The Growing Up Asian American Tag:
An Asian American Networked Counterpublic on YouTube

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The "Growing Up Asian American" (GUAA) tag on YouTube conveys the marginalized experiences of Asian American women and offers narratives not shown in the mainstream media as a networked counterpublic. By exploring YouTube videos using this tag, I analyzed counterpublic discourses formed by nonstar Asian American YouTubers and how these discourses were shaped by the culture and medium of YouTube. Using mixed methods, including semantic network analysis and discursive textual analysis, I explored the unique traits of the GUAA Asian American networked counterpublic on YouTube. Although the discourses formed around the tag are considered relatively soft, an issue compounded by the nature of microcelebrity culture, the GUAA tag has also allowed Asian Americans to narrate their own personal and affective stories. The audiovisual nature of YouTube allows Asian Americans to talk with their bodies and voices to express their rich, heterogeneous, and intersectional identity, which cannot be reduced to one monolithic media portrayal.

Keywords: Asian American, YouTube, networked counterpublics, semantic network analysis, mixed methods

The "Growing Up Asian American" (GUAA) tag, now adopted by many Asian American YouTubers, was first created by Korean American beauty/fashion YouTuber Amy Lee. A YouTuber "tagged" by other YouTubers is prompted to make a video relevant to the tag theme—in this case, "Growing Up Asian American"—though many YouTubers voluntarily "self-tag" without being prompted. The tag creation includes a set of questions[1] that prompt the experiences of participants as Asian Americans living in U.S.

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[1] Following are the questions that YouTubers are supposed to answer in the tag video: (1) Which ethnicity are you? (2) Which generation are you? (3) What is the first experience where you felt that demarcation of being a minority/different? (4) Were you always proud of your heritage, or was there a time you rejected it? (5) What are some stereotypes that you struggle with? (6) Can you speak your (mother) language? (7) How has being Asian American affected your relationship with your parents? (8) How do you feel about your heritage now? Do you identify with it? (9) What is your favorite thing about being Asian American/your heritage?

society, including diverse topics such as stereotyping, cultural exclusion, language, the relationship with their immigrant parents, and so on.

I view this tag as a networked counterpublic space created by a marginalized social group. Fraser (1990) defines a counterpublic as a "parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (p. 67). Critical scholars have focused on various digital spaces such as Twitter, YouTube, and blogs as alternative channels through which marginalized populations express their identity (Jackson, Bailey, & Foucault Welles, 2018; Lopez, 2016; Palczewski, 2001). The hashtag feature in Twitter especially has received considerable scholarly attention, because a Twitter hashtag can quickly mobilize marginalized people with catchy and simple phrases and connect them as networked counterpublics.

On the other hand, YouTube as a platform has been largely undertheorized as a site where networked counterpublic discourses form. Though some Asian American individuals have a visible presence on YouTube, as represented by the success of KevJumba, Nigahiga, Michelle Phan, and Wong Fu Productions, less attention has been paid to Asian American YouTubers as a collective public constructing their group voice. Although the alternative representations by Asian American star YouTubers may illustrate digital media's promise in lowering the bar for cultural production by people of color, concentrating only on a few big names leaves behind a diverse group of ordinary Asian American YouTubers creating their own unique, constantly changing narratives.

This study examines YouTube as an Asian American networked counterpublic sphere, where heterogeneous publics gather and form affective and political agendas connected through a common indexical signifier, the GUAA tag. In doing so, this study makes both theoretical and methodological contributions. Theoretically, by examining diverse Asian American YouTubers with an intersectional lens incorporating race, gender, and ethnicity, I add to the current scholarship on Asian American cultural production on YouTube (Chun, 2013; Lopez, 2018; Pham & Ono, 2016; Saul, 2010), which has mostly focused on a few influential YouTube stars. Through the tag, various Asian American YouTubers could not only reflexively form an awareness of their shared racialized experiences, but also discover intragroup differences and marginality within the Asian American community. With embodied visual communication, the tag resists the visual culture of race and the limited representation of Asian Americans by presenting a diverse array of their appearances. I also found that YouTubers' performance of racial scripts and grammars within YouTube's attention economy contributed to affective relationships among YouTubers and viewers, while they also made counterdiscourse less critical. Methodologically, my combination of semantic network analysis and discursive textual analysis demonstrated this mixed-methods approach as a useful tool for researching YouTube videos.

Networked Digital Counterpublics

Digital media scholars have employed the concept of counterpublic to theorize various networked movements in online spaces by members of nondominant groups. The studies have not only demonstrated Twitter as a useful political tool for groups organizing online collective actions (Clark, 2016), but also brought to light specific tactics of resistance by marginalized group members—such as hijacking a hashtag from

dominant groups to subvert a mainstream narrative, thereby using Twitter to serve their interests (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015).

For racial minorities, hashtags can contribute to the construction of an archive illustrating awareness of and resistance to racism, which Parker and Song (2006) conceptualized as "reflexive racialization" (p. 575). The academic discussion on Black Twitter shows how this reflexive racialization (i.e., recognizing racist oppressions collectively via autobiographical sharing) is formed through hashtags widely circulated on Twitter by African Americans (Brock, 2012; Florini, 2014). Brock (2012) argues that African Americans' high usage of certain hashtags allowed for the "discovery" of Black Twitter by outgroup members.

In addition to using hashtags, racial counterpublics also adopt various discursive tactics under the affordances of the platform. Florini (2014) asserts that African American Twitter users use Black vernacular English and nonstandard spelling in discursive practices of "signifyin'" (p. 232), part of African American oral traditions. Because using and comprehending signifyin' requires an understanding of its sociocultural context within the African American community, it has become a useful tool to signal users' racial identity in addition to hashtags that have explicit identity markers (e.g., BlackNerdsUnite; Florini, 2014). Because Twitter is a text-based medium where corporeal identifiers, various oral performances such as pronunciation, and other nonverbal cues are not available, signifyin' has been utilized to form Black Twitter space (Florini, 2014).

Given this networked counterpublic literature pointing to how culture, digital architectures such as hashtags, and media platforms combine to greatly shape racial counterpublic practices, I ask how mediums of YouTube, with its own distinctive culture, might shape discourses of racial counterpublics. Focusing on Asian Americans, who have already shown active cultural production on YouTube, I identify the unique discursive and performative strategies that the heterogeneous group known as Asian Americans uses to engage with in-group members and the wider public on YouTube.

YouTube and Asian America

YouTube has been employed as an alternative space for young Asian Americans to express themselves given long-standing racial stereotypes, compounded by low visibility in U.S. mainstream media. Focusing on the cultural production of influential Asian American YouTubers like Michelle Phan, KevJumba, and Wong Fu Productions, numerous scholars have examined how Asian Americans have constructed alternative identities distinct from the mainstream narrative references to stereotypes such as model minority behavior, asexuality, and nerdy masculinity that have been culturally imposed on Asian American groups (Chun, 2013; Pham & Ono, 2016; Saul, 2010). However, this "first generation" of well-established Asian American YouTubers consisted mainly of men of East Asian descent. As Lopez (2017) points out, subethnic groups, such as Hmong Americans, significantly lack visibility, even on YouTube. Though Lopez (2017) has described how the YouTube channel SuperBadFilm, operated by Hmong Americans, actively produces videos with explicit identifiers of Hmong ethnicity, language, and culture, scholarly attention to the Asian American community on YouTube has generally come short of using an intersectional lens encompassing race, gender, and ethnicity. Thus, the voices of Asian American women

and various subethnic groups of Asian Americans have not been adequately reflected in the theorization of Asian America on YouTube.

Although the GUAA tag does not center on a particular ethnic subgroup of Asian Americans, the participation of a diverse array of groups of Asian American YouTubers makes it nonetheless a germane research site for looking at the heterogeneity of the Asian American YouTube community. Begun by a fairly "big" beauty and fashion YouTuber, Amy Lee, who had more than 410,000 subscribers as of May 2019, the GUAA tag has been taken up by more than 80 YouTubers, collectively constructing a group of diverse voices of Asian American women YouTubers of different ethnicities and nationalities. Because the majority of viewership for beauty/fashion YouTuber Amy Lee consists of women, the tag has been adopted mostly by women YouTubers (93% of the sample in this study). As a result, though there are no specific gender-related questions in the tag, the discourses organically reflect the diverse experiences of Asian American women in particular.

Before discussing the use of the GUAA tag, an understanding of Asian American identity is in order. Asian American identity has been constructed by the historical and contemporary experiences of diverse Asian Americans. It is in part a political construct against racial subordination and the need to build political and administrative entities to claim visibility and resources from American society (Espiritu, 1992). The term "Asian American" was constructed during the civil rights era mainly by Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino American college-age activists to promote a cross-ethnic coalition to respond to racism and to develop community (Okamoto, 2003; Park, 2008). The senseless murder in 1982 in Highland Park, Michigan, of Chinese American Vincent Chin, who was mistaken for a Japanese person amid a racist and xenophobic anti-Japanese climate associated with deindustrialization, raised the significance of forming pan-ethnic coalitions. Illustrating how many non-Asians were not willing to distinguish subgroups of Asian Americans, to many, especially Asian Americans, the murder meant that all Asian Americans were potential victims of anti-Asian crimes (Espiritu, 1992). The issue is rooted in the "perpetual foreigner" stereotype and racial lumping demonstrated when any Asian-passing individual is disrespectfully called "Chinese," regardless of his or her actual ethnicity or nationality (Kibria, 2003). In this way, a particular Asian ethnic identity is often easily assumed and lumped by phenotype (i.e., visuality of the race) dismissing a subgroup's political, cultural, or geographical differences (Nakamura, 2002). This history indicates that a given subgroup's shared heritage often is not the most essential value for the formation of Asian American identity; rather, the pan-ethnic shared experiences of subordination and anti-Asian violence are (Iijima, 1997).

In addition to examining what is seen as a great need for a pan-ethnic Asian American coalition, scholars also have observed limitations associated with institutionalizing Asian American identity. As a consequence of systemization, racial identities have been depoliticized as mere categories under government management and intervention (Kwon, 2013). For example, many Asian American subethnic groups have had to merge into one pan-ethnic group to get state recognition because public funding sources did not recognize subethnic groups, and this resulted in reification and legitimation of Asian American as an undifferentiated racial category (Espiritu, 1992; Kwon, 2013).

In addition to pressures toward reification from without, subethnic groups also face analogous challenges within pan-Asian organizations themselves. Legitimization of Asian American as a single racial

category has marginalized subethnic groups in pan-Asian organizations; East Asians have held relatively more visibility and power in these organizations in terms of socioeconomic class and education level, and they are connected to "an informal hierarchal pattern" (Park, 2008, p. 548) existing within Asian American groups. Park (2008) notes that most pan-Asian organizations are led by Chinese and Japanese Americans, and the phenotypes and culture of East Asian groups are the most popular imagery of Asian Americans in general.

Given the potential ambivalence and internal contradictions within Asian American identity and coalition formation, which pursue pan-ethnic solidarity while being cautious about homogenizing subgroups into a single racial category, I chose to approach the GUAA counterpublic from the perspective of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991). An intersectional lens allows one to look at how various factors, such as race, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, and immigrant history, have shaped the experiences of a diverse Asian American counterpublic. Intersectionality thus resists the racist hegemonic idea that Asians are all alike, debunks the racial lumping that has been imposed on Asian Americans, and makes marginalized voices, even those within the Asian American community itself, heard.

YouTube as a Platform

Just as a networked counterpublic is elicited using a hashtag in Twitter, the simple phrase "Growing Up Asian American" for a video tag invites diverse Asian American YouTubers to share their narratives. Though both Twitter and YouTube are similar in their ability to provide a space for traditionally underrepresented groups, YouTube has its distinctive affordances and culture. YouTube as a strongly visual medium could serve as a productive space for counterpublic discourses given that the usage of visuality by racial minority groups has been effective in conveying a political message. Lopez (2017) asserts that for Asian Americans who have been constantly marginalized by the mainstream media, the "insertion" of the visual presence of their racialized body could disrupt a White-dominated media landscape.

In addition to leveraging the characteristics of YouTube as an audiovisual medium, counterpublic discourses can also be shaped by microcelebrity culture. Marwick and boyd (2011) define microcelebrity as a mentality that considers audiences as a fan base that should be constantly managed, and requires people to consciously produce their self-image to present to audiences. Private content sharing that gives the impression of "connectedness, accessibility, and intimacy" (Jerslev, 2016, p. 5246) is a commonly shared practice among microcelebrities to build authenticity. This microcelebrity culture has been criticized by digital media scholars because it helps to construct an attention economy, in which commercialism and neoliberal self-management ideals are magnified (Banet-Weiser, 2012; Duffy, 2016). For example, Banet-Weiser (2012) describes the ideal femininity promoted in an attention economy, which is "flexible, individualized, resilient, self-driven, and self-made," along with a "brandable" body, meaning "thin, white, and conventionally attractive" (p. 79).

This study focuses on how YouTube as an audiovisual communication medium and a venue for microcelebrity culture has shaped the formation of unique counterpublic discourses around the GUAA tag. Building on the conceptual frameworks of digital counterpublics and Asian American identity, I form two research questions:

RQ1:   What are the counterpublic discourses that Asian American YouTubers create through the GUAA tag?

RQ2:   What are the unique traits of networked counterpublics formed around the GUAA tag? How might they reflect the culture, materiality, and features of YouTube as a medium, as well as the heterogeneity of Asian Americans?

Methods

To approach the rich counterpublic discourses formed by the GUAA tag, I used a mixed-methods approach that included semantic network analysis (SNA) and discursive textual analysis (DTA). General themes and narratives that frequently occurred in the tag were examined through SNA, while diverse voices aligned with, or at odds with, dominant narratives were analyzed using DTA.

SNA, the quantitative part of the analysis, helps immensely considering the amount of textual data that a single video (15–30 mins) can generate. It serves as a form of automated content analysis that allows identification of multiple conversational topics within text from a large volume of data (Eddington, 2018). The multiple sets of vocabularies that co-occur within a conversational network can be brought to light using SNA to provide analytical insights that can't be seen through a linear reading of a text (Drieger, 2013).

The semantic network of the transcript of 86 videos[2] was generated by the network analysis tool WORDij (Danowski, 2013) and resulted in 1,940 nodes and 5,089 edges. While the dominant participants are the YouTubers of East Asian descent, such as Korean and Chinese (n = 52), Southeast Asian YouTubers such as Filipino, Vietnamese, and Cambodian Americans also showed active participations. For the transcript, I manually scraped autogenerated closed captions[3] of the whole list of videos. I then generated five subgraphs using the algorithm modularity class with a degree centrality measure using the network analysis tool Gephi. A modularity class algorithm, as one tool for detecting communities in data, divides a network into several groups of nodes (words) that are found to be more densely connected than the rest of the nodes in the network. In network analysis, the term "degree" indicates the number of connections that one node has, and degree centrality describes nodes that have a high number of connections. In measuring community detection and degree centrality, I identified five clusters of frequently co-occurring word pairs. The most central words in the entire semantic network and in each word cluster were identified. The graph is shown in Figure 1.

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[2] The "Growing Up Asian American" videos posted since the tag was created until the point the analysis was performed (4/23/2018–10/30/2018).

[3] One study reports that YouTube's auto-captioning agrees with 90% of manual transcription in an optimal setting, such as one-on-one interviews (Jouvet et al., 2018).
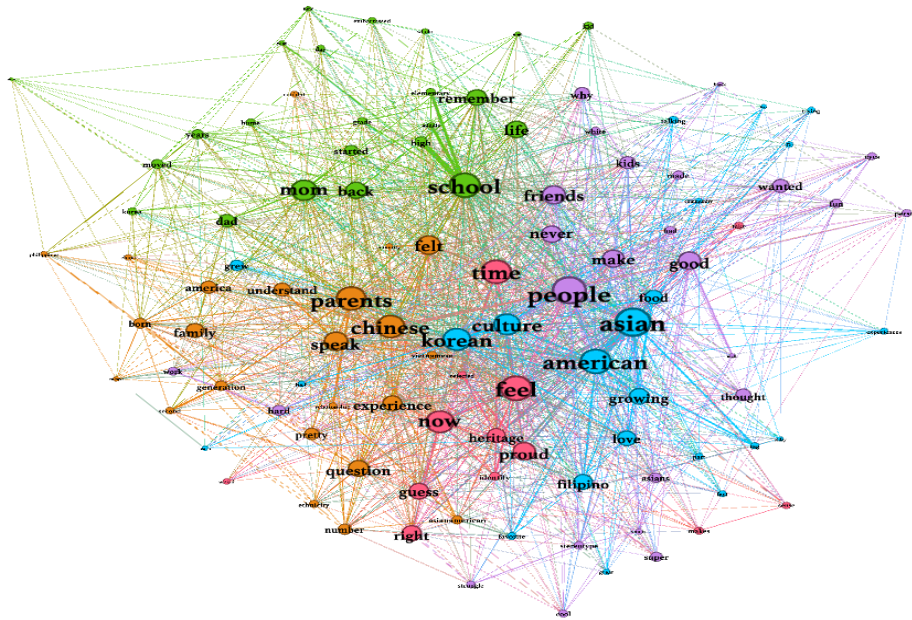
***Figure 1. The semantic network of the GUAA tag. Generated in Gephi, using ForceAtlas 2 layout
algorithm. Different colors denote each cluster, and node sizes represent the degree of
centrality of each word.***

After coding the five subnetworks of the semantic network as "parents," "school," "stereotype,"
"heritage," and "Asian American community," based on the meanings and relations of the words within the
subnetworks, I used them as focal points in DTA. For the qualitative part of the analysis, I randomly selected
30 videos to see the overall flow of discourse and chose an additional purposive sample of 10 videos from
the list that I downloaded by using YTDT (YouTube Data Tools; Rieder, 2015). Most of the videos have the
same title, "Growing up Asian American," but some YouTubers customized titles to reflect their identity,
such as "Growing Up Black-Korean" or "Growing Up Hmong-American," and so on. I selected these as a
purposive sample to reflect voices of people with diverse identities. I conducted a DTA on a sample of the
videos by trying to read the context surrounding word usage, nonverbal cues, audiovisual performances,
and video aesthetic structures.

In terms of ethics, this research did not require institutional review board approval given the criteria
exempting research that does not involve intervention or interaction, and for which the information collected
is not private. However, in digital media spaces like YouTube, the distinction between private and public can
be ambiguous (Lange, 2007). Also, studies note that women of color are often a target of online harassment
and/or digital surveillance (Linabary & Corple, 2018; Nakamura, 2015). Given that most of the YouTubers
(n = 80) in this study are Asian American women, I made a decision not to directly cite video URLs and
names of YouTubers; I will instead use pseudonyms to reference them. I did make an exception for Amy
Lee, given her publicity based on the size of her channel (410,000 subscribers), and as a means of crediting
her as the founder of the tag.

Growing Up Asian American Counterpublic Discourses

Through a semantic analysis with a subsequent DTA, I identified five major conversational clusters that emerged from the tag, which I labeled "parent," "school," "stereotype," "heritage," and "Asian American community." These themes represent YouTubers' autobiographic stories, including their relationship with parents, early school memories, ambivalent identity, and pride in their racial identity. Personal stories anchored under the GUAA tag collectively constitute their group stories of racial stigmatization, forced assimilation, and identity navigation, making the tag a space for reflexive racialization. Because the majority of the participants are women, the contents of the tag also reveal gendered and racialized experiences of Asian American women.

Using Gephi, I calculated the degree centrality of the semantic network of tag videos. Table 1 includes the top 15 words that have the highest degree centrality. I intentionally did not perform word stemming—which refers to incorporating vocabularies that have the same root—so that words in the data set are not overlapped (e.g., feel, felt, feeling), given that different temporalities of the same word also can contribute to a discourse construction of YouTubers.

Table 1. Top 15 Nodes in the GUAA Tag Videos' Semantic Network.

Words	Degree centrality
Asian	101
people	95
American	84
school	84
feel	81
time	79
parents	75
Korean	72
Chinese	71
now	69
want	66
culture	66
mom	65
speak	57
felt	56

The 10 most central words measured by degree centrality in the GUAA semantic network were "Asian," "people," "school," "feel," "American," "time," "parents," "Korean," "Chinese" and "now."

Using the algorithm modularity class in Gephi, which identifies the clusters of words that are more frequently used together than the rest of the words in the network, I divided the semantic network into five different subnetworks. Though there are five different subnetworks, the themes do not exist individually, but are connected in one semantic network.

Parents

In the "parents" network, the set of words "born," "generation," "raised," and "second," and another set of words like "Vietnamese," "Philippines," and "Chinese," signaled talk about personal history and roots, their and their parents' ethnicity, and the places where they were born and grew up. Several YouTubers said they struggled with a language barrier between themselves and their immigrant parents, who only spoke in their native language. As the fluent English speakers in the household, YouTubers often had to do "adulting," that is, tasks for adults, such as calling utility companies. The language issue is also connected to otherness—one YouTuber said she didn't want to let her parents talk to her friends because she was ashamed of her parents' "foreignness"; "When I was younger, I was really embarrassed my mom's accent . . .I didn't want her to meet my friends. I didn't want her to meet other parents and stuff."

However, many YouTubers teared up while talking about their parents' move to the U.S. from their home countries and the privileges the parents gave up for their children to have a better life. Park (2008) says the identity of Asian Americans reflects a shared experience of immigration, which accompanies hardworking parents. YouTubers recognize their parents' hard work as immigrants and also appreciate the great sacrifices that their parents made for them.

School

The "school" network shows how YouTubers have experienced othering from White American society. Words such as "remember," "back," "lunch," and "embarrassed" are connected to the school network, signaling how the experience of school has not always been positive. The tag includes a question, "What is the first experience where you felt that demarcation of being a minority/different?" Many YouTubers answered that their first time encountering cultural differences came in school. A common moment highlighting differences between YouTubers and their White classmates came at lunchtime, when students took out food brought from home. Jennie vividly recalled,

> It was on a field trip, we were eating lunch, and I took out my, like, Asian container for food. It's one of those bucket-looking things. . . . It even has a handle . . . I remember my friends laughing really hard at me because it looks like I was eating out of a bucket pretty much.

As the food culture of non-White groups has been always racialized and exoticized by Whites, the "Asian lunch box" of these YouTubers was distinct from an American sandwich, not only in food content, but also as a cultural divergence that caused the YouTubers shame. This shared experience discloses how school was not just a place where the YouTubers received an academic education, but also a place where they constantly encountered their marginality, which, in turn, manifested as pressure to assimilate to the majority.

Stereotype

YouTubers' feelings of embarrassment were connected to the "stereotype" network, which included words such as "smart," "math," and "eyes." The high number of connections between these words—the words "people" or "friends," and a set of words representing race, such as "White" and "Black"—indicates that YouTubers struggled with the stereotypes directed toward them by other people.

The experiences regarding appearance for young Asian American women were closely intertwined with gender and race. In a gendered process, women of all races are pressured to perform bodily labor to present themselves as "beautiful." But for Asian American women in particular, physical features such as monolid eyes also connect to racialized stereotypes such as "awkward," "dull," and "passive" and thus add another layer that makes them feel unattractive and inferior compared with White women (Kaw, 1993).

For example, Charlotte's physical appearance, such as monolid eyes, marked her as nonnormative to White friends, and this contributed to low self-esteem as a woman: "Me being friends with White girls was really difficult too. . . . Since they're women, there's that struggle with beauty standards, I really struggled with it because I didn't look like any of them, therefore I didn't feel as attractive."

YouTubers also mentioned the assumption that they are submissive, obedient, and sexually available, which recalls the "yellow fever" fetishization of Asians. Those stereotypes made YouTubers constantly doubt the good intentions of the people they were meeting on dates, out of fear of being treated merely as an "experience." Tess shared her story: "It's like you're this rare butterfly that people want to pin in their collection of people they've slept with. Yeah, it's very tiring to think, 'is this person interested in me because there's an experience for them?'"

Stereotypical "controlling images" objectify women of color and normalize the notion that they are inferior and justifiably subordinate in social position (Collins, 2002). It stands to reason that the experiences of othering and stereotyping expressed by YouTubers might lead them to internalize the controlling images associated with stereotypes.

The "model minority" myth assumes that Asian Americans have achieved economic and academic success in the U.S. by their hard work, thereby being a "model" that members of other racial minority groups should follow. This model creates a racial division by placing Asian Americans in a "better" position in terms of class and education, and undermines the struggles of African Americans. Kim (1999) theorizes this process of racialization of Asian Americans as "racial triangulation"—the dual process that the dominant White group relatively valorizes Asian Americans over Black people, while also constructing Asian Americans as unassimilable foreigners. This racialization has encouraged complicity with Whiteness against Blackness among the Asian American community, granting it the illusion of being honorarily White (Dutt-Ballerstadt, 2020).

The model minority myth not only contributes to racial division, but also dehumanizes Asian Americans by categorizing them into one monolithic group. Many YouTubers' felt that their accomplishments were undervalued because of the assumption that Asians are genetically good at academics. The

individuality of YouTubers' different talents and passions were subsumed by the stereotype that Asians "have to be" good at math or science. Grace shared her memory:

> It's literally people saying the reason why you achieve these goals is because of your race. People will just automatically assume you get things easier, the reason why you got this because you're Asian. It sucks especially because I wasn't one of those people who got all A's.

Heritage

In the "heritage" network, the word "heritage" is connected to "time," "rejected," "feel," "now," "proud," and "identify." This network reflects YouTubers' ambivalent feelings about their heritage and identity. On one hand, they shared a feeling that they needed to reject their heritage, almost as a survival technique. But they also explained their desire to shun their backgrounds. Many YouTubers admitted that there was a time when they rejected their heritage with the illusion of assimilation in response to the stereotyping and othering they experienced from non-Asians. The ambivalence between these two opposing factors created an internal tension between their Asian bodies/identity and the influence of the dominant White culture, as illustrated by the words "banana" or "whitewashed" used to describe themselves. Olivia discussed her identity and its relationship with society in these terms:

> I essentially felt like I was a banana, you know, yellow on the outside, White on the inside. I did try really hard to reject my culture just because I wanted to conform to Western society as well as a school community.

The efforts at assimilation, along with the circumstances of growing up in a culture different from that of parental origin, interfered with full Asian cultural acceptance. YouTubers mentioned that they don't fit into Asian culture because they are "American." Most of the YouTubers grew up in predominantly White communities, which gave them less opportunity to learn their parents' languages and culture. The YouTubers "look" Asian, which distinguishes them phenotypically from their White friends, but the assimilated language and culture in America hinders them from fully identifying as Asian. This negotiation of their identity between assimilating to American society and keeping their heritage brought discomfort and uneasiness about fitting in both societies.

Asian American Community

In the "Asian American community" network, the word "love" is connected to "Asian," "American," "food," and "culture," as well as "talking," "trying," "great," "learn," and "community." This combination shows that YouTubers express affection toward the GUAA tag title itself.

Many YouTubers who identify as Asian Americans specifically said they feel a sense of belonging as Asian Americans because of the "community" associated with this ethnicity. Jennie expressed her sense of belonging in this way:

I can identify it [Asian American] in a way that helps me connect with other people that, like, other Asians. I've gone through the same experiences, that's what I think is the most beautiful thing about it. It's like there's a community out there in the world as well as in the U.S., of us Asian Americans. And it's just, it's a way to help me connect and relate to people which I love.

Jennie, like other YouTubers, mentioned that she can connect to other Asian Americans, or people of Asian descent living in other countries, because they had the "same experiences." Supported by other comments that Jennie mentioned in her video, she was referring to the struggles she has endured because of her racial identity in Western societies. The struggles that YouTubers shared in the tag—relationships with immigrant parents, being othered in school, coping with racialized and gendered stereotypes, identity negotiation—construct the pan-ethnic connections among Asian Americans across different ethnic groups. The GUAA tag has become a space where Asian Americans share their experiences and discover fellow Asian Americans who have had similar experiences, which allows pan-ethnic reflexive racialization.

YouTube and Formation of Networked Counterpublics

Whereas I focused on the overall flow of counterdiscourses formed by the tag videos earlier, in this section, I analyze how the unique technological and cultural traits of YouTube have shaped the discourse and presentation of the tag. I found that the attention economy on YouTube and the unique format of the tag within an audiovisual medium impact the counterpublic discourses of the tag.

YouTube Attention Economy

Unlike in the development of most Twitter networked counterpublics, the counterpublic around the GUAA tag does not have a specific political event that triggered the creation of the tag. Instead, many Asian American YouTubers mentioned that they decided to make the tag video after being inspired by Amy Lee, the creator of the tag. Because the creator and early participants were microcelebrities, the overall tone and mode of communication have gone on to heavily lean on the common grammar of the attention economy.

Asian American YouTubers seem to be conscious of a need to entertain and connect with their viewers on a personal level. All YouTubers use regular beginning and ending remarks, such as "Hello everyone, welcome back to my channel. Today I am going to talk about. . ." and "Hope you liked this video, please give me thumbs up" in their typical introductions and closings. Some YouTubers not only answer the questions of the tag, but also put on their makeup while filming the video. This is consistent with a common YouTube video genre called "Get Ready With Me," in which YouTubers put on their makeup and casually talk about their makeup routine and daily life. The GUAA YouTubers freely switch between explaining their makeup process and answering the questions of the tag. This performance adds an element of intimacy, putting audiences in affective proximity with a YouTuber. During the video, participants reveal their bare face and their specific technique of putting on makeup, something often considered highly private.

Closeness is also invited in other ways that draw on affective communication. For example, GUAA YouTubers are not hesitant to show their raw emotions of sadness, gratefulness, or even anger. Intimacy

is also fostered by GUAA tag videos that adopt a vlog style—talking directly to the camera without lots of edits (Burgess & Green, 2009). Viewers see and hear YouTubers talking about their personal experiences as Asian Americans in a manner that does not seem to be scripted or highly edited. Given that most viewers likely have already followed the YouTubers and have an established rapport, the viewing adds another layer of affinity.

The familiarity of the dominant narratives of the tag—devoted immigrant parents, lunch box racisms, model minority stereotype—also plays a role. These narratives are in fact widely shared struggles among Asian Americans, even outside YouTube. Within the attention economy of YouTube, this familiar script of Asian American experiences delivered in this manner functions as an "emotional hook," drawing the attention and sensibility of audience members (Balance, 2012). One of the YouTubers explicitly said in the video that she made this "intimate video" because she wants to be "relatable" to her viewers by telling her personal experiences through the GUAA tag. By resonating with many Asian American viewers' and YouTubers' experiences, the script produces affective relationships between the viewers and the YouTube tag producers.

While the tag videos are highly intimate and affective, because the tag is nevertheless circulated in the content that YouTuber microcelebrities produce, the political stakes of the tag come into question. As part of a video created to entertain viewers and increase visibility for their YouTube channel as a brand, the discourses of the tag do not make specific political demands or offer "radical" solutions to structural racism. The discourses instead have been shaped by the ecology of microcelebrity culture, where resilient, independent, and successful women are portrayed as ideal (Banet-Weiser, 2012). To pursue the ideal, YouTubers are allowed to share their personal stories to relate to their viewers, but are compelled to express them in terms of demonstrating their resilience, positive mindset, and stories of overcoming adversity. Thus, the contents of the tag tend to stay at a relatively moderate, less political level. Rather than explicitly mentioning White supremacy or structural racism, they pivot to statements such as "Kids can be mean," attributing arguably racist experiences to the disposition of individuals.

The GUAA tag has a standardized nine-question format that could, in its structure and framing, foster the generation of a certain type of narrative. Early in the questions, it asks, "What is the first experience where you felt the demarcation of being a minority/different?" and "Were you always proud of your heritage, or was there a time you rejected it?" These questions prompt talk of previous experiences of racism and self-hatred, and many YouTubers naturally talk about school bullying, or lunch box racism that happened in their childhood. These hurtful memories are then resolved by later questions—such as, "How do you feel about your heritage now?" and "What is your favorite thing about being Asian American/your heritage?"—which prompt YouTubers to give positive and more contemporary answers. This flow of questions could frame the racism that Asian Americans face every day as merely a hurtful memory, now gone because of the YouTubers' different mindset. Thus, the flow of the questions could contribute to forming an individualized success story in terms of coping with racism, one where racism was overcome through positivity and pride in heritage. Individualized success does not require the organization of people to form collective actions asking for justice from a system that reproduces everyday racism. The YouTuber response stories can be inspirational in cases in which one could simply change from a mindset of self-hatred to one

of cultural pride in fighting back racism. But they also suggest that, if one cannot change his or her mind, the individual is at fault rather than a government and culture that perpetuate racism.

Intersectionality in the Growing Up Asian American Tag

Even with its limitations, the nine-question structure still helps to enrich the intragroup conversation. Because everyone responds to the same set of questions, it allows for the discovery of intragroup differences within Asian Americans, such as ethnic hierarchies or racial variation—for example, the struggles of biracial individuals. The combination of the tag video format and the audiovisual components unique to YouTube enables participants to construct rich counterpublic discourses that reflect the intersectionality of Asian American identity.

Using the GUAA video tag, YouTubers of Southeast Asian descent, including people of Indonesian, Filipino, and Vietnamese descent, have shared experiences distinct from those early tag creators who were primarily of East Asian American descent. Several YouTubers of Southeast Asian descent say that they never suffered the effects of the model minority myth that many East Asian American YouTubers mentioned in their videos. When quoting a famous stand-up comedy show by Ali Wong, Cassie noted different "categories" of Asians:

> In her stand-up, she describes two types of Asians: the fancy Asians and the jungle Asians. And the Filipinos, in her, like, categories, are jungle Asians, along with, like, Vietnamese . . . and then the fancy Asians are Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. So, being a jungle Asian, which I think is so funny, I actually don't feel a stereotype pressure to be like super smart or anything.

Similarly, YouTuber Rachel shared her experience of being looked down on by Taiwanese Americans:

> This kid just moved to America from Taiwan, and he had a lot to say about Filipinos, calling us the dirty Asians, low-class Asians, third-class Asians, how his maid in Taiwan was Filipino and that was all Filipinos were good for.

The categories of "fancy Asian," "jungle Asian," and "low-class Asian," mentioned in Cassie's and Rachel's videos, illustrate the informal hierarchy mentioned by Park (2008), which references the cultural and economic power that East Asian groups have compared with other groups of Asian Americans. Historically, at the point of immigration, Southeast Asian immigrants had a relatively low level of education and bore emotional and physical trauma as war refugees, whereas East Asian immigrants held relatively high levels of education because of immigration restrictions (Okamoto, 2003). Refugee immigrants were pressured to identify themselves within the already institutionalized pan-ethnic category of Asian American, despite the vast differences between themselves and other groups (Espiritu, 1992). The historical course of immigration and international relations collectively created differences in culture and economic power among Asian American groups. Despite actual differences, the prevalent assumption of high achievement for Asian Americans in education creates a blind spot for recognizing Southeast Asian students who need support.

The lack of policies and educational support for Southeast Asian students in the U.S. reported in one study (Yang, 2004) can be attributed to the U.S. government's lumping of Asian Americans into one group believed to be a model minority. The study shows that the lack of recognition of multiplicities in Asian American groups could perpetuate a skewed system.

Even within a group that shares national heritage, prejudice and stereotyping can exist. Sarah once felt embarrassed to disclose her ethnic identity as Taishanese to her other Chinese friends; rather, she wanted to identify under the broader umbrella of Asian American because of the stigma the ethnicity carries:

> I felt ashamed of being Taishanese just because, like, there was always the stigma of Taishanese being, like, the dirty people. . . . It was not a type of Chinese to be proud of, so I always still wanted to be Asian because I genuinely loved being Asian, but what I was not proud of was being Taishanese.

Taishanese speakers who immigrated to the U.S. have been stigmatized as "uneducated" and "rural" because the region Taishan, Guangdong, is rural, most of the economy centers on agriculture and farming, and less educational opportunity is available (Chen & Leung, 2017). Sarah shared the memory that her Cantonese-speaking friend from Hong Kong judged her Taishanese, saying Sarah speaks a "different Cantonese" than she: "Your Cantonese sucks, you speak with an accent." Represented by language, Sarah said she read the entitlement of her friend as belonging to "city people," while she was ashamed of her ethnic dialect, implying less education and nonnormativity. These examples shared by YouTubers illustrate that the experiences of Asian Americans are determined by a complex intersection of class, ethnicity, and national origin, which requires multiple voices to represent the standpoint of many marginalized group members.

Leveraging the audiovisual nature of YouTube, GUAA tag participants help to debunk the mainstream myth typically expressed in a "visual culture of race" (Nakamura, 2002, p. 79), which refers to a dependency on visuality as a standard to judge racial and ethnic identity. Biracial Asian Americans' participation in the tag exposes this visual culture of race that oppresses them, intertwined with the limited representation of Asian Americans. A Filipino American YouTuber, Cassie, expressed concern about identifying as Asian American, saying she doesn't "look" Asian as a biracial individual who is half Filipino and half Black.

> I used to straighten my hair all the time so I definitely looked more Asian. . . . It's especially weird [making the tag video] because I am mixed, so that's an awkward thing for me because while I am mixed, I'm half Black . . . I feel like people might get offended that I'm claiming to just be Asian American, Filipino American but that's just the fact.

Fully conscious of her appearance to viewers, Cassie was very cautious about presenting herself as Asian American. The usage of words like "Look more Asian" implies a fixed "Asian-looking" prototype, limited imagery of Asian American identity that only centers people of East Asian descent. Many other biracial Asian American YouTubers, who specifically noted that they have a "nonconventional-looking" appearance for

either a racial category of Asian or specific ethnicity, shared their stories of misidentification of their race and ethnicity.

This discussion about the visuality of Asian Americans through embodied communication on YouTube can raise awareness of fallacies present in visual culture and the limited representation of Asian Americans in media. By actively identifying themselves and sharing experiences as Asian Americans, in ways both similar to and different from other Asian Americans, biracial Asian Americans contribute to the deconstruction of preimposed racial boundaries. Presenting themselves to viewers with their bodies and voices, Asian American YouTubers express their rich, heterogeneous, and intersectional identity, one that cannot be reduced to a single monolithic media portrayal.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has presented the unique traits of the networked counterpublic on YouTube through a case study of the GUAA tag, specifically looking at how members negotiate the culture of YouTube in the course of this construction. Through their participation, members uniquely use the script of Asian American identity and history, as well as the grammar of microcelebrity culture, such as employing a vlog format, to make their tag videos and entertain viewers. This participation allows counterpublic discourses to be affective and intimate. Following microcelebrity rules, several participants purposefully made videos to promote their brand and to relate to their viewers by sharing personal memories. The contents of the tag were diverse, but I also found that these discourses tended to be soft by not explicitly calling out White supremacy and structural racism. The individual emphasis in the flow of the set of questions in the tag suggested an individualized approach to overcoming narratives of racism.

However, the GUAA tag also allows YouTubers to collectively share their mundane experiences of everyday racisms through discourses that otherwise would not have been shared publicly. Everyday stories show that the marginality of Asian Americans extends beyond explicit violence, presenting itself in various aspects of their lives, including their relationships with parents, school experiences, body perceptions, and so on. Racial minorities are typically dehumanized and marked as nonnormative in White-dominated societies, but through the tag, Asian Americans have the opportunity to articulate their experiences from their perspective. Discovering other Asian American individuals who have had similar experiences, YouTubers in the tag found validation, felt solidarity, and located a sense of belonging through what has been called "reflexive racialization" (Parker & Song, 2006, p. 575). The participants may have been motivated to make the tag video for their self-brand, yet in effect, they are creating a distinct counterpublic space for Asian American YouTubers.

This networked counterpublic also uniquely fosters intragroup conversations enriched by the presence of members of various ethnic and racial subgroups; these include biracial Asian Americans, who have not been given many opportunities for representation, either in mainstream media or on YouTube, or even within the Asian American grouping. In particular, stories from YouTubers of Southeast Asian descent and Asian American biracial individuals disclosed the widely shared visual culture of race, and the dominance of East Asians within the Asian American group. People outside monoracial East Asian descent find it difficult to even claim their identity as Asian American because they are located outside the limited imagery depicting

Asian Americans accessible to most outgroup members. Some YouTubers of Southeast Asian descent even mentioned they were discriminated against by people of East Asian descent because they are not thought to be the "same Asians." This phenomenon shows how members of a racial counterpublic can be fragmented, intersectional, and both privileged and oppressed (Kuo, 2018).

However, the revealing of dissimilarities among different groups, rather than undermining group unification, can strengthen the identity claims that YouTubers make as Asian Americans. Intragroup difference within Asian American identity stems from its coalition history as a socially constructed entity created by various ethnic groups who built a community to resist racial oppression and state political demands of the U.S. government. The GUAA YouTube tag videos, by diverse voices, have demonstrated the potential to raise the awareness of internal differences among in-group members based on the intersection of ethnicity, class, and/or education of each individual. To out-group members, this could debunk racial lumping and the limited representation by mainstream media, which has portrayed Asian Americans as a monolithic group. As Nakamura (2002) says, deconstructing the link between the biological body and race could let the participants, including viewers and YouTubers, think about racial identity in "the realm of the cultural, political, and geographical" (p. 81). YouTube allows embodied communication, so YouTubers deliver their messages through their voices and bodies and contribute to exposing the myth of the visual culture of race, which itself has become a part of their counterpublic discourses. The grammar of microcelebrities and stereotypical racial scripts of Asian Americans attract viewers to YouTube within a context of an attention economy, and this might limit the ability of counterpublic discourses to be more critical of structural racism. However, I also found that YouTube could still serve as a powerful tool for members of this Asian American counterpublic, allowing them affective community, visibility, and identity claims as an intersectional and heterogeneous group.

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