

Whiteness as a Social Lounge: The Case of White Supremacy and Discord Communities

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Abstract

Utilizing the case study method, this study analyzes news media reports and the reception of Discord from 2017 to 2020 surrounding its controversial housing of white supremacist terrorist groups directly responsible for the Unite the Right white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. By analyzing mainstream gaming media news outlets such as *IGN*, *Metacritic*, and *Kotaku*; magazine outlets such as *Gizmodo* and *Slate*; and more mainstream news outlets such as *Forbes* and *CNBC*, the study applies Tressie McMillan Cottom's (2020) work on platform capitalism and racial capitalism to identify key attributes that structures discord as a place of white supremacist ideological dissemination under the guise of leisure. We suggest a theoretical framework, racial lounge, to illustrate how racism is fostered through cultural identity.

Keywords: Online communities, Video games, White supremacy, Race and Racisms, Case study

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Introduction

Discord, a massively popular multi-platform Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) software, was released publicly in 2015. It has quickly risen to become one of the most utilized online communication platforms, especially for gaming communities - its original target audience. Educators also use Discord, business organizations, and other more specialized shared interest groups such as cryptocurrency trading communities, fantasy sports groups, anime fandoms, and innumerable other social collectivities. In May 2019, Discord claimed to serve over 250 million registered users who use the software for a wide range of purposes, such as enhancing cooperation in online multiplayer games or building social communities (Techspot 2019). Discord is a free-to-use (with premium paid features offered), extremely flexible, and customizable software that allows users to share text, memes, GIFs, custom emojis, group audio and video calls, and full video files to facilitate their online interactions.

In recent years, Discord has gained widespread attention from popular press publications as the platform has been widely used as a "home" and organizing tool for alt-right, white nationalist hate groups. As Glaser (2018) writes, "[Discord] remains a very popular destination for communities of neo-Nazis and white supremacists to socialize, share hateful memes, boost the ideas that undergird their movements, inculcate strangers, and plan activities that take place elsewhere online." As a gestational space where racial ideology is further galvanized, Discord facilitates what Chapman and Brunσμα (2020) term as "white male sociability" - offering, as such spaces do, a place to recruit, mobilize, protect, and deploy whiteness as well as particular racial projects, narratives, and identities while maintaining the veneer of "it's all in good fun." In this study, we rely on McMillan Cottom's (2020) arguments about how digital platform capitalism thrives on racial capitalism, as it reveals that Discord, as a company and a popular online platform, despite arguments to the contrary, contemporarily functions as a white

supremacist ideological apparatus. Here, the tradition of Black Marxism (Robinson 2000) undergirds our perspective, which McMillan Cottom (2020) extends, builds, and recontextualizes as a palpable research agenda in the current era of ubiquitous digital platforms.

Engaging the literature of spatiality and white supremacy, we propose a conceptual framework we call the “racial lounge,” inspired by the way that Glaser (2018) identified Discord as a “white supremacist social lounge.” One can see the utility of this approach by reviewing Discord’s actions following the events in Charlottesville, VA, in 2017 and the federally mandated seizure of their data in 2018 (D’Anastasio 2018). Some scholarship has revealed that anonymity offers the potential for developing strong social ties through shared cultural and ideological commitments (Adams and Sardiello 2000); we show how such a platform can facilitate bonding, mobilization, and group cohesion. The case of Discord housing white supremacists suggests implications for the reproduction of racial structure beyond fixed physical space.

Communities vary in how they facilitate camaraderie and bonding among members and often use shared cultural understandings, grammar, and ideological commitments to do so, including cultural practices of leisure. Often these practices are grounded in class, gender, and race - both for inclusion and exclusion (Arai and Kivel 2009). Here we think through how Discord furnishes hubs - lounges - of ideological dissemination. In particular, we first focus on the ways that the digital spaces provided by Discord become leisurely spaces where white supremacist ideology flourishes. Second, we analyze the overall institutional performances and organizational impression management by Discord. That is, we analyze the reception of the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, VA, by the mainstream media, Discord’s initial move in not cooperating with the investigation, and finally, the blanket message echoed by Discord and other organizations that ultimately shields the ongoing organizing accomplished by white supremacist groups. Finally, because racialized organizations give whites agency by decoupling formal rules and maintaining “value neutrality” (Ray 2019), we extend this to Discord’s level of transparency and organizational responses. Here, our focus is on the case of Discord’s complicity in harboring white supremacist groups. The racial lounge’s social and cultural organizing structures allow us to identify platform-based, micro-interactive dynamics that extend to the so-called racial value-neutrality that shields white supremacy under the guise of leisure.

Unlike *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Reddit*, *8chan*, and *Facebook*, despite its widespread use, there has not been much scholarly attention given to Discord. Recent studies demonstrating the interactive and communicative nature of emotes (icons used to convey emotions in Discord chat) have garnered recent academic attention (Kobs et al. 2020; Oh et al. 2020). Though the platform continues to increase in popularity among online gaming enthusiasts, little to no light has been cast on either its inner workings or its controversial, widespread adoption by extremist hate groups. According to Discord’s recently founded “Trust & Safety” task force, “[i]n 2019, more than half of the servers we removed for violent extremist content — many of which were white supremacist servers.” Since 2017, Discord has been under fire for aggressively banning extremist servers. Yet, scholars have rarely looked at this space and its use by these groups to create an inclusive space for themselves as they pursue their exclusionary agendas.

Using the case study method, we analyze the events before and following the expulsion of white supremacist Discord servers, the gaming industry’s response to the wide prevalence of white supremacy in gaming culture, and the reception of Discord’s official denouncement of racism and white supremacy by Discord users and gamers at large. Further, we analyze how Discord acts structurally and organizationally as a cultural “lounge” in which racism and white nationalism are emboldened and nurtured. In doing so, we extend Tressie McMillan Cottom’s (2020) identification of the connection between racial capitalism and platform capitalism with racial implications for future studies to consider.

Theoretical and Empirical Background

The Racial Lounge as a White Space

Spaces are social and cultural locations of interactional practices and the development of the meanings of those practices. Following Bourdieu’s (1977) operationalization of habitus, which captures the dual nature of the practice structure, we argue that racial ideology and racist practices are inculcated through one’s participation in social and cultural spaces - like Discord. Both the “social” (i.e., within social space, therefore the ontological) and “lounge” (i.e., exchange of communication, thus meaning) occupy space, even in the context of the digitized terrain within which Discord functions. Building on the literature on spatial justice (Anderson 2015; Brunnsma, Chapman, and Kim 2019; Brunnsma et al. 2020; Harrison 2013; Harvey 1996; Massey 1994; Moore 2007; Soja 2013), one can see that spaces,

whether online or offline, are racialized and made meaningful to its members through obscuring racial matters for the common collective goal of leisure. Our theoretical framework also incorporates recent work on “white sanctuaries” that considers the institutional mechanisms through which whiteness is maintained. This is done through the white policing of space and access management (Dominguez et al. 2020; Embrick et al. 2019). Interactions that occur in racial lounges facilitate enculturation by providing a source of cultural identity (Bennett 1999). Research on race in leisure spaces (Brunnsma et al. 2019; Brunnsma et al. 2020; Harrison 2014; Krymkowski 2021) identifies this as one of the functions of white space. We extend this argument to the context of a racial lounge that consists of non-fixed spatial characteristics on the Internet, such as particular interest or hobbyist forums that exist online for leisure. Here, Discord is a prime example of a medium encapsulating leisurely pursuits within a given space.

The Racial Lounge and Ideological Dissemination

Existing research has shown that being strangers in a subcultural community facilitates social ties (Adams and Sardiello 2000). We conceptualize the racial lounge as a place where social networks are constructed, identities are fostered, and racial ideology is disseminated through implicit and explicit interactions. As such, culturally embedded ideology “can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor” (Bourdieu 1977: 72), enactment of an embodied cognition and practice in a field both with and without any overt intent. Overall, we define the characteristics that shape a racial lounge as a place where white supremacist ideology is disseminated, galvanized, and fostered under the guise of leisure. Extending Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1990) empirical findings on social domination to results on racial matters in conversation with spatial justice (Anderson 2015; Brunnsma, Chapman, and Kim 2019; Brunnsma et al. 2020; Harrison 2013; Harvey 1996; Massey 1994; Moore 2008; Soja 2013), we identify the key attributes that disseminate and embolden white supremacy and racism in digitized spaces such as Discord. Here, feigned opacity to racial matters colorblind racism - is a critical aspect that shapes racial domination in contemporary U.S. society (Bonilla-Silva 2017).

Recognition is of utmost importance for social beings (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990; Lamont et al. 2016; Lamont 2018). More precisely, one searches out opportunities and possibilities of recognition by

the virtue of existing as a social being (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990). Given that living in modernity is racialized and to be “civilized” is to valorize white ideals (Jung and Vargas 2021), the Bourdieusian conceptualization of symbolic power is intertwined with racial implications. From the micro-interactional level of Discord servers to the federal subpoena of Discord’s server data upon their initial refusal to comply, one can see in the case of Discord how digital spaces emulate and reproduce racial domination found in fixed, physical spaces (McMillan Cottom 2020).

Extending Harrison’s (2013) conceptualization of racial spatiality, where racialized bodies are marked as “outsiders” within a given space of racial homogeneity (i.e., the white space), one can critically examine the field of gaming. The purpose and significance of reviewing the gaming industry have become even more important as the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the consumption of video games in the U.S. (Gilbert 2020). Revenues from the gaming industry are now projected to eclipse most of U.S. film and sport expenditure (Gilbert 2020). Here, Discord allows us to enter and explicate what Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1990) would have identified as a symbolic space in conjunction with McMillan Cottom’s (2020) groundbreaking analysis of and call to examine racial capitalism embedded in the “platform” industry

This study applies the racial lounge framework to understand better how racism is fostered through participation in subcultural activities and cultural identity. Doing so, we further inquire about the limits of racial capitalism by focusing our analytic lens on the popular internet medium Discord. As a platform made famous by the gaming subcultural community, Discord has garnered prominence in its notoriety as a platform that housed the white supremacist terrorist groups directly related to the “Unite the Right” white supremacist rally in Charlottesville in 2017 (D’Anastasio 2017), leading to a direct seizure of their database in the subsequent year, 2018, as mandated at the federal level (McKay 2018). By analyzing the perceptions, receptions, and organizational responses of significant gaming media outlets on the coverage of Discord, including Discord’s responses, we hope to illustrate the mechanisms whereby racial lounges are established, operate, and bolster their whiteness.

Discord and a Brief History of Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP)

Discord did not invent the types of computer-mediated communication that its service offers to its

more than 140 million users today (e.g., text messaging, group voice and video calling, file sharing, etc.). Digital interactive social spaces, such as early internet forums, are as old as the Internet itself. For example, USENET, an internet-based discussion group network capable of the group and private messaging and rudimentary file exchange officially began in 1980 (Lueg and Fisher 2003). Over the last forty years, computer-mediated communication platforms have developed exponentially with growing technological sophistication.

A significant shift occurred with the invention and eventual public and corporate adoption of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) which was made possible by increasing broadband internet access infrastructure in the mid-1990s. VoIP and its related services ushered in new ways of communicating online through text, voice, multimedia, and, eventually, video sessions over the Internet rather than through traditional public switched telephone networks. While Skype (launched in 2003) reigned as the VoIP king in the early 2000s, several other notable VoIP servers and client software were well established before Skype and particularly popular among the rapidly growing online gaming scene such as TeamSpeak, (launched 2001), Ventrilo (launched 2002), and Mumble (launched 2005).

Using computer microphones or headsets, gaming community members, such as gamers in clans, would primarily use such software for real-time communication during gaming sessions to coordinate their actions in multiplayer games and gain competitive advantages over their opponents. In contrast to text-based chatting, communication via voice was preferred by gamers because it permitted hands free communication, allowing players to keep their hands on their controls at all times.

Suppose these technologies and their widespread adoption within gaming culture significantly predate Discord (launched in 2015). What sets Discord apart as worthy of an in-depth case study on computer-mediated interactional social spaces? According to David Pearce (2020):

Eventually, a lot of those [gamers using TeamSpeak and Skype] realized something. They wanted to talk to their gaming friends even when they weren't in a game, and they wanted to talk about things other than games. Their gaming friends were their real friends. As luck would have it, in early 2015, a new tool called Discord showed up on the market. Its tagline was not subtle: "It's time to ditch Skype and TeamSpeak." It had text chat, which was cool, but mostly it

did voice chat better than anybody else. ... Fast-forward a few years and Discord is at the center of the gaming universe.

Discord's (2021) official mission statement is a little more subtle than their original call-to-action of "It's time to ditch Skype and TeamSpeak." Instead, their current *raison d'être* reads:

Discord is about giving people the power to create space to find belonging in their lives. We want to make it easier for you to talk regularly with the people you care about. We want you to build genuine relationships with your friends and communities close to home or around the world. Original, reliable, playful, and relatable. These are the values that connect our users and our employees at Discord.

Discord's presumption in their statement illustrates the abstract notion of personhood that simultaneously implies whiteness. Echoing the ways that institutions give lip-service to diversity in an abstract and nebulous way, as observed in studies of diversity and inclusion in flagship universities (Ahmed 2012; Thomas 2021), Discord's institutional message repeats a similar abstract set of diversity "principles." Defining belonging in abstract terms gives institutional legitimacy while simultaneously justifying and obscuring the whiteness of the space and maintaining whiteness as normality, allowing whiteness to do its structural, ideological, and cultural work. Studies of whiteness (Christian 2019; Lewis 2003; Mueller 2020) illustrate its malleability, invisibility, and opacity in spaces where racial matters are policed and maintained (Dominguez et al. 2020; Embrick et al. 2019).

As Discord continued to grow and attract new users, all sorts of communities began to emerge, gaming-related and otherwise. Discord's savvy engineering teams were prolific in their feature roll-outs, including video conferencing, high-level bot integrations, more sophisticated administration tools/community moderation, etc. As a result, the software was becoming ever more popular and more freely allowing communities to create the "society we want to create" -- one where people can find their true belonging (Discord 2021). Not surprisingly, coinciding with the large influx of (anonymous) users, Discord's social problems were coming to become more and more apparent: online bullying, hate speech, and generally some of the worst discourse the Internet has to offer (Law 2021).

Racial Ignorance as the Dominant Racial Discourse

In terms of the dominant racial discourse in the United States, many have pointed toward the shifting ideological terrain where race is given meaning and, ultimately, racism, as a social structure, is accomplished. From *laissez-faire* racism (Bobo, Kluegel, and Smith 1997) to what is now better operationalized as colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2017), the transformation of racial domination from the structural (Bonilla-Silva 1997) to global (Christian 2018) demonstrates the analysts' urgency in locating and explicating how "modern-day" racism is enacted.

Often, colorblind racism has been understood as a transformation of overt Jim Crow racism to more covert forms of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2017). In addition to colorblind racism, as the rhetorical device that shields and protects the overarching racial structure that dominates within the U.S., Mills's (2017) notion of white ignorance also helps us understand the dominant racial discourse in the U.S. Hence, colorblind racism *does* appear in racially vacuous socialization - especially for whites - where racial matters are taught to be ignored (Lewis 2003; Mueller 2020). As Mills (2017) rightfully states:

White ignorance has flourished all these years because a white epistemology of ignorance has safeguarded it against the dangers of an illuminating blackness or redness, protecting those who for "racial" reasons have not needed to know (P. 71).

The epistemology of ignorance - the process of knowing to "un-know" - is the core that undergirds racial ideology. In this model of conceptualizing how race is accomplished in the dominant discourse, race is ignored and obscured, both with and without intent, ultimately shaping and animating white racial agency. As an everyday social process (Lewis 2003), race is a boundary work (Lamont and Molnar 2002; Lamont et al. 2016) shaped by everyday *inaction* towards racially charged situations and context (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Mueller 2020). In other words, racial ignorance is a key factor in accomplishing organizational dynamics that value and credentialize whiteness without having to appear to do so publicly.

Organizational Value Neutrality and Racial Domination

Mueller's (2020) conceptualization of racial ignorance helps us extend this argument in an organizational setting, where the white racial agency is structured to dominate not by its hypervisibility but

its rhetorical opacity. At face value, the supposedly race-neutral values that organizations assign, such as Discord distancing themselves from white supremacy, ultimately allow the value-neutrality itself to function as white racial agency (Ray 2019; Mueller 2020). Complicit to how such racialized organizational dynamics function, the media reception, and the erasure of racial implications of the failure of Discord to properly monitor white supremacist hate groups are connected with the failures of institutionalized bureaucracy.

By highlighting the racial contexts of businesses that sell leisure spaces - such as Discord - we extend the existing empirical work on racialized organizations (Ray 2019) in making sense of how having fun can be analogous to the dissemination and protection of racism and white supremacy. Here, the value-neutrality is in line with Mills's (2017) demarcation of white ignorance, where "white group interests need to be recognized and acknowledged as a central causal factor in generating and sustaining white ignorance" (P. 69). Especially because this value-neutrality obscures the information on racial matters which directly relates to the gaming industry - and a platform in which they market themselves - reporting on the white ethnoracial terrorism becomes a fiscal decision and indicative of the connection between the platform and racial capitalism identified by Tressie McMillan Cottom (2020).

Institutions as Racial Actors

As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) analyzed, institutions often mimic other institutions in the field, as conscious social actors. This matter of institutional level impression management - and mimicry of what is prominent in the field - is termed as "institutional isomorphism" (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). DiMaggio and Powell identify institutional isomorphism as the "... [s]tartling homogeneity of organizational forms and practice" (P. 148). Bureaucratic rationality is key to institutional isomorphism's institutional mimicry and homogeneity. Defined through Ray's (2019) revision of centralizing race as an organizing principle in organizational dynamics in conjunction with McMillan Cottom's (2020) articulation of racial capitalism seen in the platform industry, the seeming racially "sensitive" messages echoed by these institutions ring hollow in their authenticity.

For example, after Charlottesville's "Unite the Right" white supremacist rally, gaming news outlets have been silent on matters of race entirely, with the exception of the mainstream gaming news outlet Kotaku. Given that Discord is promoted via various

social media platforms, ranging from Twitch to YouTube, most gaming news outlets have mimicked other institutional responses by keeping silent. However, mainstream game news outlets such as Kotaku drew a parallel with the mainstream media outlets (CNN, WSJ, CNBC, etc.) in reporting on reactionary, sensationalist journalism. In other words, this mimicry very much applies in the context of racial impression management by organizations and institutions. Much in this line of mimicking the institutional actors in the field, Discord has responded to racial matters through social media through Twitter.

It is important to note that the shift in institutional and organizational responses matters as it allows us to assess whether the statements and commitment to racial justice - or a “lip-service” for the sake of platform capitalism (McMillan Cottom 2020) - is genuine or authentic in its origins.

Methods

This study utilized the instrumental case study approach (Simons 2014) to analyze the mainstream media’s reception before and following the deletion of white supremacist Discord servers, the mainstream gaming media outlet’s response, and the overall landscape of Discord as a racial actor in the institutional field of platform capitalism (McMillan Cottom 2020). We follow Simons’ (2009: 21) definition of a case study for this project, considering the approach as “... an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution or system in a ‘real-life’ context.” Platform capitalism, marked by the increasingly digitized terrain of social life, is a key factor in understanding the reproduction of racial domination (McMillan Cottom 2020).

We selected Discord for the company’s growing prominence, especially considering the gaming industry’s rapid growth since the COVID-19 pandemic which now outpaces the film and the sports industry (Gilbert 2020). Discord is garnering the attention of the mainstream media ever more as corporate giants Sony and Microsoft are vying to acquire it (Rodriguez 2021). Furthermore, we aimed to apply the theoretical framework proposed by McMillan Cottom (2020) in illuminating the connections between platform capitalism which replicates racial domination in online spaces. Finally, we also aimed to analyze both the production and reception of how racial situations are managed by the gaming industry in which Discord is a key actor in the field.

Using multiple data sources, we sequentially collected news articles reporting on Discord and white supremacist servers leading up to and after the Unite the Right Rally that took place in Charlottesville (2017-2021). Our sources range from (1) mainstream gaming media news outlets such as IGN, Metacritic, and Kotaku; (2) magazine outlets such as Gizmodo and Slate; and (3) more mainstream news outlets such as Forbes and CNBC. We then put together the sequences of events by comparatively analyzing the responses - or the lack of them - to understand Discord’s reception as a white supremacist information hub. The various social processes that structured the white supremacist servers in Discord, as Glaser (2018) identified as a social lounge that still houses white supremacists, was the basis for our theoretical inspiration in what we define as a racial lounge. Overall, by analyzing Discord’s organizational decisions and the media coverage from 2017-2021, we highlight the key attributes that shield internet forums and platforms, such as Discord, that harbor hate groups to engage in ideological dissemination.

Results

Racial Capitalism and Discord

Outside of Kotaku, major gaming news media outlets have been silent on the response at the institutional, and industry level. After conducting preliminary searches on significant gaming news outlets such as IGN, Metacritic, and Game Informer, we could not find any news articles that even remotely mentioned Discord and white supremacist servers. Given that Discord is promoted via various social media platforms, ranging from Twitch to YouTube, the majority of gaming news outlets have mimicked other institutional responses here - which has been an absence of any mention in the events before and after Charlottesville (2017-2021). Kotaku, a mainstream gaming media news outlet, followed suit with the narrative resonant in the media sensation (D’Anastasio 2018). Their report is similar in tone and content to the mainstream news outlet’s coverage (Glaser 2018). Discord’s official statements on Twitter and Medium are consistent with other institutions that disavowed racism, invoking the rhetoric of peace, love, and inclusivity (Glaser 2018). As expected, news articles from 2017-2018 covered the event and problematizing Discord’s internal management of the white supremacist groups.

Discord’s post-Charlottesville Twitter message, “Discord’s mission is to bring people together around gaming. We’re about positivity and inclusivity. Not hate. Not violence,” (Glaser 2018) fails on at least two

grounds: it does not define precisely who belongs in the space, nor does it address the whiteness of the gaming subcultural community. The aftermath of Discord's institutional impression management and its current standing is informative. Three years after the initial report of troubling events that led to the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017, Discord has rebranded itself as an emergent business geared towards the mainstream audience outside of the "gaming" demographic. Fast forward to the present, and Discord is portrayed in a much more palatable light than a couple of years past. A Forbes news article's headline in 2020 states the following on Discord's growth as a company:

By shutting out white supremacists and reinventing itself to be more accessible, Discord has added millions of more diverse users - teachers, Boy Scouts, book clubs, Black Lives Matter protestors - and landed a \$100 million infusion from investors" (Brown 2020).

This is consistent with the current rebranding of Discord's platform, where it is now projected to have investors such as Microsoft and Sony vying for company ownership. Caught in a limbo between managing the personal data of users (platform capitalism) while having to maintain the company's responses consistent with major industries during 2017 (racial capitalism), the leaders in the company knew and publicly admitted their mistakes after the fact that Discord had to be subpoenaed to reveal the data of white supremacist terrorist groups (McKay 2018). In the same news article by Forbes in 2020, the founders of Discord remarked in an interview on this matter:

Discord's founders CEO Jason Citron, 35... and Stan Vishnevskiy, 31, the... chief technology officer, willingly admit to missteps through Discord's first few years. "You're going to make mistakes," says Citron, speaking publicly about Charlottesville for the first time. "As long as it doesn't kill you, you learn from it" (Brown 2020).

The critical statement here is that Citron, the CEO of Discord, expresses a view of growth as a company, implying that they have succeeded in diversity and inclusion efforts since 2017. McMillan Cottom (2020) has identified the phenomenon of "predatory inclusion," which is another strategy used to deflect criticism but ultimately reproduces racial domination in digital platforms. Platforms often follow a pattern

of opportunistic and insincere denouncements of racism. Since 2018, Discord has garnered favorable attention again to expand and market itself to an audience more mainstream as a platform beyond the gaming industry (Brown 2020; Rodriguez 2021). To understand platform capitalism in a digital context, "[a]n understanding of the political economy of Internet technologies adds a precise formulation of how this transformation operates in everyday social worlds: privatization through opacity and exclusion via inclusion." (McMillan Cottom 2020: 443). This opacity is crucial in understanding how racial capitalism operates by controlling visibility, which gives institutional legitimacy and credibility that replicates and structures racial domination while profiting from it (McMillan Cottom 2020). As an organization based on bureaucratic-based rationality that is racialized and credentials whiteness (Ray 2019), Discord is not only a fiscally motivated actor but also an institutional actor that perpetuates racial ignorance. Although skeptical, the financial interest that characterizes the mainstream media's coverage of Discord (Brown 2020; Rodriguez 2021) illustrates its transforming reception.

Who Belongs in Discord Servers?

Discord's Twitter message that their mission is "...to bring people together around gaming" (Glaser 2018) invokes abstractions about personhood while simultaneously erasing race (and other non-normative identities and experiences) from precisely who belongs in their servers. Given that the gaming industry is - and continues to be - responsible for products that further demonstrate the persistence of racial ideology (McKernan 2015), it is imperative to critically question the institutional complicity by Discord that safely houses white supremacist entities.

For example, the depictions of Blackface in products seemingly innocuous as Pokemon (Tobin 2004), a video game rated PG-13 and thus aimed at a young audience, is a reminder that racial representation and its attendant ideologies are omnipresent and persistent in popular culture. Hence, a mere lip service in mimicking the "popularized" response to racial matters is motivated by racial capitalism. Companies to generate financial success for their platform, which encourages their statements on racial matters. In this way, it becomes difficult to gauge whether companies authentically approach diversity focused on racial justice.

As Discord now enjoys its platform's growing financial success three years after the white ethnorracial terrorism that occurred in Charlottesville, it is critical to address what preventative measures went unaddressed by the mainstream media. As an

institutional actor managing impressions motivated and calculated to generate capital, racial matters addressed by Discord are superficial at best, and complicit to white supremacy at worst. It is important to recall Ahmed's (2012) analysis of diversity and inclusion, where the objective value is put on diversity as a source of institutional capital. Certainly, this seems to be the case as their growth after three years indicates, where Forbes and CNBC now praise the organizational leaders for attracting diversity and inclusion (Brown 2020; Rodriguez 2021). Discord's current financial success also comes at the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic that propelled the video game industry to a business boom (Gilbert 2020). It is to be noted that mainstream media is still cautious in its reading of Discord, with Forbes stating the following from their interview with the founders:

Still, Discord is far from squeaky clean. It's immensely easy to find offensive material even among the largest groups (and much more of it circulates in smaller, more private circles). For instance, one of the largest meme-based groups is called Gates of Autism. It has 212,431 members, and its profile picture is Pepe the Frog, a white nationalist emblem. A simple search in the chat history for the derogatory term "faggot" produced results that spilled over hundreds of pages. Members widely trade memes and GIFs that are either explicitly or implicitly sexual. Asked about this content, the founders declined to comment (Brown 2020).

Here, it becomes apparent that Discord certainly favors capital growth, not the institutional management of hate crimes or how they plan to address this as the platform grows to a more mainstream audience - taking the racial lounge to encompass more and more users at the expense of those actively marginalized by the reality of whiteness embedded within its digital walls. As a company that emphasizes diversity and inclusion, the silence regarding addressing these matters from the CEO and the chief technology officer is a warning - as it can be ascertained from our analysis on the sequence of events after Charlottesville - that no matter how much "cleaning up" Discord has done, it is not enough to dismantle the root of white supremacy that undergirds the platform as well as U.S. society at large.

Discussion and Conclusions

We propose our framework of the racial lounge to understand how racial capitalism is interconnected

with platform capitalism, and ultimately institutional isomorphism based on the racial "trends" where other institutional responses are enacted for the sake of mimicking other bureaucratic organizations in the field. As our findings demonstrate, social spaces such as Discord help us to understand that digital space emulates similar enculturation and inculcation of racial habits, ideology, and white supremacy. Organizational dynamics which purposefully obscure and mimic the racial climate in the dominant social discourse are precisely problematic for the reasons that it houses racism in a digital forum. As previous research has indicated (Brunnsma et al. 2019; Brunnsma et al. 2020; McMillan Cottom 2020), digital spaces are not absent from racial implications and situations. The means to defuse racial tensions in digital leisurely spaces become increasingly difficult due to the sheer lack of its precedence in subcultural history.

Our conceptualization of Discord as a racial lounge ripe for dissemination of white supremacist ideology is dependent upon the ways that racial ignorance is practiced at the institutional, organizational level. As previous research finds (Brunnsma, Chapman, and Lellock 2019), the rhetorical language of love, much in line with what Bonilla-Silva (2017) rightly points out as "racial peso-optimism," hinders and obscures dialogues towards anti-racism. As an exploratory study, we developed a rough framework to better analyze how digital platforms render racial matters opaque while stating colorblind rhetoric. In this way, we invite future studies to expand upon this study's limitations given our research design and the data available.

This study peered into how the dominant racial discourse has proliferated into VoIP and other online spaces where leisurely pursuits obfuscate xenophobia and white supremacist views - in addition to a host of issues regarding sexism (see the limited literature on #gamergate, e.g., see Massanari 2017), homophobia, transphobia, and ableism. As a practice of knowing to "un-know" (i.e., ignorance) (Mills 2017), which is foundational to the cognitive structure of contemporary racism (Mueller 2020), racial ignorance reigns as the dominant mode in which racial domination is accomplished. We invite future studies that engage with race in the digital era to incorporate racial ignorance as a default mode of racial cognition. While our study is limited by the exploratory case study design, it is notwithstanding that racial implication of this study is outside the purview of the current U.S. racial tensions. As Mills (2017) reminds us, racial cognition is both implicit and explicit, without needing overt intent to enact racialized interactions from the individual to the group-level organizations; from Discord servers to the company itself. Our overall findings identified Discord as a

leisurely space that emboldens racism. Future studies should also consider the ways that sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism, as well as other discriminatory acts, are held together in the name of leisurely pursuits (i.e., lounges).

Much in the way that culture (Bennett 1999; Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1990) is intertwined with a set of complex social relations and identity, it is also intertwined with the reproduction of racial domination (Bonilla-Silva 2017). In considering these factors that operate in the digital space, we invite future studies to critically examine racial capitalism embedded across the sugar-coated message of faux diversity and inclusion echoed by, but not limited to, the video game industry and VoIP services, such as Telegram, where white supremacy is still housed and galvanized and thus continuing to exacerbate U.S. racial tensions.

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