	Master's Degree	3.60	4.14	3.92	Online
P10	Black	32	Female	Bachelor's Degree	4.40	4.14	4.25	In-Person
P11	Black	18	Female	High School/GED	5.00	5.00	5.00	In-Person
P12	Black/African-American/Afro-Caribbean	22	Female	Bachelor's Degree	4.80	5.00	4.92	In-Person
P14	African American	25	Female	Professional or Doctoral Degree	4.80	5.00	4.92	In-Person
P15	Black Hispanic	38	Female	Bachelor's Degree	4.40	4.86	4.67	Online
P17	Latino	27	Male	Master's Degree	4.40	5.00	4.75	In-Person
P20	Chinese	30	Male	Master's Degree	4.20	4.00	4.08	In-Person
P21	Korean	33	Female	Bachelor's Degree	3.40	3.71	3.58	In-Person
P22	Asian American	22	Female	Some College	4.40	4.43	4.42	In-Person
P23	Black	32	Female	Master's Degree	3.80	4.43	4.17	In-Person
P24	Korean	45	Male	Master's Degree	4.60	4.86	4.75	Online

[1] To maintain anonymity, respondents to our ads were all given unique IDs. Due to scheduling constraints, not all respondents participated, and thus our numbering is not consecutive.
[2] Due to circumstances of some participants, interviews were conducted either online or in-person.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Data and Results of Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) including measure of ethnic identity (EI), other-group orientation (OGO), and overall score.

3.3 Study Procedure

The study (conducted in April 2018) consisted of an hour-long, audio-recorded interview about the participants' experience(s) with interpersonal racism, followed by a survey questionnaire on ethnic-racial identity and usage of social media and communication technologies.

We acknowledge that discussing personal stories of experienced racism could be challenging for participants as it involves highly vulnerable self-disclosure and recollection of bad or traumatic memories. We addressed this concern in several ways. First, a narrative episode and semi-structured interview methods were used to give participants agency and control over the conversation. This was important given the sensitivity of the topic discussed. Second, the researcher directly acknowledged the risks with potential participants throughout the research process. Third, the interviewer (first author) disclosed her personal relationships to the topic at hand (e.g., that she has herself experienced racism, but that she has likely not experienced all of the same forms of racism as the participants, and that she has studied and done work on racial justice for many years). More details on how we addressed the sensitive nature of the current research have been discussed elsewhere [89].

Upon arrival, the participants were briefly introduced to the study and the researchers and signed a consent form. The interviews began with a short introduction of the participant about their profession/education, their interests, and their racial/ethnic identity. Participants were asked about the role race and/or ethnicity plays in their life, how often they discuss race with others, and in what context.

Next, participants were asked to communicate one or more narrative episodes (i.e., [8]) about an experience with interpersonal racism. The participants were asked to describe the incident that they had experienced, preferably within the past 5 years, giving an anonymized description of the setting, time, aggressor(s), etc. Participants were asked how they responded to the incident, who if anyone they talked to about the incident, how they chose whom to talk to, and how they reached out. They were asked what the impact of this support-seeking interaction as well as the long-term impact of the original incident (e.g., did the incident change their perception of race?). They also answered questions about their general usage of social media and communication tools.

Following the interview, participants completed surveys consisting of three sections: 1) demographic information, 2) racial-ethnic identity, and 3) social media and communication technology usage. The racial-ethnic identity was measured with the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM), a 12-item instrument widely used in ethnic identity literature to assess affiliation with one's ethnic group, and one additional question to understand the ethnic salience for participants [70, 71]. Participants respond to a series of statements on a 5-point Likert (1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4 - Agree, 5 - Strongly Agree) where higher scores are associated with stronger affiliation to racial-ethnic identity. The MEIM provides a perspective on how individuals' feelings towards their racial-ethnic identity interplay with their experiences with racism and their post-incident social support-seeking strategies. Results are reported in Table 1. The last part of the survey included five questions on types of social media and communication tools participants use, the frequency with which they use them, and where they feel comfortable discussing ethnicity/race-related issues. These questions were investigated to inform our next step of designing digital tools that amplify social support for targets of racism at online environments. Results replicate what is found in the interview data and are not reported separately in this paper.

After the completion of the questionnaire, participants were thanked by the researchers and received $15 cash or gift card as compensation for their time.

3.4 Reflexive Statement on Researchers

All researchers conducting the interviews and qualitatively coding data identified as women of color, entailing some personal stakes in this research topic for the researchers. Not only does this mean that both interviewing and analyzing researchers personally identified with the research, but it also means that the researchers had their own experiences and opinions about racism and racialized aggression.

While this may seem to pose a risk of subjectivity and bias in the study, it was also conducive to the study since participants feel more comfortable discussing these issues with someone who "gets it." To help signal this directly to participants, during the session the interviewer (first author) discussed experiences with participants as a peer while acknowledging that participants have unique experiences our research team members likely do not have. The interviewer took particular care to avoid responses that could be experienced as micro-invalidations by stating at least twice during the interview (once before the narrative episode and once before the semi-structured interview) that questions were not meant to invalidate the participant's lived experiences, but instead meant to clarify so that the interviewer avoided over-interpreting what the participant said. The interviewer also regularly affirmed the participants' personal stories.

4 ANALYSIS

We use qualitative methodology as it is ideal for situations where the phenomenon at play is unclear [11]. We recorded and later transcribed all of the interviews. A blind study protocol was used for analysis [75]. In other words, except for the first author who supervised the entire project, data analysis was conducted by a different subset of researchers than those who assisted in conducting the interviews. We utilized a grounded theory approach to qualitatively code transcripts of our interview data with several rounds each of open, axial, and selective coding (e.g., [24]).

During open coding the first author reviewed transcripts by going line-by-line and highlighting and writing down phrases, words, and actions with an emphasis but not exclusive focus on social support-seeking forms of coping. The first author and an additional researcher then selected portions of the data to iteratively code with open codes, using points of disagreement to refine the code definitions. The final codebook contained 27 open codes (samples in Appendix). Open coding produced 684 quotations with one or more associated codes each.

To develop axial codes, the research team explored relationships between quotations sharing the same open codes and classified identifiable relationships under an axial code (samples in Appendix).

When axial coding was complete, the first author performed selective coding. During this process, relationships were drawn between axial codes to make meaning from the data. The results of selective coding are presented in the discussion.

5 FINDINGS

"*[There are] situations where it's like so aggressive that people like me on the periphery [who] get it... like we have no choice but to get involved.*" -P24

In this section we describe findings about the experiences of racism our participants shared and their processes of communicating about those experiences. Due to the richness of the stories they shared, we begin by providing a summary of our participants' experiences with racism (5.1.1) followed by a few illustrative sample stories (5.1.2). We then describe the processes targets of racism engage in when seeking social support including what social technologies they use, what they choose to share, and what factors go into their decision-making (5.2.1). Next we describe the core

motivation for that support-seeking behavior - uncertainty (5.2.2). Finally, we describe *how* social support helps targets of racism cope through meaning-making (5.2.3).

5.1 Experiencing Racism

In order to provide the necessary context to understand social support and coping, we provide a brief summary of the experiences our participants shared with us as well as three representative stories. While our analysis focuses more on the coping process, in this section, we do discuss important common themes across how participants describe these experiences. *We caution that these stories may be triggering and upsetting to our readers.*

5.1.1 Summary of Stories. In total our 14 participants shared 52 discrete stories with us about their experiences of racism. We count 'discrete stories' as experiences with either precise incidents or perpetrators identified. For example, saying "*my high school math teacher said he was surprised I was so articulate*" is a discrete story, but "*people make comments about how good my English is*" is not a discrete story, but is still included in our analysis. The stories ranged in both practical and perceived intensity for our participants. To name a few we heard stories about microaggressions in a science lab workplace, experiences being followed by security while shopping, stories including hate speech, physical violence, and the threat of violent confrontation and arrest by law enforcement.

In our description of the narrative episode, we asked participants about their personal experiences with racism. However, we found that participants had varying definitions of what it means to describe 'their personal experience' with racism. We coded the stories by the target of racism and found that of the 52 stories, the participant was the direct and sole target of the racist experience in 18 of them. In 12 of the shared stories, the participant described experiencing the racism with someone else (e.g., Story 1 below where P05 was with her cousin the entire time). In six of the stories, there was no direct target of racism. In other words, something racist happened in the vicinity of the participant (e.g., seeing a Confederate flag flying while driving through a new neighborhood or being an Asian person and overhearing someone say something racist about Black people while no one else who is Black is in the vicinity). While the participant was not 'directly targeted' it was still their personal experience with racism, and they often coped with it similarly as they did with experiences where they were directly targeted. Finally and most surprising, the final six stories describe situations in which another person, known or unknown to the participant, was directly targeted by racism. For example, P12 described her brother's experiences being harassed by the police, P15 described her son's experiences being followed by security guards while walking through a mall, and and P24 described intervening when he saw an unhoused person of color being harassed on the street by a group of white men. Even in these 'indirect' experiences of racism, racial minority group members feel the oppressive nature of the racism and often need to engage in some form of processing and coping.

Experiences with racism were often described as embodied by participants - their emotions were felt physically. One physical characteristic that participants noted during their racist experiences was a feeling that their body was heating up from embarrassment or outrage. Additionally, participants noted having weird feelings that people were looking at them and of wanting to get out of the situation. These embodied feelings also left participants feeling rejected due to a barrier preventing them from belonging.

Another common detail described by our participants is the role of non-verbal support during their experiences with racism. Participants often clearly remember when another person of a similar racial background or other marker of allyship shares meaningful eye contact during the experience. Participants describe those allies in the moment as "getting it" (discussed as an important theme

later in this paper). Very often, the participant does not discuss the incident further with these in-the-moment supporters.

Finally, childhood memories were a prevalent part of our participants' storytelling. Of our 14 participants, 10 told us about some incident that happened during childhood. Often these stories stood out in how participants framed their experiences. For most participants, they described how, at the time, they didn't understand that they were being treated differently because of their race. These first brushes with racism are often very clear and cleanly narrativized by the participant - there is a beginning, middle, and end that the participant describes linearly and concisely. This differs from the other stories which are often told more cyclically with participants calling back to a prior story several times throughout the interview to add additional detail.

5.1.2 Representative Story Samples. Here we present three stories that represent the experiences of our participants in more detail. In story one, P05 describes an initially ambiguous experience being unjustifiably removed from the VIP section of a concert venue by security. In story two, P11 describes six of the most common microaggressions she experiences and explains why she chooses not to respond to them, through support-seeking or otherwise. In story three, P17 describes experiencing directed hate speech on a public bus.

Story 1. Part way through a concert in Las Vegas in a VIP section, security tapped P05 and her cousin on the shoulder and asked them to leave. They were given no previous warnings and were very visibly the only two people of color in the section. During and after being escorted out, P05 and her cousin repeatedly asked security and hotel management for specific reasons for their removal or for photo or video documentation. Management repeatedly said, "*we didn't look at the video, but security told us you were a problem.*" They then instead asked for a refund and were denied but told they were welcome to purchase tickets and come back to a future show.

P05 later called her father - as she was considering legal action on basis of discrimination and was interested in filing a civil suit. She also told her close friends who she texts daily about this incident. She received mixed responses - but largely the 'bad' responses came from people who she was not as close with who had known she was going to Vegas. When they asked how the concert was, she described the situation as well as its racial motivation, to which at least two responded "*did you guys do something?*" She was very frustrated by this because she felt that "*sometimes a lot of people can't see that oh wow this actually does happen to people for no reason, it's unprovoked.*" Others commented, "*that sucks*" and "*I can't believe that happened to you guys,*" and "*I hope you guys can work something out.*" She was encouraged by these comments and seemed happier overall with the friends who responded in this way.

While her cousin posted about the event on Facebook, P05 did not. She thinks she commented on his post, but definitely did not engage in any conversation. However, were it to come up, she is willing to tell others who might attend that same venue about her experience to deter them:

> "*I'm not going to necessarily go on a social media tirade against you, but if I can convince or let other people that I personally know about my experience with this hotel... hopefully they will feel the same way and not want to support organizations and business that treat people the way that they treated me.*"

She will also no longer patronize their hotel, mall, or concert venue in the future.

Story 2. Every one of our participants described common microaggressions they experience. P11, an undergraduate student, described six common microaggressions she faces in rapid succession: 1) "*wow, I wish I was as dark as you*", 2) "*oh, you're so articulate*", 3) "*you're just playing the race card*", 4) being told her Nigerian mother or father's accent is "weird", 5) "*can I touch your hair?*" and 6) being called an "Oreo" in middle school (a derogatory term that implies you are 'Black on

the outside, but White on the inside'). Over the course of her interview, she described additional microaggressions, but what stood out here is that she was able to so quickly list these experiences. She described a few of her philosophies and responses to dealing with microaggressions:

> "*It's just like we all deal with microaggressions. No, it's really terrible that we all deal with microaggressions but you kind of just have to shrug your shoulders... I don't really experience [overt racism] much anymore other than, like, little microaggressions and I'm just like, oh you're a dumbass and I get over it because I kinda have to, which is terrible... Like most of the time White people don't even know that they're saying microaggressions and if you tell them they'll get really offended and it's very annoying.*"

To P11, microaggressions are inevitable, commonplace, and not worth reacting to. It gives more power to the aggressor to spend her time thinking about what happened, and in the worst case it could backfire on her (e.g., possibility of being fired by her manager for pushing back). This attitude towards microaggressions is shared by the majority of our participants. It is worth noting that this distancing attitude is yet another coping mechanism. However, we know that microaggressions have cumulative negative impacts on those who experience them.

Story 3. P17, a recently graduated grad student, recalled a blatantly racist incident he experienced on the bus. He described his experience as being incredibly hostile in a way that necessitated multiple forms of social support.

P17 used to regularly commute to school by bus. On the day of the incident, gave up a seat on the bus to an older woman that just got on. As the bus was crowded, he stood in front of her to hold onto the pole right by the seat. After taking his seat, the woman kept kicking P17's foot, so he asked her if his leg placement was bothering her, and the woman responded that she wanted him to move. He said that he could move his leg, but he would still be close to her as a result of the crowded bus, and she replied by saying that he was not entitled to the space. P17 replied that everyone is entitled to that space if they have a bus pass. The woman launched into an agitated rant about how 'Blacks' beg for everything and that they feel entitled to everything they have, but if they are given welfare or education, they still complain. This sharp turn in the conversation shocked and upset him.

This interaction captured the attention of many bus riders close to P17 and the woman. Multiple riders began arguing with the woman, calling out her racism and hate. P17 remembered as he was getting off the bus that the driver, who was an African-American man, said that he was glad he had handled the situation like he did. A Latinx woman who recorded the incident sent the video to P17 and told him she was going to send it to a local news station.

Despite that immediate support, P17 described struggling to process and cope long after the event:

> "*I don't know what happened to [the video] but it was an interesting experience, because up until that point though I had dealt with, you know, the regular run-of-the-mill kind of microaggression being one of four minority students in my whole graduating class. It was never anything so blatant and kind of disgusting that made me really reflect. You know, it really bothered me... so much so, I called my father afterward and I was crying. The reason I was crying wasn't because I was sad, I was so angry because I felt like I should have been able to defend myself. And I felt put in the position where if I defended myself it was only going to react negatively upon me... I felt helpless because I had no response other than just take it.*"

5.2 Communicating About Racist Experiences

We break down the core aspects of communicating about experiences of racism into three sub-themes of support seeking: 1) mechanisms and the process of seeking-support, 2) uncertainty as a motivator and deciding when support is needed, and 3) meaning-making as the purpose of support through uncertainty reduction. In this section, we refer to our interviewees as targets of racism and the people they share their stories with as supporters.

5.2.1 Support-Seeking Processes. Our first set of findings focus on the particular mechanisms targets employ to respond to and cope with racism. We discuss the role of communication technology and social media platforms, particularly as it affects the inclusion and exclusion of particular people in the social coping process.

Participants overwhelmingly distrust more public social media platforms in seeking support for racist experiences (e.g., Facebook News Feed vs. Facebook Private Groups). None of our participants described actively seeking support for a personal experience with racism on public platforms. However, three of our participants said they post about personal experiences only when they can do so in a joking manner. For example, P05 posts about microaggressions on Facebook and Twitter:

> "*I always kind of take it to a joking place. I mentioned something that happened or that I thought was interesting or strange or weird. I may mention it on my Facebook as like a status or Twitter... I feel like some of the craziest things happen to us on a daily basis that I can't help but respond with laughter and sarcasm because it happens so frequently and it's almost like it should be a joke. It really is not a joke. It's real life stuff, but I try not to let those situations take definition in my life.*"

Although the purpose was described more to cope through humor, than to generate support, social support may still have come from this interaction. Four of our fourteen participants said they would *never* post a personal story about racism on social media.

Participants' primary concern was how shared personal information might be used against them in the future, particularly regarding prejudice and discrimination. For example, P14 is in school to become a trial lawyer and described concerns that if she were to express her true opinions about police violence (e.g., Eric Garner's murder) people might assume she is biased and accuse her of letting people off easily in future cases. Many participants were unsure how the platforms might share personal information, how long it might live online, and who ultimately would be able to access it through search mechanisms. There was a general lack of visibility on how personal information lives and travels online.

Six of our participants said that rather than posting personal stories, they post articles relating to race and racism. This allows them to express their political views and even imply to potential readers that they may have had similar experiences (e.g., White people excessively and inappropriately calling the police on Black people in viral social media news stories such as "Barbeque Becky" [50]), but provides more distancing and protection from critique of their personal experiences.

For our participants, the mode of social support communication is incidental. That is to say, support-seekers communicate with potential supporters in line with their already established social norms. If a person speaks on the phone with their parents, they will use a phone call to tell them about their racist experience. They might call specifically to communicate about their experience or they might describe the experience during, for example, a regular weekly phone call with their family. Targets do not usually alter their communication norms when seeking support for racist experiences. We also explicitly and repeatedly asked participants about their choice of communication technology, preference, and reasons for their feelings and were very often met

with noncommittal or one-word answers; finding that they do not care or do not actively think about their preferences enough to verbalize those choices.

The only time a target might change the mode to seek support is when the communication is overly burdensome. For example, when P20 was sharing an experience with a friend over GChat (an online instant messaging service), he realized there was too much context and background to explain. He halted the conversation and told his friend that he would "*tell him about it next time I saw him in person.*" The burden (physically, modally, emotionally, and/or mentally) of typing the story in pieces was overwhelming and necessitated a change of platform.

Targets also proactively join or curate communities where they feel comfortable discussing their experiences with racism. In these situations, "getting it" is usually a given and therefore targets can openly share experiences with either individuals in the group, or the group at large without the burden of feeling evaluated on a case by case basis. In our interviews, these communities fall into two main categories: 1) professional/institutional organizations and 2) pseudo-anonymous online communities. While the core purpose of these communities may not be social support for racism, it is an expected and acceptable community norm that people self-disclose experiences with racism and often the community will collectively engage in meaning-making with the target. For example, P23 describes her interactions on a large-scale online forum that focuses on Black women's hair care where she has engaged in discussions about racism:

> *"So it really started as, 'we have to learn how to take care of Black hair' and now books have been born from that group, hair care companies have been born from that group. I wasn't there when it started, but it started because we wanted to educate people. It was so much hair care or styling, but then we talked about other things that women talk about. So it is this women's forum where we talk about politics, we talk about entertainment, we talk about... we talk about everything, but you just know that you're talking to Black women.*"

In these situations, even when a supporter introduces uncertainty, the target engages more positively with that uncertainty. When these conversations happen with the entire group, there may not be consensus, but the target can use the multiplicity of opinions and perspectives to come to their own conclusions as an individual as to the nature of their racist experience. Regarding professional organizations in particular, there is a sense that members of a community have a responsibility and a need to uplift and support each other. P02 discussed the communal aspects of a large text message group on GroupMe for young professionals of color in the city of Pittsburgh, PA:

> *"I always tell people even people who are visiting often like Pittsburgh is small but Black Pittsburgh is even smaller. There's not a lot of us here, so we really have to work together to make things happen, because there are certain places that we're just not welcome and stuff like that. So I think that's why the group is there. Just, you know, just to get people to hang out and network. Some folks more like a network aspect, but every now and then there's a time where somebody is like... 'you know I just want to hold this up to the group, throw it out to the group and see what happens.'"*

While the group centers around a professional affiliation, the purpose and lived use of the group stretches beyond professional networking. People on the group lean on each other for practical, mental, and emotional support.

The social support processes for targets are often cyclical. People who are deemed to be poor supporters (e.g., through introducing uncertainty, invalidating the support-seeker, etc.) are excluded from future communication about racism. These relationships are often tainted in the future with the target always knowing that even if they are close with the purported supporter, they will never

really understand or empathize with an important aspect of their lived experiences. This can cause distance that may be visible or invisible to the supporter. Supporters who demonstrate allyship build trust and understanding with the target that gives more leeway in the future to introduce uncertainty during the meaning-making process and may be more readily called upon when future support is needed.

5.2.2 Uncertainty Motivates Support-Seeking. In our data, we observed that two main sources of uncertainty are the major motivators for communicating about experiences of racism. The first uncertainty motivator for communication is uncertainty about the event itself. In situations that were initially ambiguously racist, participants often describe a constant inner dialogue assessing the occurrence. They might, for example, ask themselves: was that racist? Am I overreacting? Was that a slip of the tongue or is that person racist? Should I leave? These inner conversations can be summarized as a desire for a "sanity check" through which targets reaffirm their experiential reality [85]. Targets of racism also face uncertainty about what to do when deciding if an experience was racist. Should they engage in some follow-up action or confront the aggressor? Should they avoid (if possible) this person or space in the future? What can they do to better protect themselves in the future? In these situations, targets may seek empathy, advice, and connection with others with a shared experience.

The second source of uncertainty motivating support-seeking is uncertainty about the consequence of the event. These consequences may take different forms; the common thread is how seriously they are perceived to affect the target. In the most overt case, racism may present a threat to the immediate and future safety of the target, including the threat of physical violence or harassment. For example, P17 described being approached by police officers with guns drawn while he was parked in his car on the street in the neighborhood he lives in and the constant undercurrent of uncertainty about their reactions if he moved too quickly or spoke too loud or too fast. He furthered described the lingering impact of uncertainty about *why* he had been approached by the police. For weeks later he described how it weighed on his mind:

> "*There were many times after I picked up my daughter where I waited there to see who drove their car there to look out on the hill. And there were so many times where people did [what I did] and they were of mixed race and mixed nationalities, but no one ever got the cops called on them. So I don't know if it was a lesson learned [by my neighbors] or something that just was specific to me. I mean I'm six feet, 251 pounds. I don't have the darkest shade of skin, but I do have a dark shade of skin and I don't know.*"

This lingering uncertainty centers on the consequences of staying and living in this neighborhood as a man with his physical appearance. Will this happen again, and is this a safe place for his family? Another form of threat may be to the target's future. When racism occurs in professional or academic contexts, the target may feel that their future opportunities are either already limited or may become limited depending on how they react to the situation. There may also be a threat to the target's sense of social belongingness. The climate of a professional, academic, or public space may become hostile or chilly [6, 22], negatively impacting long term engagement with entire topics of study and/or communities and snowballing to create long-term impacts to career and professional success. In the case of feeling these serious threats, targets seek social support primarily for emotional support as the experience is often traumatic and secondarily for advice.

To provide one additional example, as described earlier in Story 1, P05 asked her father for support that addressed both uncertainty about the event and potential future consequences:

> "*I talked to my dad about it specifically because I remember being so upset that I was considering legal action on basis of discrimination. I remember going as far as looking*

> *into seeing about filing a civil suit because I was that upset and felt that wrong you know? But, at the time I was applying to schools and carrying out a legal situation across state lines is difficult and financial and it just wasn't worth everything else that I was doing at the time to kind of focus my energy on that.*"

P05's father is a legal professional. In asking him whether or not she should consider legal action, she is asking whether or not the situation was racist by a formal definition of discrimination. In addition to this question about the event, she also asked him how long the process would take, what financial impact it might have, and how much of her time it would take. In other words, what are the consequences to my life and what will the outcome be if I respond in this particular way?

In situations where there is more certainty about the event or its consequences, participants did not express the need to seek social support. While their experiences may come up in conversation during the social norm communication described above, in these situations of certainty, the target does not actively seek support related to the experience. For some, it may feel necessary to downplay the impact of frequent experiences such as microaggressions as a type of coping in and of itself either by labeling them as 'not that bad' or by using humor and sarcasm. If every experience of racism merited a specific action from the target, their life would be overwhelmed with the constant reaction to racism. Ultimately, this is not feasible.

5.2.3 Meaning-Making through Social Support Reduces Uncertainty. An important part of the coping process in dealing with racism is understanding the underlying motivation and purpose behind the interaction. We know from the previous section that uncertainty around the event motivates support-seeking. In this section, we describe both the social and individual processes of meaning-making as a form of coping. In social processes targets look for trusted allies to evaluate their experiences with them. In individual processes, targets often relate their individual experiences to a larger context.

When selecting a potential listener or supporter, the top priority for a target is that the supporter gets it. This concept of "getting it" or "not getting it" was core to every participant's conception of communicating about racism. "Getting it" usually implies that the supporter has a high degree of empathy for the target, either because they shared similar lived experiences or because they have in some way demonstrated that they are a legitimate ally (i.e., a person who has already said or done something in front of me that proves that they will legitimize and understand my lived experiences). For example, P21 describes:

> "*I found that I can only really speak openly about these experiences with people who I feel like are gonna get it and who have also been accused of not being Asian enough or like taking on traits that are not like stereotypically Asian and like you know I don't know betraying the race or whatever the hell like the subtext is you know?*"

It's important to note that this does *not* mean that the supporter always labels the event as racist. "Getting it" is a precursor to support. The support-seeker is not looking for someone who will always say "yes, that was racist", but is instead looking for someone who has a shared frame of reference who can help resolve their uncertainty. A Shared frame of reference supersedes the need for supporters to share the same racial identity or have the same experiences as the target.

Supporters can do a number of things to help a target resolve uncertainty. First is the sanity check - supporters can just clearly state yes or not that an event was racist or racially motivated. This kind of uncertainty resolution is typically a short interaction and quickly and easily bolsters a target's feeling of validation. Supporters also might help run through different or parallel scenarios with the target, either in theory or in practice. For example, a supporter might return to a store where a friend was followed by a security guard to see if it happens to them. Whether or not the

supporter has the same racial identity as the target, both can gain useful information from doing this kind of test.

Second, supporters with certainty might provide additional context or background information, explain why a particular incident might be racist, and engage in a back and forth meaning-making process with the target. For example, P10 described experiencing frequent slights and exclusions from her Indian cohort members. After several experiences with these microaggressions, she reached out to a Pakistani childhood friend asking, "Is it just me? Is my intuition off?" Her friend responded that she was correct in thinking that her cohort members very likely had culturally ingrained racial prejudice towards her, but insisted that she not take it personally and try to ignore their ignorance in future.

Finally, a trusted supporter might bring in a non-threatening level of uncertainty and work with the target to resolve their mutual uncertainty. For example, P15 described that she and a number of her co-workers were uncertain whether or not their more senior co-worker had said something racist over lunch. They spent the next week going to each other re-hashing past statements that had been red flags in retrospect and ultimately came to the collective conclusion that he himself was not overtly racist, but was "a product of another time" and thus they could forgive but not forget his indiscretion.

Whether or not it is a result of independent or social support, an important process a target might go through in coping is the abstraction of the racist experience to its larger context. When our interviewees discussed their experiences, they often focus on the agent of racism on institutions and physical locations rather than individuals. For example, when P23 (who identifies with her Christian religious faith) discussed a racist experience in a Catholic church with an elderly woman, she described how that experiences altered her willingness to enter Catholic churches in the future:

> "*But I guess it affects the churches that I go to even now. I try not to go to Catholic church. But okay, like if I go to a church, a Catholic Church, and there are no Black people in the church I automatically think there is another church for me... I'll stay for today. Today I'm already in church, right? Right. So I stay and if there's no Black people and the people don't seem friendly at all yeah, I won't come back again. I used to think maybe they're just in a bad mood, but now I just don't come back again... However, if I go there and everybody minds their business and there are some Black people there I'm more inclined to visit their church again because again I'm like, okay maybe everyone is just in a bad mood today.*"

We can gather a few things from this story. First, extrapolation to the larger context and distancing might be a useful and productive part of coping - rather than being about me as an individual, my racist experience was evidence that some larger system is flawed. Second, connecting to a larger context might help me make predictions about the future. I can avoid experiencing racism in the future if I can understand why it happened when it did. Finally, we might imagine that time is a key factor in this contextualization process. Our participants are often describing experiences years after they occurred and their bias in feeling comfortable discussing these experiences might mean that they are quite far in the coping and healing process. It might be that contextualization is not an inherent part of processing, but a signal that a target of racism has coped 'well' with the experience.

6 DISCUSSION

"*It's just after a while going back [and forth saying] well then they shouldn't do this, they shouldn't do that, it's like alright, you don't get it.*" -P12

In the following section, we discuss the risks, challenges, and design opportunities associated with seeking social support and communicating following racist experiences. In particular we focus on the process of determining whether or not to seek support and the experience of sharing, how people determine who to share with, and considerations relevant to trust and agency in the support-seeking process.

6.1 Experience of Sharing Racist Events

Social support can be an incredibly useful tool in reducing and mitigating uncertainty and other negative impacts of dealing with racism. However, the act of seeking support can be burdensome, present unique risks, and entail competing priorities. Just deciding whether or not to seek support is a difficult process in and of itself that we can consider in creating social support tools.

Communication needs for support for racism evolve over time. In the time immediately following an incident they strongly prefer synchronous and low-effort forms of communication, and tend to follow known trends for sensitive disclosure on social media sites (e.g., that Instagram may be preferable for sensitive or emotional disclosure over Facebook [3]). Like many forms of trauma, racist experiences have a cyclical lifecycle and may be triggered by proximity to the aggressor, the physical or metaphorical space where the aggression took place, etc. weeks, months, and even years later. While immediate support may be needed, support-seekers need more tools for reflection, long-term unpacking, and documentation, especially for microaggressive racism where the accumulation of events build to create a larger impact [83].) There is a need for tools that facilitate access to supporters that are available when the support-seeker is ready to share, whether that is immediately after or even during an experience, or days, weeks, or even months and years later.

While their experiences of uncertainty are core to support-seeking, our participants did not acknowledge uncertainty directly when coping with everyday racism. Not acknowledging or possibly even recognizing uncertainty can seriously impact how they might communicate about their experiences. Even without explicitly discussing their uncertainty, stress from uncertainty can be easier to manage if targets seek social support as a means of validation or clarification [79]. However, relatively little is known about how awareness of uncertainty affects support-seekers. Might targets of racism be more effective at support-seeking if they were aware of their own uncertainty? Can using uncertainty as a frame improve alignment between the target and a potential supporter? Would targets develop novel techniques for reducing uncertainty to a more comfortable level? Given the individual's differences that people have for tolerating and coping with uncertainty, we can expect a range of responses and need to thoughtfully incorporate support for those differing levels of comfort.

Our work drawing out uncertainty as a core theme may itself make the targets of racism more aware of what they are experiencing as uncertainty. As researchers, we are philosophically committed to disseminating our insights within the affected community, particularly as multiple members of the research team are directly targeted by racism. We therefore emphasize that uncertainty is a natural and common part of the process of coping with everyday racism. We must incorporation considerations in designing for the experiences before seeking support and while receiving support, not just the outcome of that support.

Finally, people who experience racism need options signal their values and needs while protecting themselves from direct confrontation. Our finding that participants share news articles rather than personal experiences has interesting parallels to strategies used by queer youth identity work online. Queer youth often share articles about political and social issues to let others identify them as LGBT+ [15] but are often engaging in a delicate dance over how much of their queer identity to signal in online social spaces [30]. Racial identity very often comes with visual signals that

are difficult to disguise, and we see that sharing articles about others' experiences rather than inviting people to see them as a racial minority, instead invites consumers to understand the the poster has experienced racism similar to that discussed in a given news article. The widespread dissemination of the news stories lended a legitimacy that participants felt would discourage invalidating responses as well as provide psychological distancing from similar negative reactions. Technological affordances such as Facebook's profile photo filters for campaigns such as the Red Equal Sign for marriage equality allow people to communicate their values and needs in am ambient way, but have also been criticized as being 'slacktivism' and shallow virtue-signalling [69]. This work brings to light how these ambient signals might help support-seekers find potential supporters more easily.

6.2 Determining Who "Gets It"

Once a person has decided to engage in the sharing process, they must determine who to seek support from. As discussed in our findings, participants repeatedly describe needing to know whether people "get it" or "don't get it." This desire has implications for the design of online communities as well as other forms of computer-mediated communication.

First, support-seekers need tools to find communities that "get it." Very often the context of an interaction lets a target know that people in the space or community will understand the nuances, complexities, and uncertainties that are embedded in experiences with racism. On college campuses, ethnic minority cultural centers can provide safe havens and countercultural spaces that, among many services, provides a space for unpacking racist experiences [68]. Online communities such as subreddits can similarly explicitly signal prioritization on creating racial-identity-based community and can enforce that through careful moderation [33, 34]. We as technologists and researchers must continue to design for digital spaces that provide ambient signalling of legitimate acceptance and safety to discuss racial issues.

Second, the process of curating a group or community of people who "get it" when it comes to experiencing racism is a long, iterative, and ongoing process. There can be a disconnect between friends and family and a support-seeker when the seeker has unique experiences (e.g., cancer patients [87]) which can lead to isolation and feelings of rejection. While this can urge support-seekers to seek formal organizations, seeking support for racism comes with unique risks ranging from microaggressive invalidation (e.g., being told we live in a post-racial society [83]) to more serious practical risks (e.g., losing a job, harassment [26]). Knowing that formal support groups and professional organizations are prevalent, support-seekers greatest need is for technological tools that support informal supporter curation and facilitate easy access to supporters. We might compare a message board or Facebook group to Google+'s circles that create filter that only allows certain trusted members to see certain content and might obfuscate who belongs to which group [78]. Support-seekers need to be able to easily move people in and out of circles of trust to provide a higher chance of receiving appropriate, validating, and needed support.

Finally, those unique psychological and practical risks that come with seeking support for racist experiences heightens the need for transparency when it comes to security and privacy in our social tools. For many groups, getting it wrong about who "gets it" can lead to the aforementioned isolation, rejection, and exacerbation of the issue. Related specifically to racism, studies on the framework of color blindness show that many people have a vested interest in protecting themselves from criticism at the expense of the targets of racism and that these individuals often seek to be perceived as non-racist [13]. We must design social tools that incorporate added layers of privacy as well as ways to disengage in discussions that have become harmful for users protect them from dealing with the struggles of talking to someone who does not "get it". This can be especially

important when in most extreme cases, there are people actively attempting to cover up themselves on whether or not they really ”get it”.

6.3 Trust and Agency

A major barrier between technology and those who seek to use technology for support after racist experiences is trust. For example, for many of our participants, the benefits of a large pool of potential supporters on social media cannot outweigh the concern that their support-seeking and vulnerable disclosure will be used against them in the near or distant future.

First, the question of trust in determining who “gets it” or does not as discussed above become particularly complicated in sociotechnical systems. In theory, online social cues can indicate to targets who could potentially be trusted to “get it” and who cannot. In some cases, the context of the space provides enough assurance that it is safe (e.g., sharing of street harassment stories is the stated purpose of the Hollaback platform [32]). However, in executing this idea, one risk is that the social cue does not necessarily represent an accurate gauge of understanding and support, particularly without a way of vetting or validating the intentions or the level of understanding possessed by the users who are “marked” by those cues. For example, invisible audience members with malicious intent might be present [32] or cues may be adopted and displayed by well-meaning allies who, at best, are under-prepared for supporting people dealing with trauma and, at worst, are performing empathy and allyship in shallow and invalidating ways (e.g., ‘slacktivism’ or engaging in trivial online activism for the main purpose of social participation [74]), causing additional burden to those who seek the space for its intended use of social support. In a more extreme example, ‘hashtag hijacking’ occurs when people with explicit desires to do harm can easily co-opt online spaces using hashtags by flooding them with hateful, disruptive, and malicious content [53]. While online platforms provide the benefit of wide access to potential supporters, support-seekers need tools to navigate these spaces and protect themselves (e.g., through selective visibility [15]) from both intentionally and unintentionally harmful interactions.

Second, users must trust the platforms they are using to seek support. There have been many public scandals with various technologies and social media platforms that have infringed on people’s privacy [86]. For example, many apps such as Snapchat will track user location and information is not made available to the public on where or how this data is used and stored [72]. This ambiguous use of personal data can cause user’s to feel that their privacy and security are threatened by technology. Along with this, many online platforms are not automatically thought of as safe spaces. The prevalence of online trolls and harassment are high in online communities, and even with moderators, it can be difficult to instill in users a sense of safety that would lead them to be comfortable sharing intimate and potentially traumatic experiences [76]. Some online communities such as Reddit, have already combated this by allowing users to implement a ‘SERIOUS’ tag onto their posts, allowing mods to skim through and delete posts that may be an attempt to troll or fail the original poster’s trust [33]. However, this relies on the platform’s ability to maintain a certain level of trust and integrity within its users, such as avoiding abruptly changing privacy policies in order to further gain as a business (e.g., Facebook’s micro-targeted ads [57]).

Finally, do users trust that they are the ones in charge of their own process? Any technology needs to maintain the user’s agency [54], including the agency to decide when and how to process their experiences with racism and to seek support. There may be situations where it is more psychologically protective to delay processing and coping with an experience. This means that any form of technology used to alert about a racist event or stress cannot interrupt the users daily life.

For any of these systems, we could begin proposing a series of solutions to mitigate our highlighted risks, but that is not the goal of this paper. We seek to illustrate the need to engage in iterative stages of critical design when designing and prototyping interventions for coping after

racist experiences as well as the need to anticipate the potential for any idea to unintentionally exacerbate, rather than support, coping processes. We will undertake this challenge in upcoming research.

7 LIMITATIONS

We acknowledge that our sample and data have limitations. First, our sample is relatively homogeneous, comprised of primarily well-educated residents of the same mid-sized U.S. city. We know that experiences with racism may have negative impacts on success in academic and professional contexts. Given that our sample is college-educated, they are more likely to have already succeeded in overcoming some of those negative impacts. Second, by virtue of responding to our recruitment text, our participants may be biased towards being more comfortable speaking about their experiences of racism. This might mean that they have already processed and narrativized their experiences, or may already be more resilient to racism. Third, all of our participants scored high on the MEIM measure for racial-ethnic identity (Table 1). This means that our participants consider their racial identity to be important and valuable to their sense of self. Understanding the practices and concerns of individuals who may be more resilient to racism at a baseline provides valuable lessons and signposts for the types of interactions or support-seeking behaviors that should inform future design. This baseline might enlighten future work that can help individuals who differ, from our participants, in racial-ethnic identity or resilience towards racist experiences.

Although the current study focused primarily on social processes used to recover from racist experiences, our participants also informed us about other strategies they used. Most notably, participants described processes by which they reclaimed their identity. Some participants deepened their connection with their racial identity, for example by engaging with existing cultural practices related to their race. Others deprioritized their race and prioritized other aspects of their identity, while still others used "code-switching" techniques [27] to make their racial identity more and less salient depending on the context.

8 FUTURE WORK

We envision several lines of future work stemming from our findings. For example, many support-seekers described friends who *wanted* to support their coping process, but who were unable to follow through and successfully support them in practice. Typically, the friend was unable to resolve their own uncertainty, and therefore increased, rather than decreased the uncertainty of the target. While our current approach focuses on the target of racism and how they communicate, our work could also lead to "helping the helpers." For example, we might design ways for well-intentioned supporters to manage their uncertainty about racism outside the collaborative coping process with a target of racism, or to help them prioritize the needs of the target above their own needs.

Future work may study the longitudinal processes of recognizing people who "get it". What triggers a person to evaluate whether someone in their environment might "get it?" Under what circumstances might they reach out to someone whom they have never sought support from before? What happens after someone is removed from a social support network because they "didn't get it"? Understanding the dynamics of support and allyship in order to promote learning healthy support and allyship practices could vastly improve the available resources in a person's social network.

As a next step in the CARE project, we will iteratively prototype cultural design probes (e.g., [92]) that draw on our findings, such as the ones described above. Using these artifacts, we will engage in co-design activities with people who have experienced racism to understand how particular interventions can support coping. We will then evaluate the effectiveness of the most promising interventions that emerge from this process. In recruiting for this next study we hope to address

the limitations of our current study by broadening to an audience that may be less resilient and less practiced at productively coping with racism.

9 CONCLUSION

"*I mean, you get it, right?*" -P23

Seeking social support following racist experiences can be a challenge for targets of racism. In both online and offline contexts, there is a substantial risk of emotional, psychological, and practical consequences. Additionally, the ambiguous nature of experiences of modern racism complicate coping and provide additional barriers to support-seeking.

In this work, we explore the complexities and nuances involved in seeking support following experiences with racism. We find that uncertainty surrounding the nature of the experience as well as its consequences is a primary motivator for support-seeking behavior. Once a target has shared with a potential supporter, supporters and targets work together to make meaning of the event through uncertainty reduction. This is typically only possible when a supporter first validates the subjective experience of the target, either in-the-moment or through previous interactions with the target. When potential supporters introduce additional uncertainty during the meaning-making process, it hampers the coping of the target. Targets engage in a number of practices to ensure that they have ready access to potential supporters, such as cultivating relevant relationships before a racist experience occurs. From these findings, we demonstrate opportunities for researchers and designers who wish to create solutions that facilitate coping through support-seeking following racist experiences.

This work may have implications beyond the context of vulnerable groups. Prejudice and discrimination are experienced alongside a wide range of facets of identity. For example, previous work on microaggressions explores gender, racial-ethnic identity, and sexual orientation. Our work examines how people from racially marginalized groups successfully cope with experiences of racist oppression in an effort to uncover opportunities and challenges in amplifying and supporting those practices at scale, but we believe that this approach can be extended to other marginalized populations as well.

We envision a future where sociotechnical systems promote the safety and empowerment of people from marginalized groups in fighting against their experiences with prejudice and marginalization by sharing, communicating, and supporting each other. This work is intended to provide a foundation for other members of the CSCW community to respond to this challenge and contribute to a growing body of theoretical, empirical, and technical work that helps bring that future closer to reality.

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A APPENDIX: TABLE OF OPEN CODES

Category	Open Code	Open Code Definition
Background	Ethnic-racial-identity	Target makes some mention of their racial or ethnic identity or describes what it means to them personally
Background	Identity	"Target discusses an aspect of their identity that is unrelated to race or ethnicity (e.g.
Background	History	Target talks about some part of background / situational / contextual information that informs how they deal with situations of racism
Event	Event-observing	Interviewee describes an event of racism where they are not the direct target of the aggression
Event	Event-receiving	"Interviewee describes an event of racism where they are the direct or indirect target of the racism
Event	Event-intervening	Interviewee describes becoming an active participant in an event-observing situation of racism - this may or may not cause the interviewee to become a target of racism - they are trying to prevent the event from becoming racially aggressive or stop an ongoing event
Event	Event -OTHER	Any description of the event that is not captured by the above - should be minimal use
Event	Racism-evidence	Discusses how the target knew the event was racially motivated / how the target interprets the event (in the moment or afterwards)
Event	Target-asks-question	Target asks some kind of question relevant to the event - could be during or after and to people involved or not involved or to themself internally
Event	Microaggression	"Target describes a form of racial aggression and treats it as 'everyday' or 'commonplace' or in some other way minimizes it. Focus on target's interpretation of the act. This is typically non-specific (e.g.
Event Aftermath	Event-consequence	"discusses some impact (long or short term) on target's behavior

Event Aftermath	Internal-processing	"Things that the target does something alone to cope emotionally and/or mentally before
Event Aftermath	Social-support-public	"Target actively seeks out some kind of support by sharing their story on a public platform (e.g.
Event Aftermath	Social-support-private	Target actively seeks out some kind of support by sharing their story with an individual or a small set of specific individuals that they have a direct personal relationship with
Event Aftermath	Target-event-certainty	Target expresses some level of certainty about the racial motivation of the event
Event Aftermath	Target-event-ambiguity	Target expresses some level of uncertainty about the racial motivation of the event
Listener Response to Story	Listener-question	"Listener asks a question of the target - might be clarifying question
Listener Response to Story	Listener-empathy	Listener expresses that they understand and may even share the feelings of the target - provide some kind of emotional support or comfort
Listener Response to Story	Listener-disbelief	Listener expresses that they don't think the event was racially motivated or even in a more extreme version that the event happened or was a negative experience at all
Listener Response to Story	Listener-explains	Listener offers some kind of reason why the event might have happened - this event might align with the event being negative and racially motivated or it might not
Listener Response to Story	Listener-advice	"Listener offers some kind of action the target might take following the event - could be a more direct response to the aggressor or might be more abstract or personal just so the target can cope further or might be advice towards other ways to reduce uncertainty about the event
Listener Response to Story	Listener-OTHER-behavior	Any other kind of behavioral response the listener gives that is not captured by our other codes

Target Reacts to Listener	Target-listener-response-behavior	The target/storyteller does some action in response to a listener's reaction
Target Reacts to Listener	Target-listener-response-internal	"The target/storyteller thinks or feels some specific way in response to a listener's reaction. This might be directly related to the event or may at a meta level be related to the target's relationship with the listener
Listener Attributions	Listener-event-certainty	Listener expresses certainty about the racial motivation of the event - could be affirmative or negative
Listener Attributions	Listener-event-ambiguity	Listener expresses uncertainty about the racial motivation of the event

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