

Running head: RACISM, A/PIA IDENTITIES, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Let's Talk About It: Racism, A/PIA Identities, and Higher Education

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Abstract

“Your English is so good!” “Oh my God, you’re so chinky!” “You don’t look like this type of last name.” Although Asian and Pacific Islanders have been in the United States since the early 1800s (Zhou, 2016), they still experience racism today. From the time they immigrated to the US until now, Asian and Pacific American Islander Americans (A/PIAs) have been formed their own cultural identities, communities, and histories. Throughout that process, they have also been categorized and stereotyped. Living in a country that is majority of 63% White (248 million), A/PIAs, with a population of 20.3 million Asians and 1.3 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (FFF: Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month, 2016), are seen as a minority. As minority groups, they are also marginalized and experience systemic racism. Marginalization and racism among A/PIAs are found in various forms through the ideologies of the Model Minority of Forever Foreigner. By conducting focus groups and analyzing transcripts through open coding, I found that A/PIA students combat racism and oppression by standing in solidarity with their own communities and additional marginalized communities against the institutions that work against them.

Keywords: A/PIAs, racism, Model Minority, Forever Foreigner, oppression

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As a result of being a “minority,” the intersectionalities and individual experiences of Asian and Pacific Islanders are often overlooked and/or clumped together. The value of A/PIAs differences and unique identities are ignored; which is why this study will utilize the abbreviation of “A/PIAs” in exchange for “APIAs.” It is important to recognize that “‘API’ is not a natural alliance of partnership of communities, but a financial relationship forced by a rubric meant to serve larger institutions in identifying and controlling marginalized peoples of color” (Lee, 2015). Racism has influenced how API/As communicate their definitions and experiences of racism within spaces such as higher education.

In order to better understand how A/PIAs continue to experience racism and explore how they are identified as marginalized peoples of color in large institutions, four University of San Francisco (USF) scholars and I have formulated an interview guide and conducted three focus groups. Collectively, we aimed to answer the following research question (RQ): How do APAs communicate about issues surrounding race related issues at USF? The underlying goal was to discuss the Fall 2016 incident on USF’s campus that involved a “photograph depicting a Black USF student with a noose being held around his neck by a non-Black USF student” (usfcadobetter, 2016). Unmentioned by any letters from students or higher administration but disclosed from Professors and faculty, the non-Black USF student was Asian American. Because of the race-based incident and its lack of addressing the Asian student, I analyzed our transcriptions and results according to the following research questions:

- **RQ1:** How do A/PIAs at the University of San Francisco define racism?
- **RQ2:** How do A/PIAs at the University of San Francisco respond to racism within higher education?

After conducting the focus groups and going through each group's transcriptions, A/PIAs students within higher education described their experiences with racism having stemmed from cultural expectations such as the Model Minority (Zhou, 2016) and Forever Foreigner (Reyes, 2007). Students have also defined racism as being systematic. When facing or being affected by racism, A/PIAs students in higher education organize, speak up, and make change. They engage in the opportunities to say, "Let's talk about it."

Methods

As a Pinay student leader who is engaged in social justice work on and off USF's campus, I encourage my peers to educate themselves and take agency in social issues. In the city and University of San Francisco, it is easy to talk about how cultural identities influence our engagement with the community. Being a double Minor in Asian Pacific American Studies and the Yuchengco Philippine Studies Program, I want to know more about if and how Asian Pacific Islander American students participate in social change.

Data Collection

Participants.

Three focus groups were conducted on November 1, 4, and 9, 2016. Two moderates facilitated each group. Meetings were held in either a private room in USF's library or closed conference rooms on the university's campus. Participants could be of any age or gender and were preferred to be part of Asian Pacific Islander American (A/PIA) descent. Out of the 20 participants, 16 participants reported to be at least part API. A breakdown of the ethnicity and gender identities of the participants can be found in the Appendix.

The first focus group with myself and Jacquelyn included: (1) Dianne is Japanese-American; (2) Krissy is Filipina-American; (3) Jane is Mexican-American; (4) Rose is Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese-American; (5), Jared is Chinese and Filipino-American; (6) Riza is Nepalese-American; and (7) Ian is Filipino-American. Two participants identified as male and five identified as female.

The second focus group conducted by Gloria and Amber included: (1) Jeannette is Filipina; (2) Greg is half Irish and Filipino; (3) Ariel is Chinese, (4) Ally is Caucasian, (5) Sarah is Chinese American, (6) Kyro is half Chinese and Japanese; (7) Karla is Hispanic; and (8) Frida is Mexican. All participants identified as female with the exception of one male participant.

In the last focus group conducted by Gabriella and Alex, participants included: (1) Sage is Samoan; (2) Peyton is Filipina and Indian; (3) Indira is mixed Asian; (4) Noe is Chinese; (5) Fallon is Chinese; and (6) Raine is Filipinx. All participants identified as Asian American and female.

Procedures.

Two researchers facilitated each focus group. One facilitator moderated half of the interview, and the second facilitator moderated the second half. In the beginning, the moderators explained the purpose of the study, statement of confidentiality, and asked participants for verbal consent.. The participants complied. Next, the interviewers asked for participants' name, gender expression, and ethnic background. They welcomed interviewees to use pseudo-names, but were informed that their names would be changed during the post transcription analysis. The focus

group meeting continued with completing the full Interview Guide that can be found in the Appendix. After conducting each focus group, which lasted a minimum of 45 minutes, the recordings were divided among the pairs of facilitators to their respected groups.

Data Analysis

A classic analysis approach was used for this research. Transcriptions were analyzed through open coding to discover how A/PIA students at the university understand their A/PIA identities, define racism, and react to race-based incidents. Texts and conversations from the transcript were highlighted and coded using Google Docs. Various colors were used to differentiate between interview guide questions, off guide questions, and codes. The transcripts were reviewed again to organize common themes such as “Ethnic identity shapes character” or “Result of systematic oppression,” or “Asian positionality in racial hierarchy” found in the participants’ responses to the interview guide or off guide questions. Transcript-based analysis was utilized because general topics related to identity and racism would be specified and detailed in the participants discussion. Because personal narratives were expected to be shared due to the interview guide questions, special attention was given to the replies that included personal experiences.

Results

The following sections describe themes based off of the research questions and will include claims on how A/PIA students at USF define, experience, and respond to racism. The themes will include personal narratives and intersectionalities, reflecting the experiences and understandings from the participants.

Racism Towards A/PIAs

A/PIAs arrived as early as 1838 during the labor demand, and were only allowed to apply for American citizenship through the 1952 Immigration Act (Zhou, 2016). Specifically with A/PIA students in higher education, they continued their resilience and fight for representation by participating in the Third World Student Strike in 1968 to stand in solidarity for the creation of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University. This movement eventually influenced the nation and lead to establishing Ethnic Studies Departments such as Asian American Studies and Pacific Asian Studies. Although A/PIAs continue to be resilient and stand in solidarity, they still face society’s cultural expectations like the Model Minority and Forever Foreigner summarized in the chart from Reyes (2007) below:

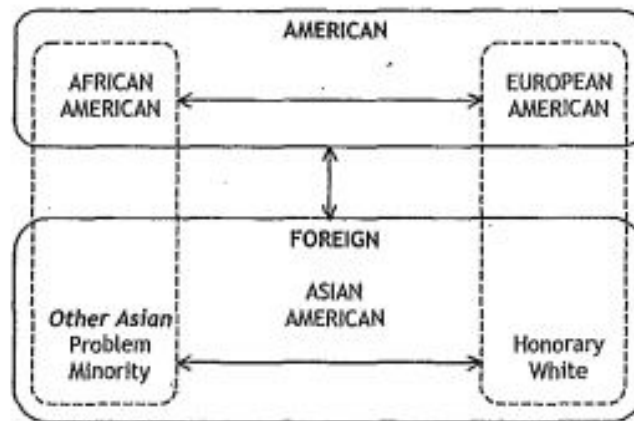


FIG. 1.3 Asian Americans as forever foreigners, honorary Whites, and problem minorities in U.S. racial discourses.

The Model Minority (associated with “Honorary White”) is the ideology that A/PIAs are stereotyped to be studious, successful, and diligent (Zhou, 2016). Because A/PIAs have the highest rate of educational attainment of a bachelor’s degree at 53.9%, passing the White percentage of 32.8%, they are seen as achieving, or even surpassing, Whiteness or European American (Ryan & Bauman, 2016; Reyes, 2007). As mentioned by Riza,

383 Riza: this idea that as an Asian American, somewhere we stand here in the middle, we're

384 constantly trying to achieve whiter values, whiter goals, whiter dream and American
385 dream in general. That's a privilege. Because it ends at Black and it wins at White. So
386 we're in the middle and that's a privilege to me.

While the additional participants in Riza's focus group agreed with nodding heads and verbal responses, Reyes and Riza both describe how A/PIAs can have the flexibility on the spectrum of US racial discourse. As Reyes (2007) illustrates, American society sees Black and White first; categorizing A/PIAs as one or the other and pressuring A/PIAs to strive for Whiteness because "it ends at Black and it wins at White." Participants from all focus groups included how this "flexibility" or as Riza calls it, "privilege" gives A/PIAs a sense of passing in society, it can also silence A/PIAs' narratives that differ from the chart, divide A/PIA communities among themselves and others, and become victims or practitioners of racism. In relation to the

An aspect of the other end of Reyes' (2007) chart would be "Forever Foreigner," found on the bottom left. As described by Ike,

161 Ike: So forever foreigner is an ideology that comes from how our bodies are being read because
162 of how we look. We are seen that we are not native to this country or born here at all. Like we
163 were born in some past of Asia or the Asiatic zone across the world.

Bodies are perceived before stories are heard. How API/As look and dress contributes to how "foreign" they look to others. The phenotypes of A/PIAs influences how people and large institutions chose to make us relevant. In the example included in the interview guide, Ike included the term "forever foreigner" because A/PIA "foreigners" are less likely to be acknowledged because they are not as notable or credible as Model Minorities. The fact that the Asian American student was not addressed in any of USF's letters reveals that A/PIAs are overlooked. Thinking further on today's racial and political climate, Black lives are on the

forefront making the ethnicity of the “Non-Black student” appear irrelevant. The reasoning to why the Asian American was not identified could relate to A/PIAs “privilege” of being a Model Minority or the result of neglect by being a “Forever Foreigner.” By understanding the histories of Asian and Pacific Islanders, we better understand the contexts of racism against A/PIAs. The problem and question posed for this study is how does this affect how A/PIA students understand and react to racism within higher education?

How Do A/PIAs Respond to Racism in Higher Education

“Racism in higher education (has) been allowed to continue in the guise of civility. These ‘isms’ are often entrenched in higher education through policy and the inadvertent actions of administrators, faculty, staff, and students” (Patton, 2004, p. 62). The inadvertent actions of administrators at USF has led to incidents such as the racially charged photograph. The incident was declared “racially charged” only after it was recognized by a letter (found in the Appendix) written by Cohort 5 of USF’s graduate program, Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA).

278 Riza: HESA Cohort 5, wrote a letter in response to Julie Orio's letter,
 279 the first letter, we wrote it in a way not to ridicule – in some sense,
 280 yes – because we were so frustrated about regarding the lack of awareness that came from that.

Orio’s letter lacked awareness because of its civility and safeness. While participants used the phrase “racially charged” as an effect from HESA’s letter, Orio’s letter read, “Last night, members of our community reported seeing a disturbing photograph that was apparently taken in one of our residence halls and shared electronically” (Message from Vice Provost for Student Life, 2016). Nowhere in the full letter, which can be found in the Appendix, does not acknowledge any factors that makes the incident racially charged; such as the ethnicities of identities involved or act that was being portrayed. Because of the email’s vagueness, students

felt frustrated. Orio's choice to remain civil and politically safe enables racist ideologies to thrive and be unchallenged.

HESA's letter, as stated by Riza, was not meant to ridicule Orio. It was meant to do what Orio's letter did not - raise awareness. It was a statement of how communities that include people like APIA/s will not accept the reinforcement of hegemony because it does not recognize how Black lives matter or how Asians are not held accountable because they are the Model Minority (Patton, 2004). In turn, academic institutions are not held accountable. This is important because higher education is supposed to do more than teach. It is meant to productively utilize its power to shape students' political and cultural thought, are not held accountable (Patton, 2004). But similar to USF's A/PIA Graduate students, A/PIA Undergraduate students would not tolerate racist behavior. When my co-facilitator, Jacquelyn, asked,

300 Jacquelyn: Do you think that you can name a student org. that you know for sure vocalized their
301 opinions on –

A student immediately responded with,

302 Jared: I know for sure Kasamahan had a meeting about it... Yeah.

Kasamahan, USF's Filipino-American organization on campus, is one of the many culturally-focused student organizations that utilized its power as an organization to create a space to talk about the photograph and its impact. As an Asian organization, Jared and additional participants, Krissy and Jane, discussed how the organization used their practice time to talk about the issue and how they as Asian Americans relate to the situation. During their meeting, they discussed that members of the organization were "outraged," and highlighted the importance to take a stance because the university failed to support the community that was directly affected:

the Black and African Americans; which populates 6% of the student body (Facts & Statistics, 2016).

Students in focus group 1 pointed out how USF's student population is 22.2% Asian and 0.9% Pacific Islanders (Facts & Statistics, 2016). Knowing these statistics compared to the additional demographics emphasizes why it is important for students to come together in solidarity. The numbers of the minority do not compare to the majority. A majority of the focus group participants pointed out that they as A/PIA students and marginalized individuals who have experienced racism and have the agency to combat it, they must utilize their voices because

414 Peyton: Silence is violence. If you aren't taking action to help educate people to stop
415 the thing then you are in turn perpetuating that since you are not making action to help stop that.
416 So if we were to talk about racism, if you do not say anything, if you witness a racist thing or see
417 someone doing anything, if you don't step in or go and educate yourself and help inform other
418 people, then that's just perpetuating that cyclical systematic racism.

A majority of A/PIA USF students like Peyton understand why the incident of the photograph was more than a picture. They understand that it was racially charged and why it needed to be brought to the community's awareness. It was a photograph that depicted racism - cyclical systemic racism. Higher administration chose not to address the true matter of concern firstly; therefore students, like the A/PIAs in the focus groups, took action and made their voices heard.

What Do A/PIAs Want?

When posing the question, "How can USF change when communicating about race related issues?" I found two things: transparency and accountability. As summarized by Greg,

358 Greg: I think just being more upfront about it in the first email. Like Jeanette said, they were
359 very vague about how we first got the email, I thought it was nude photo. And I was kind of just
360 like okay? Whatever and not a big deal. I think because of that, there wasn't as much of a

361 reaction across the whole student body. Which is maybe what they were trying to do? Kind of
362 keep things hush hush.

Vague and misleading, students in general want transparency. The “hush hush” ordeal can be improved by acknowledging that color blind or coded “race talk” exists. Although Orio did not explicitly practice color blindness, her lack rhetoric that would bring awareness to the situation said more itself. People “selectively use silence (or become ‘color mute’ (Pollock 2005) to ‘avoid objecting to oppression’ and thereby veil the existence of systemic racism (Castagno 2008; Wildman and David 1995:890)” (Becker & Paul, 2015, p. 186). In the case of Orio’s letter, USF’s higher administration chose to be silence, and Peyton said, “Silence is violence.” A reaction to the silence was student action. They challenged color-blind racism by reflecting in the classroom or in their communities (Becker & Paul, 2015). They were upfront to the people around them. Students hope for higher administration to do the same. Sage shares,

305 Sage: I just feel like whenever there is an incident that happens or a controversial incident that
306 happens on campus, the university, especially those in higher positions have very poor responses
307 to it.

Sage, and many participants, expressed that this is not the first time that the university and its higher ups have responded poorly to incidents. Many also noted that as a Jesuit institution that takes pride in its social justice values and diversity, incidents like these should not be recurring on USF’s campus. Furthermore, if incidents like these happen repeatedly, it is vital that the university holds themselves and the appropriate parties accountable. According to Urciuoli (2009), “culture is linked to some notion of institutional benefit, such as ‘educating the community’: culture is assumed to be a defining aspect of diversity, and diversity is assumed to be beneficial to the college” (p. 21). Common concerns found among the focus group

participants are how the university can better educate our students on issues such as these and how does USF not appropriate its diversity. Students have expressed that they feel their ethnic identities contributes to being tokenized as being “diverse students,” supplementing USF’s cultural diversity. And while USF claims that cultural diversity enhances the quality of the institution, students see it as a branding function (Urciuoli, 2009). Not only do students want transparency, they also want support.

470 Hope: Going off of that, it shouldn’t be the job of the oppressed to educate the oppressor
471 but sadly that’s what we have to do.

USF’s photograph incident has displayed how the burdens of racism and oppression have fallen onto those who are oppressed. Even further, it has fallen onto communities and A/PIA communities like HESA and Kasamahan to do the work that USF is supposed to be standing for. There has been place blaming “for lack of success on people of color rather than identifying the systemic origins of inequality” (Becker & Paul, 2015, p. 186). Racism continues to be a problem for communities of color because those in power do not recognize the inequalities that people of color face. Because institutions do not hold themselves accountable, they are justifying specific linguistics manners and rhetorical strategies that grow from color-blind racism (Becker & Paul, 2015). It is not the student's’ job to educate the oppressor, “but sadly that’s what we have to do.”

At least half of the participants of the focus groups mentioned in some form of verbal or nonverbal agreement that they feel as Asian or Pacific Islander Americans, they feel a responsibility to stand and speak against racism because as social rights activist, Desmond Tutu has said, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor” (Brown, 1976).

Conclusion

The results illustrate how the histories of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans influence how A/PIA students experience and encounter racism within higher education today. Whether in the form of Reyes' (2007) U.S. racial discourse chart or having one of its members partake in a racially charged incident, a strong number of A/PIAs at USF are driven to take action through words or organizing. The study and focus groups contributed to my better understand to answer the research questions. The first question, "How do A/PIAs at the University of San Francisco define racism?" can be answered through academic terms such as the Model Minority or Forever Foreigner. An A/PIAs' ethnicity and phenotype influences their experiences with racism. Although the two categories contain two differing ideologies, they are still results of racism because they are judgements based on their race. An answer to the second question, "How do A/PIAs at the University of San Francisco respond to racism within higher education?" is reiterated through Tutu's words, "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor" (Brown, 1976). A/PIA students and USF break the stereotype that Asians and Pacific Islanders are quiet (Reyes, 2007). They organize and they make noise.

Limitations of this research include the strictness of requirements. Although we said that focus groups were targeted for Asians and Pacific Islander Americans, 4 out of 20 participants identified as Non-A/PIA. Even with a small percentage of Non-A/PIAs in the bunch, this could have influenced our participants' responses. Another limitation was the academic levels of the students. There was a blend of Undergraduate and Graduate students. This was a major factor because the participants who used the terms, "Model Minority" and "Forever Foreigner" were Graduate students. The interviews could have been different if there was not a mix of different grade levels. Gender identity can also be a limitation. Answers could have varied and we could

have had more male perspectives if we invited more male identities into the space. Most importantly, having more Pacific Islander American identities in the space would have been beneficial to disaggregating our data.

Future research in this area should include hearing more Pacific Islander American and South Asian American narratives. Because there are many intersectionalities and identities found among A/PIAs, it is important to continue to gather and hear their experiences. Including male identities would also help bring in various perspectives and even break the male expectation that males do not share their feelings. Another intersectional piece that is often overlooked among Asians and Pacific Islanders are queerness. Future research should invite queer identities to share their voices because queerness can influence how an A/PIA experiences or deals with racism. Not only will being mindful of these identities help disaggregate Asian and Pacific Islander American data, it can also lead to improved representation, affirmation, and overcoming any institutionalized or internalized racism.

The implications of these findings are important because the intersectionalities of Asians and Pacific Islanders are often overlooked or clumped together. Our research was fortunate enough to include various A/PIA identities, mixed race identities, and the unheard voices of female A/PIAs. This research can connect with additional studies regarding how students of color go through their experiences in higher education. It can also help discover how institutions can improve on addressing and educating its students on race-based issues. As new classes come into college and the US population of A/PIAs continue to fluctuate, it is important realize that we are not in a post-racial society. We experience different “isms” throughout our every day, and racism is just one of them. Research topics such as these are important because Asians and

Pacific Islander Americans need to break the stereotype of keeping their experiences to themselves. They need to continue to organize and utilize the spaces, like their communities in higher education, where they can come together and say, “Let’s talk about it.”

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Appendix

Demographics of participants:

Participants	Ethnicity	Gender Pronouns
Dianne	Japanese-American	She/Her/Hers
Krissy	Filipina-American	She/Her/Hers
Jane	Mexican-American	She/Her/Hers
Rose	Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese-American	She/Her/Hers
Jared	Chinese and Filipino-American	He/Him/His
Riza	Nepalese-American	She/Her/Hers
Ike	Filipino-American	He/Him/His
Jeannette	Filipino	She/Her/Hers
Greg	½ Irish, ½ Filipino	He/Him/His
Ariel	Chinese	She/Her/Hers
Ally	Caucasian	She/Her/Hers
Sarah	Chinese-American	She/Her/Hers
Kryo	½ Chinese, ½ Japanese	She/Her/Hers
Karla	Hispanic	She/Her/Hers
Frida	Mexican	She/Her/Hers
Sage	Samoan	She/Her/Hers
Peyton	½ Filipina, ½ Indian American	She/Her/Hers
Indira	½ Japanese, ½ White	She/Her/Hers
Noe	Taiwanese, Chinese	She/Her/Hers
Fallon	Chinese, Vietnamese -	She/Her/Hers

	identified as Chinese	
Raine	Filipino	She/Her/Hers

Focus group interview guide:

Introduction:

Hello all! If everyone could go around the room and introduce themselves, their major, and say their favorite spot in the city. My name is [interviewer 1]. [Do ice breaker]. My name is [interviewer 2]. Do ice breaker. This focus group interview is for our Asian American Culture and Communication class. For our research paper, we wanted to learn about your insights and opinions on how issues surrounding race is communicated at USF, specifically in the APA student body. Everything you say in this room will be kept private. My professor, Evelyn Ho, and my groupmates will be the only ones viewing your responses. We want to ensure everyone’s identity will remain private. Please quickly fill out these name tags with a different name and your gender pronouns; it can be anything you would like. During this interview, we ask that you address each other by the name on your nametags and your respective gender pronouns. We all agree that these responses will remain confidential, right? Everyone has a different opinion and perspective, so we ask you to respect them no matter how different they might be. You could also be the only one speaking their opinion. It is important for us that we respect one another, keep an open-mind, and learn from a variety of experiences and perspectives. This will not be a debate but an outlet to voice your opinions freely. We are interested in hearing and learning from different points of views. Everyone’s voices matters, so share as much as you would like. To remind you all and to go over some logistics, everything you say will be kept confidential and private. This is completely voluntary so feel free to let us know if you need a break, skip a question, etc. We want your story and voice to be as accurate as possible, which is why we will be taking some notes and be recording this interview. Great. Is it okay if I start the recorder?

Everyone verbally consents with a yes

Opening:

1. How do you identify your ethnic background?
 - a. What is your nationality or nationalities?

Introductory:

2. How does your ethnic or cultural identity influence who you are today?

Transition:

3. Think about how you define racism and please write them down. When you think of the word racism, what comes to mind?
4. I want every person to share:
 - a. Can you recall any examples of racism that happened to you?
 - b. Open to sharing - Are there other similar concepts? - i dont want to say this i dot even get it

Key Questions:

5. What would you consider a racist act?
 - a. What influences a person to perform such acts? And why?
6. Can you recall any examples of racism at USF?
 - a. What happened?

- b. How did you feel when this occurred?
- c. How do you think this affected or affects our peers?

OPTIONAL—Moderator: There was recently a racially charged event that happened on USF’s campus. *Explain to ensure participants are all on same page about event.*

- 7. How have you perceived USF’s initial responses?
 - a. How did this make you feel?
 - b. Ask participants if they have any examples of the responses
 - i. If not, provide examples such as the letters from the Vice Provost, Dr. Mary Wardell, HESA’s #USFCADoBetter, or student organization statements.
 - c. How do you feel about these responses? Why do you think they responded this way?

Ending:

- 8. Ideally, how would you have liked USF to respond?
- 9. How can USF change when communicating about race related issues?

Closing:

That was the last question unless is there anything else you would like to add? Thank you for your time, participation, and openness to our research project. It was very insightful. We have a lot great information. We greatly appreciate your stories. You have our contact information, so please feel free to contact me at anytime if you have any questions I will gladly share my research with you when I am done with it. Do you have any questions for me?

Higher Education and Student Affairs Cohort 5’s Letter:

Dear USF Community,

Last week, a racially charged photograph depicting a Black USF student with a noose being held around his neck by a non-Black USF student was reported by other students in the USF community and has been shared electronically throughout the campus. The act and distribution of the photo is traumatic and unacceptable.

As a University we acknowledge the immense impact that this incident has on each and every member of the community. As a social justice institution, this photograph stands in contradiction to the Jesuit values of “Care of the Whole Person” and “Women and Men for Others” that USF claims to practice. This act should not be treated as an isolated incident, as it is rooted in the routine and systemic lack of support of Black students and other marginalized students at USF. Incidents like this are never a joke. This act and subsequent photo should never have taken place.

On behalf of the University, we would like to apologize to the Black community and other students of color who have been hurt, angered, and made to feel unsafe. This photograph is a symptom of a greater problem within the campus climate and culture at USF, as evidenced in the reactionary creation of the Bias Education Response Team due to student reported microaggressions on campus. Despite other incidents of this nature happening not only at USF, but on campuses across the country, University administrators only saw a need to create such a task force within this year. There is no one dedicated as a staff member to respond to issues of

campus climate, instead this responsibility falls on administrators that are already overburdened and underpaid to serve on this team.

This act and photograph is not an isolated incident. Its imagery references a history of violence and oppression of the Black community not only in higher education but within the United States at large. Lynching of Black individuals during the era of slavery and post Civil War was a means of asserting and maintaining white supremacy. Hate groups such as the KKK use lynching in order to terrorize Blacks and keep them from voting, working, and getting an education. With this in mind we again stress that there is nothing isolated about this photograph. Rather, USF has allowed a culture of racism to permeate throughout the campus. In addition, the institution has yet to make a statement of support in regards to #BlackLivesMatter, a movement that directly impacts many USF students.

USF claims to value individuals that contribute to the diversity of perspectives and experiences that are essential to the mission of Jesuit Education. However, the reality is that our Black students are not equitably served or protected at our institution. We must support our Black students and other students from marginalized backgrounds who face adversity from systemic issues within society and within USF. It is our responsibility as administrators to stand accountable to create an equitable and safe campus environment.

We will not stop advocating for social justice and a safer campus for all students. If we continue to be reactionary and not proactive to racist incidents on our campus, we will not be able to truly serve the members of our university. We must address the ineffective policies and practices that have led to our current campus climate. We hope in the upcoming days to provide new and better spaces for our community to process and heal. We hope that USF's Administration will actively participate and collaborate with students in the development of a comprehensive plan working towards a more equitable and affirming campus in the future.

#USFCADoBetter

Sincerely,

HESA Cohort 5

Julie Orio's Letter:

“Dear USF Community,

Last night, members of our community reported seeing a disturbing photograph that was apparently taken in one of our residence halls and shared electronically. The photograph was subsequently shared (also electronically) with some students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

Regardless of the intent of the individuals photographed (or that of the photographer and others who may have been present), the image is unacceptable and an affront to what we stand for as a community guided by our mission and values.

The image has also triggered, hurt, and anger among many members of our community. As members of the Student Life staff and the university's Bias Education Response Team actively review the facts associated with this incident, please be aware that there is a great deal we do not yet know.

Nevertheless, the photograph is a reminder of how images and actions can have enormous impact and can cause profound distress — emotionally and physically — to those who have experienced cruelty, violence, trauma, and injustice.

It is an image that calls us to remember our obligations to each other and to treat all with respect and dignity...

Very Yours Truly,
Julie Orio, Vice Provost of Student Life”