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The Race Talk on Reddit: “China Virus” and its Effect on Asian-Americans

“The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus! We will be stronger than ever before!” (Trump Mar 16, 2020).

1. INTRODUCTION

As news of the rapid rise in deaths due to the coronavirus first trickled into the U.S. just after the Lunar New Year, concern mounted with the possible looming threat of a “China virus” or the “Wuhan virus.” The World Health Organization (WHO) soon released updated information about the disease with a new name, *coronavirus*, which was assigned according to its crown-like shape, and then renamed it COVID-19 in February, as a means to avoid association to any “geographical location, an animal, [or] an individual or group of people” as per WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus's explanation in a media briefing (WHO 2020). Despite these efforts to remove a sense of associated threat between the virus and the Chinese people, President Donald Trump’s tweet on March 16, 2020 revived the usage of incriminating language that points blame to the Chinese people while simultaneously striking a border between the “we” of Americans and the Chinese.

In response, various news articles were released to address the rising state of rampant xenophobia across the U.S. against Asian-Americans and how the renewal of terminology of the pandemic by the head figure of the U.S. further spurred discrimination and violence. As Emily Liu from *CNN* reports on April 11th, various cases of anti-Asian violence erupted after the continued use of “China virus” and “Wuhan virus” by government officials in public statements. She presents several cases of hate crimes and open antagonization of Asian-Americans and states that specifically “the word choice puts the Asian community at risk” (Liu 2020). Several other newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, as well as Asian news platforms such as *The Japan Times* all report a rise in xenophobia that escalates to crime and discrimination against Asians in public. As Liu suspects, there does seem to be a direct connection between the terms used to refer to the pandemic that incriminate a specific population

as a source of disease and ostracization of that targeted group. As seen in literature regarding past pandemics, there is a continuing pattern of hate and prejudice following language that mentions specific locations or people.

However, as the influence of language to catalyze xenophobic behavior is established, how does the Asian-American population, as a mix of the “we” Trump identifies and the “other” of the Asian population, interpret and digest these incriminating terms? Particularly, how do they perceive the controversial naming of COVID-19 and how does that influence the formation of social groups within the ethnicity? Do Asian-Americans also perceive a sense of aversion towards those who are more closely aligned to the “other” of China such as Chinese immigrants or those who reside in China? Investigating this possible effect of the language of COVID-19 on perceptions of social groups within Asian-Americans themselves will reveal the power language holds on differentiation of social groups. Understanding the levels of discrimination Asian-Americans experience and practice themselves will aid in awareness of such prejudice and hopefully the reduction of such practices in the future. Throughout the many crises of 2020, this study intends to garner awareness of the social impact of language use and highlight the importance of exercising care in words spoken.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Spanish Flu

The Spanish Flu of 1918 serves as a significant comparison in which a disease was similarly labeled with a particular population in mind. As with COVID-19, works on the language surrounding the Spanish Flu present a precedence in xenophobia arising from the rhetoric of a pandemic.

For example, Hoppe (2018) investigates whether fear of a certain population is truly irrational and also delves into how persistent xenophobia is despite contradicting evidence. In approaching the phenomenon of xenophobia, Hoppe turns towards analysis of the media and their methods of reporting the pandemic as the primary means of relaying information to the public and therefore the main influencer of public perceptions and opinions. He notes that although “early coverage typically emphasizes the threat of contagion,” “subsequent reporting aims to reassure the public that the threat will be contained” by “associate[ing] the epidemic with foreigners or a foreign country.” He then presents xenophobia itself as a rhetorical strategy in

which “naming [is]... a social production that reflects complex social realities and politics” (2018:1463). The transition from possible local threats to framing a foreign country as a source of danger shifts blame and culpability to foreigners and perceived members of that foreign nationality. Likewise, the label of “Wuhan virus” exemplifies Hoppe’s concept in which the coronavirus is given a foreign name, framing the Chinese and the generalized Asian-American population as source of the disease. President Trump’s rhetoric on social media of the “Chinese virus” further exacerbates this effect by broadening the scope of targeted foreignness to a whole ethnicity rather than a particular region which catalyzes the generalization of populations to be blamed. Hoppe’s analysis of the media’s rhetoric in times of a pandemic highlight the importance and influence naming choices have on people’s perceptions and acceptance of certain social groups.

Stemming from these theoretical explanations of the effects of the language regarding the Spanish Flu, various cases of fear-based discrimination and prejudice sprouted. Kraut (2010) reviews cases of fear against certain groups, specifically immigrants or “newcomers,” during rampant disease or epidemics and subsequent discriminatory behavior. Kraut notes the power of language in propelling the height of xenophobia through the case of the Spanish influenza. He introduces controversy over the naming of the Spanish Flu and its perceived origins with speculations at the time of it being a disease purposely spread by the German government. Though this seemed to have more localized rather than nationwide effects on immigrants themselves, being foreign-born was still “stigmatized as disease-carrying” and was considered a “genre of nativist rhetoric.” This sentiment resulted in ostracizing behavior such as dropping “German-language classes from school curricula,” and “some fearful immigrants anglicized German-sounding names” (2010:126). The perception of Americanism and national pride from perceived enemy forces in the origins of the name conjured perceptions of difference and ostracization against German immigrants and associated German cultural features.

2.2. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

However, the 2003 Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) pandemic truly embodies a parallel to COVID-19 in terms of beginning outbreak and incriminated population. Various works regarding SARS also focus on the language used in media to refer to the pandemic and its resulting influence on the Chinese population. These studies present evidence

of naming and language affecting the Chinese and Asian-Americans themselves, serving as guides for this study.

In particular, Eichelberger (2007) conducted interviews in New York City's Chinatown on Asian-Americans' opinions on the handling of SARS in the media at the time. Because of parallel situations between SARS and COVID-19, such as a huge fall in business for Chinese restaurants because of the connection between Chinese food culture and the disease as well as general avoidance of the Chinese, Eichelberger's work mirrors this study and provides significant precedence for the phenomenon I am studying. She interviews the Chinese at the heart of falling businesses, and many interviewees blamed the media for the framing of the disease that led to stigmatization and rumors (Eichelberger 2007). They also explained how the stigmatization affected their perceptions of being Asian and Asianness itself with subconscious efforts to be seen as "clean." Although no one avoided at-risk demographic individuals such as the elderly or children, there was a clear identification of "recent immigrants as at-risk and potentially contagious, even with the absence of symptoms" (2007:1290-91). These results present how framing of China in the media influenced perceptions of groups that come from that perceived source of disease, even within the ethnicity. The social group of the fresh immigrant was differentiated from Americanized immigrants.

Furthermore, Eichelberger's results present a direct example of my hypothesis and predictions for this study, as she also covers how the Chinese themselves were influenced by the rhetoric of SARS coverage. She interviews younger Chinese-Americans such as Andrew who explains that, after the pandemic, he "won't fly back to Asia. Because [he] think[s] China is a very dirty country" and Matthew who states that "certain parts [of Chinatown] are very dirty" (2007:1292). Through these statements of a perceived dirtiness in mainland China and in its ethnic enclave in NYC, the framing of China in referral to the pandemic is seen to influence Chinese-Americans themselves in their perceptions of the country and its culture. The incrimination of China and those associated to China through media coverage of the pandemic influenced those within the ethnicity itself in which Chinese-Americans internalize the perceived uncleanness of their own ethnicity. This influence then connects to determination of social groups with Matthew's next comments of how "the recent immigrants... are really, really, really dirty... [and] they don't really care about sanitation and stuff" (2007:1293). This transcription embodies the influence of the language used to refer to the pandemic on the creation of social

groups in which Chinese immigrants are differentiated from Chinese-Americans. The perception of this social group is then affected where immigrants are characterized with the dirtiness of the pandemic itself, directly exemplifying my hypothesis for how the language of COVID-19 is currently affecting Chinese-American perceptions.

To further cement Eichelberger's study, Oh and Zhou (2012) analyze a Canadian Chinese newspaper, the *World Journal*, and compare it to a Toronto newspaper, the *Toronto Star*, touching upon the perception of Asian framing for the Asian population. Both newspapers presented similar frames and focused on responsibility and risk, though the *World Journal* focused more on risk than responsibility compared to the *Toronto Star* that presented the opposite. For instances that do include mentions of responsibility for the pandemic, the *Toronto Star* "blamed Canadian governmental officials 77.5% and China or Chinese Canadians only 22.4%" whereas the *World Journal* "blamed China or Chinese Canadians 73.4% of the time it used the responsibility frame" (2012:269). The Chinese papers openly blamed China itself or Chinese-Canadians for the spread of the disease while the Toronto paper was more careful to not point fingers. Though it is not clear as to whether the naming caused this result, this study establishes a precedent of shaming within the ethnicity for a disease and differentiation between certain groups within the ethnicity. Especially as this study focuses on a country other than the U.S., it provides an alternative parallel to the social blaming and ostracization seen in Eichelberger's study, solidifying the prevalence of incrimination of China and the Chinese even within the ethnicity.

2.3. Ebola Virus Disease

Although the Ebola pandemic of 2014 does not refer to a specific ethnicity in its rhetoric, it does reference its theorized location of origin in the Democratic Republic of Congo which links perceptions of the disease to images of Africa. With similar investigations of how the naming of the pandemic influences black individuals in the U.S., many works regarding Ebola introduce methodology that align with those of this study due to the more recent timeline.

For example, Odlum and Yoon (2015) take samples from the social media platform, Twitter, to grasp the public's perception of Ebola. Although trends of fear appeared, the study found a greater prominence of compassion tweets of praying for certain areas which presents a possible alternative to the xenophobic reactions and discrimination that appeared in other studies

(2015). However, this result may also be due to the limited length of a tweet that does not allow for expansion on certain fears and perceptions of the disease. Furthermore, as a study that is also on social media, Odlum and Yoon use the hashtag system on Twitter to collect samples of tweets from chosen keywords, which mirrors the methodology I plan to employ (2015). This precedence supports the legitimacy and effectiveness of my methods as a past example of a successful study. Likewise, Seltzer et al. (2015) conducted the same corpus study on Instagram and Flickr, using hashtags to gather samples of photos from keywords to grasp a sense of public perceptions of Ebola. The 1% of photos they gathered, although small in sample, also featured many posts on prayers for affected areas (Seltzer et al. 2015). Although photos differ in analysis from discourse such as tweets, the methodology still aligns with this study's proposed methods, presenting an additional study that utilized hashtags to gather data. The results also further present a more positive outlook on the public's approach towards the disease.

3. THEORY

In order to fully grasp the possible influence of the language of COVID-19, some foundational theory will aid in a more thorough analysis of the impact of the rhetoric. Horn (2006) explains *implicature* or the hidden meaning behind words beyond their literal interpretations. He reviews several sub-types, but this study will use the two main categories of *conversational implicature*, where underlying meaning is inferred from the context of the words, and *conventional implicature*, which is the literal meaning of the words.

- (1) b. [in a recommendation letter for a philosophy position]
 Jones dresses well and writes grammatical English.
 b'. Jones is no good at philosophy.
 (Horn 2006:4)

Horn presents this example to display the difference between conventional and conversational implicature. The conventional implicature is that "Jones dresses well and writes grammatical English." However, based on the context that this statement comes from a recommendation letter for a position in philosophy, there is a conversational implicature that Jones is not good at philosophy. The context added to the literal meaning or the conventional implicature, and the inclusion of Jones' qualities that are unrelated to philosophy suggested an underlying meaning or the conversational implicature that he does not have skills that do apply to the philosophy position.

Furthermore, in Kraut's (2010) findings, despite the literal meaning or conventional implicature of Spanish Flu that seems to frame the Spanish, underlying conversational implicatures of possible German sabotage arose due to the context of political friction between Germany and the U.S. at the time, resulting in subsequent rejection of those outside of the bubble of nationalism. There was implied meaning behind the name that was based off of the sociopolitical situation at the time. This concept can then be applied to the posts on COVID-19 and its various names to investigate how people are intaking and using literal and implied meanings of the labels. For my methods of analyzing Reddit posts, replies to posts and comments on posts present conversations between Reddit users, and individual posts are also included. Both conventional and conversational implicatures will aid in thorough analysis of all possible perceptions regarding the terminology of COVID-19 throughout these different types of posts.

4. METHODS

For this study, I gathered data and samples from Reddit where posts allow for enough space to flesh out opinions, and the option of anonymity allows for more honest statements. To do this, I used the Asian American subreddit to conduct my search. This thread is moderated to maintain the authenticity of an Asian-American community, presenting samples of opinions from the specific group I am focusing on. As with many of the Ebola studies, I used the keywords, "China," "Chinese," "Wuhan," and "Virus," to gather samples of various posts regarding COVID-19 and associated cases of xenophobia, paying particularly close attention to posts that directly address the language used to speak about the pandemic. In order to determine the extent of how much this gathered sample represents the population, I used the Reddit API and Python to gather data on the amount of "up-votes" each post has, and I chose the top 10 posts for each keyword from the past year. The number of up-votes or down-votes indicate the rate of how widespread the post is, so posts with comparatively larger numbers of reactions will be representative of more commonly read opinions. As up-votes and down-cotes on Reddit are commonly used to agree or disagree with posts, similar to the "like" button on Facebook, the posts with the most up-votes will be used as representatives of popular Asian-American opinions. Alternatively, comments that are hidden from a large number of downvotes will also be considered as significant opinions that many members of the Asian-American community

disagree with. Posts that appear in multiple keyword searches were counted once and were placed into the keyword category where they ranked the highest. Posts in the top ten list that did not address the topic of discussion or did not have comments were omitted.

I performed discourse analyses to gain a sense of Asian-American perceptions on the terminology surrounding the pandemic and any possible distinctions between the three social groups of Chinese-Americans, Chinese immigrants, and mainland Chinese people. The theory of implicatures will also be used here to determine if there are any underlying meanings in the posts and the replies or comments on those posts. In particular, I noted repeated usage of one or several of the key terms and mentions of any of the three social groups listed. In light of the positive social media reactions in the Ebola studies, I also noted posts that include prayers or criticisms of the keywords and the terms they use to speak about the pandemic to understand how those advocating against the discrimination of social groups are interacting with the pandemic's framing language.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The majority of the posts within each of these keyword searches were centered around the issue of COVID-19 and the rise of xenophobia. Although not all of these posts refer directly to the naming of the pandemic, there are various themes that appear throughout the discussions: perceptions of China's "exotic" food culture, reactions to Donald Trump's rhetoric, anti-China or anti-Communist Party of China (CCP) sentiments, and direct conversations about the naming of COVID-19. These themes speak to common perceptions the Asian American community have about the language and create a comprehensive representation of how members of the community are interacting with the pandemic and specifically its controversial naming. Also, throughout these themes, users collectively grappled with conflicting Asian and American identities as well as shifting allegiances between these two social groups.

5.1. China's "Exotic" Food Culture

Many posts and comments throughout these keyword searches reference Chinese food culture with criticisms of its perceived exoticness and associated unsanitary nature. As seen in Eichelberger (2007), blame on China's "strange" food habits previously arose during the SARs pandemic. As COVID-19 was also rumored to have arisen from the wet markets of Wuhan, the

discussions revolving around China's food culture from the past year are also associated with the pandemic and contribute to a representation of Asian-Americans' perceptions of China after the influence of media posts about the pandemic.

Table 1. Posts addressing China's "exotic" food culture

Keyword	Rank #	Title	Score	Upvote %
"China"	#6	"DAE struggle with compartmentalizing anti China sentiment from anti Asian sentiment?"	40	81%
"China"	#9	"Bill Maher Goes on Despicably Racist Rant Against China Over Coronavirus"	264	89%
"Wuhan"	#8	"The West Blames the Wuhan Coronavirus on China's Love of Eating Wild Animals. The Truth Is More Complex"	46	88%
"Virus"	#13	"Photo of Trump remarks shows 'corona' crossed out and replaced with 'Chinese' virus"	217	97%

Under the search for "China," the sixth most popular post titled, "DAE struggle with compartmentalizing anti China sentiment from anti Asian sentiment?" spoke about the difficulties of "defend[ing] communist China in order to protect Asian Americans from racism." In context with the timing of early June right in the midst of quarantine, this post speaks to heightened senses of racism and China vs. America friction that is associated with the rise in xenophobia during the pandemic. A commenter on the post echoes this sentiment.

(2) "Go to any "mainstream" part of reddit, find a China related post and look at the comments. It won't be long before you see "fuck China", "China is asshole", "China is asshole" (which is racist mockery of Chinese dialects/accents), "Chinese culture is fucked up", "China should stop eating wild animals", etc. etc."¹

With a score of 35, Commenter (2) presents a relatively popular opinion in the post. In its conventional implicature, this commenter identifies the anti-China rhetoric that exists across social media platforms, but specifically connects this attitude to attacks on Chinese culture.

¹ The original spelling and phrasing of the comments are preserved in the interests of maintaining the authenticity of the discourse.

Through context of how the COVID-19 pandemic also was sourced through Wuhan's alleged "bat-consuming" culture with precedents of scrutiny on the food habits of China, the comment presents the conversational implicature of Asian-American acknowledgement of how Chinese culture is negatively presented in social media through stereotypes, applying to this specific pandemic as well.

Furthermore, the ninth post in this keyword search, titled "Bill Maher Goes on Despicably Racist Rant Against China Over Coronavirus," includes an interview in which Bill Maher defends the usage of the "Chinese Virus" because of its origins in Chinese food culture, effectively linking the naming of the pandemic to Chinese culture as a whole. A commenter in this thread repeats this rhetoric.

(3) "... i meant, what's wrong with him telling chinese not to eat wild shit?"

Commenter (3) conventionally points clear blame to the Chinese as a collective point of fault for the creation of the pandemic due to their food culture regardless of how the Chinese also exist in America, presenting a case of a member of this Asian-American subreddit defending the use of the nomenclature and criticisms against China. In its conversational implicature, this commenter's use of "the Chinese" places a difference between themselves and the ethnicity which paints the Chinese as a separate, outside group with faults in their culture despite how the naming is also influencing Asian-Americans as a whole. However, since this comment is hidden with a score of -10, many members of this subreddit also disagree with the division and shaming that the commenter presents which portrays a range of perspectives in the Asian-American community that reproduce and refute the discrimination in the naming of the pandemic.

For example, the eighth post in the search for "Wuhan," titled "The West Blames the Wuhan Coronavirus on China's Love of Eating Wild Animals. The Truth Is More Complex," presents comments that directly refute the shaming of Chinese food habits.

(4) "As one Twitter user pu//t it: it's completely insane how the wuhan coronavirus hasn't generated sympathy for the victims or people most at risk but instead spiralled into racist hysterical conspiracy theories about "dirty" chinese people who eat weird food or a victim-blaming mentality."

Commenter (4) displays how the implications of dirtiness and lack of sanitization in Chinese food culture behind specifically the "Wuhan" coronavirus is an inappropriate association where

attacking and shaming a group is prioritized over empathy for that group. They also recognize a connection between the virus and perceptions of “dirtiness” in the Chinese and following racism which provides insight into how Asian-Americans are digesting the relationship between the pandemic and images of certain ethnicities. Despite this comment’s conventional implicature of criticism of racism and discrimination from the pandemic, the conversational meaning behind the user’s mention of “the wuhan coronavirus” presents replication of divisive language and speaks to perceptions of separation from the “them” of the victims. In further support, another commenter on the same post retorts that the shaming of China’s food culture.

- (5) “This is dumb, like Americans don’t shoot and eat their own native wild rodents and mammals. I was just watching some Netflix hunting show where there is literally a section on how to cook beaver tail.”

Commenter (5) specifically separates themselves from Americans here referring to the group with “their,” while comparing the eating habits to reduce controversy over “exotic” food cultures. This comment then presents a different sense of allegiance to social groups as the user does not place themselves within Americans, displaying the shifts in allegiances between Asian and American social groups.

However, despite these supportive viewpoints, opposing, discriminatory opinions also exist in the same post.

- (6) “Eat those wild animals all you want boo boo, but stop selling them in those backwards fucked up markets. I’ve only ever been to the animal markets in Shanghai but those places are fucking filthy from top to bottom. No wonder people are getting sick there.”

Commenter (6) conventionally presents animosity towards the food culture of the area and uses references to experiences in Shanghai to make the claim of lack of sanitation in the food culture. They then state that it would be normal for the virus to be placed there because of the perception of filthiness in the area. Furthermore, in its conversational meaning, the comment directly links disease and a perception of dirtiness in China’s food markets. The use of “those” when referring to locations in China establish a clear boundary between themselves and China, presenting China as an “other.” With a score of 1, the comment does not have major support but represents a faction of Asian-Americans who agree with these divisive sentiments. Likewise, in the search for “Virus,” the thirteenth post, titled “Photo of Trump remarks shows 'corona' crossed out and replaced with 'Chinese' virus,” features a commenter who addresses Chinese food culture in

relation to Donald Trump's othering rhetoric.

(7) "He's fucking race baiting. As much as I wish China stop eating exotic animal. Trump is doing it on purpose."

Commenter (7) mentions exotic food habits as something specifically Chinese, painting a stereotype of the country that aligns with generalization of the culture that is also derived from the nomenclature. Despite its conventional implicature as a criticism of Trump's phrasing and its subsequent blame on a specific race, the conversational meaning of the comments still presents a specific image of the Chinese social group and separates it as a "them" that has strange cultures that should be stopped. The common theme of China's "exotic" food culture then provides a range of Asian-American identity allegiances derived from the language of COVID-19.

5.2. Donald Trump's Phrasing

Stemming from the tweet that sparked this study, many posts and comments also touch upon the theme of Donald Trump's media rhetoric regarding the pandemic. With controversial names that he insists on using that serve as the crux of this study, Reddit users discuss the ethics behind the nomenclature with opinions varying just as with the last theme. Members of the Asian-American subreddit present a spread of viewpoints that also criticize and defend Trump's language.

Table 2. Posts addressing Donald Trump's Phrasing

Keyword	Rank #	Title	Score	Upvote %
"China"	#7	"Trump tells Asian reporter to ask China why people are dying of Coronavirus"	198	98%
"Chinese"	#1	"Trump refers to COVID as 'Chinese virus,' 'kung flu' at Tulsa rally"	475	99%
"Virus"	#9	"Coronavirus: Asian American groups compile hate crime reports as Trump persists in 'Chinese virus' attacks"	328	97%
"Wuhan"	#11	"No doubt about it, Trump is directing the pent up frustration with regards to the Coronavirus towards China, taking all Asian Americans along for the ride"	257	97%

In the search for “China,” the seventh post, titled “Trump tells Asian reporter to ask China why people are dying of Coronavirus,” addresses one of Trump’s incidents of controversial public speaking in which he identifies an Asian-American reporter in the crowd and directs them to China for answers about the pandemic. One of the commenters addresses differences in social groups between ethnicities.

- (8) “An American president asks an American reporter to ask China why Americans are dying. Imagine a foreign country know more about your own people.”

Although the reporter was Asian, Commenter (8) identifies them as American and part of the social category of America. Meanwhile, in its conversational implicature, they also differentiate China from Americans, displaying how those who live in the U.S. are part of a fundamentally different social group from those in China at that moment. While berating Trump for his comments in its conventional meaning, this user also provides underlying insight into the separation between the “us” of Americans and the “them” of China. Likewise, another comment in the same post identifies the prevalence of Asian generalization.

- (9) “I'd invite the Falun Gong-influenced NDTV to these briefings just for Trump go nuts against them, he wouldn't know the difference between any Asian reporter.”

Commenter (9) focuses on the differences between Asian-American ethnicities and how those social groups are perceived as different for the community. This distinction provides a foundation of how ethnicities are fundamentally different within Asian-Americans which refute the generalization of all Asians under the framing of China in the naming of the pandemic.

A majority of the posts and comments present criticisms of Trump’s language as well as support of other Asians, such as the first post in the search for “Chinese,” titled “Trump refers to COVID as 'Chinese virus,' 'kung flu' at Tulsa rally.”

- (10) “To any Asian American who still supports this bastard: hate crimes against Asians are up, partially due to this rhetoric. Even with the best interpretation of his actions, the fact that Trump wants to call COVID-19 the “Chinese Virus” means he is willing to throw Asian Americans under the bus just to jab at China. At best, to him, we are worth sacrificing if it means beating China. And that is the best interpretation of his actions, not the most likely.”

In a case where the conventional and conversational implicatures align, comment (10) recognizes that xenophobia was heightened due to Trump’s naming of the pandemic and particularly acknowledges how the usage of those names translates to sacrificing Asian-Americans as a

whole to attack the perceived enemy of China. The comment presents unifying language with the reference towards all Asian-Americans as those who experience collateral damage in the use of divisive language. With a score of 77, many members of the Asian-American community agree with this statement in which the differences between Asian ethnicities are not significant in the face of collective discrimination. Furthermore, a reply to this comment present further insight into the separation of social groups in American society.

(11) “And, rather importantly, the people who are galvanized by Trump’s rhetoric don’t care if we’re American. They don’t care if we’re not even Chinese.

To them, we are the Chinese Enemy. We will never be Real Americans.”

Commenter (11) continues to conventionally acknowledge that there are differences between the ethnicities as some are not Chinese and are not the subjects of the naming, but because of the generalization of all Asian-Americans, the user recognizes that such differences have little meaning in American society. The conversational implicature in use of “we” then establishes a sense of belonging to the particular group of Asian-American that is neither Chinese nor American as a subject of support.

However, opposing ideas that support Trump’s language and present a clear dichotomy between Americans and the Chinese also appear in this theme. In reply to a comment that expects less Asian voters for the Republican party, a user explains:

(12) “It absolutely isn’t a wake-up call. They blame China for Covid and don’t have a problem with trump blaming it on China. They’re really engrained with the right wing media, so basically they believe all the Fox News bullshit and on top of that blame CCP for everything... it’s hopeless”

Commenter (12) reports how their Chinese parents differentiate between themselves and China and also blame the pandemic directly on China. The score of 31 for this comment represents how other Asian-Americans either agree with this statement or also have parents who hold these sentiments where they are in line with the naming and truly believe that mainland China is at fault. The introduction of an older generation that is less likely to have access to social media such as Reddit portrays the conversational implicature in perceptions of social groups for a different age range of Asian-Americans who propagate hate towards China in the interests of an American identity despite their Asian roots.

In addition, in the search for “Virus,” the ninth post, titled “Coronavirus: Asian American

groups compile hate crime reports as Trump persists in ‘Chinese virus’ attacks,” garnered much attention with Asian-Americans in agreement of how Trump’s naming of the “Chinese virus” are associated to hate crimes. However, as with comments in the “China search,” a hidden comment states:

- (13) “This is America after all. And we are Americans first. A President democratically elected that caters to the nationalist American sentiment of the statistically larger half of all kinds of Americans that voted for him should not have to change his verbiage and hide from an enemy country because it will hurt the sentiment of the Asian-American minority... We are Americans first.”

In another case where the conventional and conversational implicatures coincide, Commenter (13) makes a clear call to the social group they identify with and defends the usage of these specific names because of the differentiation between an “enemy country” and the “we” of America. They paint Asian-Americans as mainly minorities that should prioritize their identities as Americans before their ethnicities as Asians. This commenter presents an example of a member of the Asian-American community who supports the usage of divisive language with COVID-19 in alignment with their own perceptions of difference between identities of Asian and American. However, because this comment was hidden with a score of -49, a large number of people in the community also disagree with the sentiments, representing a spread of takes on the naming of the pandemic.

In the search for “Wuhan,” the eleventh post, titled “No doubt about it, Trump is directing the pent up frustration with regards to the Coronavirus towards China, taking all Asian Americans along for the ride” contains further comments that echo this sentiment. For example, a hidden comment states:

- (14) “Unpopular opinion, but I think his comment was fair given that the Chinese government is trying to blame this on Americans. He didn't direct his comment to Asian Americans. He might be a racist, but what he said doesn't make him a racist.”

In its conventional meaning, Commenter (14) presents a clear dichotomy between Americans and the Chinese government and claims that the naming of the Chinese virus does not reference or influence Asian Americans themselves. Although they speak about how the naming does not reference Asian-Americans directly, the conversational implicature places Asian Americans as part of America and not the government that is attacking Americans because of the lack of distinction of Asian American as a distinct social group. With a score of -24, this is also a

relatively unpopular opinion within the community. In this user's further replies to the thread, they state:

- (15) "Yes, that is unfortunate. But that specific comment he made was a retaliation to China. I wish Chinese government would stfu and stop exasperating situation here for Asian Americans."

Commenter (15), conversationally in its reference to "retaliation to China" and differentiation between China and "Asian Americans," identifies with Asian-Americans as an opposition to the "them" of China as other Asians that are influencing their in-group. However, this comment also has a low score of -14 as a sentiment that members of the community do not disagree with. This user then presents a case of an Asian-American who strikes allegiance with America and Asian-Americans, opposingly scorning the "other" Asians of China.

In this same post, another hidden comment provides similar support of Trump's naming.

- (16) "I don't blame him. They didn't start using the term "Chinese Coronavirus" UNTIL China tried to frame the US Navy for bringing the virus to China, which everyone knows is not true. He's just doing this because China is trying to brand it as an American Coronavirus. That's why he has to emphasize that it's from China, not America."

Commenter (16) also conventionally pivots blame to an out-group of the Chinese by claiming that the naming began with China which would prompt appropriate responses of framing the naming as Chinese. In terms of conversational implicature, the lack of reference to Asian-Americans, discussing the issue with the polarity of Americans versus China, places the user's own allegiance in the American camp. This comment also had a low score of -31, speaking to its lack of popularity amongst other members of the subreddit as an individual case of dichotomization of two social groups.

5.3. Anti-China Sentiment

Following the previous trend in comments, the theme of anti-China sentiments are also prevalent in the posts and comments throughout the four keywords. Pre-existing resentment of China and the Communist Chinese Party (CCP) present a strong influence on Asian-American perceptions of ethnic framing in the language of the pandemic. Likewise, such distaste for China and its government may also arise after the spread of the virus to alter the boundaries of social groups and allegiances to those groups for Asian-Americans.

Table 3. Posts addressing anti-Chinese sentiments

Keyword	Rank #	Title	Score	Upvote %
“China”	#3	“Saying ‘I Hate China’”	271	95%
“China”	#6	“DAE struggle with compartmentalizing anti China sentiment from anti Asian sentiment?”	40	81%
“China”	#11	“‘China poisoned our people.’ Houston Republican congressional candidate Kathleen Wall is making her anti-Chinese platform the center of her campaign”	247	97%

In the search for “China,” the third post itself establishes the extent of anti-China sentiments.

- (17) “Why are there so many people who think saying, “I hate China,” or “Fuck China,” means specifically that they only hate the government and not Chinese people? I encounter so many redditors saying this on every subreddit and it bugs me so much. Everyone who says it or agrees with it seems to justify it by saying the country is somehow distinct from the people but I feel like they have it all wrong. The government is distinct from the people, yes, but the country doesn’t exist without its people. I am Chinese American. I love China and I love America. I hate the CCP and I hate Donald Trump. Those are two entirely different sentences with entirely different meanings and they are both true to me. Making one sentence mean two different things, to me, is just a lazy excuse to justify racist comments and satisfy people who think they’re on ‘our side,’ by supporting democracy and Chinese people at the same time. It’s a non-Asian American’s method of self-gratification at best and a statement in support for xenophobia at worst.”

Post (17) continues to conventionally establish the divisive sentiment between Asian Americans and mainland Chinese people. However, this user presents further evidence with examples of the rhetoric they see around the Reddit forums in the Asian American thread which exemplify the direct antagonism of China and anti-Chinese sentiment within Asian Americans. Considering the context, as the post was uploaded a month ago, being in the midst of the pandemic with the mention of “xenophobia” conversationally suggests association to the anti-China mentality that was birthed through the rhetoric of COVID-19. Although there is no direct connection to the naming of the disease, this post introduces precedents of discriminatory language and its prevalence on Reddit. In further conversational implicatures, the user also provides their own perspective, with the use of “our,” that they consider Asian-American to be its own category that aligns with both China and America that cannot be understood by those outside of the Asian-

American social group.

In response, commenters present their own takes on anti-China sentiments while presenting further examples.

- (18) "I mean, the reality is that some of them do hate the Chinese people. The US administration and media have been stirring up this anti-China pot for years now, and it's taken a hold on the general public. These people don't care to make a difference between the CCP and the Chinese people, and eventually this dehumanization of the Chinese is going to lead to war. I think all of us should prepare ourselves for what's coming and think about what we are to do in that situation."

Commenter (18), in its conventional meaning, proposes that there are Asian Americans who harbor hate towards China. The mention of “dehumanization” presents the conversational implicature that points to the context revolving around the phrasing of COVID-19. The transition from viewing the Chinese as humans to viewing them as collective sources of disease and the pandemic applies to this situation, providing underlying reference to the pandemic and its naming, especially because the user mentions the media. This comment presents another negative outlook on the phrasing of the media in referring to mainland China which also accepts the existence and prevalence of the divide between Asian-Americans and mainland Chinese. With a score of 244, this comment also represents a popular viewpoint in the Asian-American community.

Furthermore, the sixth post in this search about separating anti-China and anti-Asian sentiments, also provides comments that acknowledge anti-China sentiments. One user specifically addresses the rhetoric of anti-China sentiments and how it is perceived.

- (19) “Too many people, including even some Asian people, think that racist rhetoric against China is somehow a victory against the CCP. It's not. It's just going to rile up more people to attack mainland Chinese, HKers, Taiwanese, Japanese, Korean and other Asian and Indigenous American people. When Biden talks about "the Chinese", people aren't going to interpret that as a criticism of authoritarianism, dictatorships or the communist party. That shit puts anyone who could be mistaken as Chinese in danger. Despite not being Chinese I've been treated to racist rhetoric directed against Chinese people, from literally the same people who claimed to be "pro Hong Kong": sad, but not surprising at this point.”

In its conventional meaning, Commenter (19) first identifies observations of Asian people using anti-Chinese rhetoric as an attack on the communist party. They also acknowledge how this language generalizes Asian parties to also be attacked. The reference to Biden’s language of “the Chinese” solidifies this concept of generalization that puts all those perceived as Chinese in

danger. This use of “the Chinese” that also appears in Trump’s language also presents the same effect. The user particularly recognizes a difference between Asian ethnicities by listing examples, but ultimately concludes that such differences would not be apparent for the American people due to generalization of all Asians. By listing the ethnicities, the commenter presents the conversational implicature of a distinction between mainland Chinese, other Asian ethnicities, and Asian-Americans, revealing how the social groups are perceived as different.

In the same post, a user proposes further evidence of discrimination and scorn against the Chinese in direct relation to the pandemic.

- (20) “A lot times anti-China sentiments almost always devolve into anti-Asian sentiments. Remember when that woman pulled the pope’s hand and the pope reacted badly. Reddit was using that incident as an excuse to be racist towards Chinese people. Or that one time someone posted a picture of a Chinese woman sleeping on the airport and taking over like 5 seats. Redditors were saying Chinese are insensitive even though the airport was in Vietnam and there was only one person acting entitled even though there’s like at least 100 other Asians in the picture.

Some HK people are loving this anti-Chinese sentiments as a payback. Some HKer got assaulted in London and she had the audacity to say it was fine cuz they probably thought I was Chinese. Or Joshua Wong constantly trying to associate COVID-19 with Chinese, he even went as far as adopting the alt-right rhetoric and posting memes of Batman signal means dinner is ready in China. Or that even that racist dog-whistle of Covid stands for “Chinese originated virus”.

I defend anti-China (notice I said anti-China but not anti-CCP) because racism towards Chinese means racism towards all Asians. Even as an southeast Asian woman, I was subject to racism directed towards Chinese people. I mean a little 5 years old Burmese boy got his face slashed in broad daylight because of these people.”

In its aligned conventional and conversational implicatures, Commenter (20) directly mentions the naming of COVID-19 and its resulting xenophobic comments and reactions. This user also acknowledges a particular anti-Chinese sentiments with saying they are said to be “insensitive” from other Asian ethnicities and also shows that other Asian-Americans such as Joshua Wong are also accepting this phrasing and using it as humor and signs of disgust. Despite the presence of other Asian ethnicities, the particular against the Chinese presents an elevated awareness of the Chinese and associated antagonism of the ethnicity. However, this user also references their own opinion about how any attack on any Asian ethnicity is an attack on all Asians and how rhetoric against the Chinese is different from language against the communist party. As non-Chinese Asian-American, this commenter represents an example of empathy towards the

Chinese in a collective Asian social group despite her identity as a southeast Asian woman.

Within the search for “China,” the eleventh post, titled “‘China poisoned our people.’ Houston Republican congressional candidate Kathleen Wall is making her anti-Chinese platform the center of her campaign,” also includes comments that express how any language against an Asian ethnicity translates to attacks on all Asians, regardless of any specific anti-China hate.

(21) “There's never a “I mean fuck China not you, I still respect you“, no it doesn't exist at all. When people are sending messages like this, we all know what it means, we all know what it will lead to. A person that says “China poison our people“ is not going to give a shit about Asians.”

Commenter (21) makes a clear differentiation between China and Asian-Americans and acknowledges how the blame on China puts Asian-Americans at risk. They quote common phrases seen in discussions about the pandemic and establish how they generalize Asians from what the user perceives as distinct ethnic groups. Despite these distinctions in its conventional meaning, the commenter, in the conversational implicature of the use of “we,” unifies Asians as a collective that faces the damage of the pandemic’s incriminatory language.

However, there are also comments in this post that propagate differences between Asian ethnicities to justify the use of divisive language.

(22) “I didn watch the video

But the title “China poisoned our people.” is technically true since china CHINA did bring the plague.

Im talking as a country 2nd majority population are chinese, if people failed to make this distinction, is like calling hongkonger and taiwanese. CHINA.”

Commenter (22), in its conventional meaning, attributes blame to China for the spread of the pandemic, and its conversational implicature supplements that sentiment through the friction between China and “our people” that places a difference between the “them” of mainland Chinese and Chinese-Americans. This difference is as apparent to the user as difference between Asian ethnicities as fundamentally separate social groups. The user also defends the usage of incriminating language when speaking about the pandemic as a perceived truth about the out-group of mainland Chinese people. However, this hidden comment has a low score of -9 which presents how members of the subreddit disagree with this viewpoint.

5.4. Addressing the Naming

Throughout the past three themes, many posts and comments revolve around the topic of COVID-19's various names. However, there is also a significant number of users who speak directly to the phrasing of the pandemic and present their opinions on its ethnic framing. These posts provide the clearest representations of how Asian Americans are digesting the language of COVID-19 while also speaking to how boundaries in social groups are determined in relation to these perceptions.

Table 4. Posts addressing the naming of COVID-19

Keyword	Rank #	Title	Score	Upvote %
"China"	#9	"Bill Maher Goes on Despicably Racist Rant Against China Over Coronavirus"	269	89%
"Chinese"	#1	"Trump refers to COVID as 'Chinese virus,' 'kung flu' at Tulsa rally"	467	99%
"Wuhan"	#1	"Sen. Kamala Harris Introduces Resolution: 'Wuhan Virus' Is Anti-Asian"	319	94%
"Wuhan"	#11	"No doubt about it, Trump is directing the pent up frustration with regards to the Coronavirus towards China, taking all Asian Americans along for the ride"	257	97%

Returning to the post regarding Bill Maher's defense of Americans using "the Chinese Virus," a conversation between several users presents several colliding opinions about this very naming. The beginning comment focuses on dissecting Maher's argument with key criticisms of Maher's proposed benefits behind using the incriminating names.

(23) "He presents a completely false dichotomy. His argument centres on the fact that: If we call it the Chinese Virus, we can hold China accountable and save lives.

If we call it Covid-19, we're not holding them accountable and it will cost lives.

I don't see why the name of the virus is particularly important for holding China accountable for its actions, especially when the reasoning for not naming the virus after China came from WHO guidelines set in place in 2015 (years before the virus came about). For god sakes, put sanctions, set higher tariffs whatever, naming the virus the "China Flu/Virus" is so pointless. It achieves nothing in terms of holding a China accountable and is basically akin to petty namecalling (the Trump special I guess).

I also have no idea where Bill gets the idea that calling it the “China Flu” will save lives. If the implication is that playground insults will submit China into better health regulations as opposed to any other tangible actions then he’s wrong. If the implication is that health professionals will somehow benefit (?) then he’s super wrong. Having currently been placed at a hospital, I’ve not seen a single doctor struggle with the current nomenclature.

It also annoys me to no end that people blame wet markets. Wet markets are fucking everywhere in China and are no more dangerous or dirty than some of the fish markets here in Sydney. It’s the regionally isolated selling of exotic wildlife in these wet markets which should be investigated.

Finally, this guy seems to brush past the consequences as if they’re nothing. Completely skimming over the racist-fueled violence against ABCs in the past months as if it’s a necessary means to an ends. Someone needs to link him the incident of the asian woman doused with acid in NY.

Bill just doesn’t understand the cost of aggressive names such as “China Virus” and can barely justify the benefits. What a joke.”

Comment (23), in its conventional implicature, presents criticism on the use of the aforementioned names with a focus on its detriments in racism and its lack of any claimed function from the interview. It also refutes the linked blaming of the wet markets/food culture in China to the pandemic seen in the first theme by presenting the perceived source of the pandemic, wet markets, as something common throughout China and the U.S. with similar levels of dirtiness. In turn, the user points to “reginal selling of exotic wildlife” as a point that requires investigation. In its conventional meaning, the line further refutes Asian food stereotypes by separating the whole ethnicity from the particular area of controversy. However, in its conversational implicature, this separation also conveys a sense of difference between the general Chinese and those in Wuhan and still places a focus and a sense of blame on the problems in the food culture of that area. This speaks to a sense of distance between the user and those in Wuhan at the moment despite intentions to refute the divisive language of the naming.

In reply, a user reviews the possible influence of using the naming along with cases of racism that followed the spread of these terms.

(24) “In terms of your second point, I agree that violence would likely have still occurred even without the “China Flu” bullshit, people would have known it would have come from China regardless of the name attached. BUT, the point of not calling it the “China Flu” is to prevent the escalation of this idea that all Chinese are to blame - an idea which unchecked would cause violence to worsen.

People aren't stupid, the attacks would have occurred regardless, but I have no doubts that the scale to which they are occurring would not be so if the government had provided some coherent voice of condemnation against these actions.”

Commenter (24), in its conventional meaning, provides explanations that, though the naming is most likely not the instigator of xenophobic reactions, the naming did cause an escalation of said responses. They propose that prevention of such naming would have caused a reduction of hate crimes. This comment represents a differing opinion of how the language itself has the influence to aggravate the connection to the Chinese and can be used to control the aggression against generalized Asians in America. In its conversational implicature, the claim that “not calling [the pandemic] the ‘China Flu’ [would] prevent the escalation of the idea that all Chinese are to blame” suggests the possibility that some Chinese may have faults in the situation because of the specific modifier of “all.” This user then has another comment that seems to respond to a reply made from the original commenter that blamed the markets, but that point on markets seems to have been removed by the moderators as material that was deemed inappropriate which may suggest the community’s opposition to the blame on China.

Furthermore, another comment presents the same opinion of preventing the usage of incriminating naming for the sake of battling racist reactions but approaches the topic with more generalized support.

(25) “Lol people need to reaLize not calling it a Wuhan disease isn’t about defending the CCP or how the Chinese government continues to do shady shit. It’s to stop ignorant racists from obtaining more fuel and for the people who want to use fear and anger to manipulate an agenda.

Hate the CCP all you want but don’t be blind to what this is doing to actual people who have little to do or control over what the CCP does.”

Comment (25), in its conventional meaning, supports the past sentiments of how the naming can be used to control xenophobic reactions against generalized Asians. The comment also acknowledges the prevalence of anti-China or anti-CCP sentiments that turn any defense of Asians into a defense of the Chinese government. Also, in its conversational implicature, the reference to those who “have little to do or control over what the CCP does” points to Chinese citizens in the mainland, other Asians, and even Asian Americans who cannot control the actions of the Chinese government. These people are mentioned as one, collective group that suffers

from the racism resulting from the naming, garnering sympathy for a perceived group of allies against the face of xenophobia.

Also, continuing analysis of the post about Trump's use of the "Kung Flu" at a Tulsa Rally, a comment presents an Asian American's opinion on the ethnically framing name.

(26) "I'm Filipino and I thought it was funny. Kung-Fu originated in the Wuhan area, where Covid-19 originated. It's not like he's saying N*gga Flu, the N word is an offensive term that dates back to the oppression. How is Kung-Flu an oppressing/discriminatory word?

And also why are you asking Asian-Americans? My Filipino culture has absolutely nothing to do with Kung-Fu, nor is the language similar. You're stereotyping Asians to be of the same."

In its conventional meaning, commenter (26) presents their perspective as a non-Chinese Asian American with direct support of the incriminating name because of perceived origins of Kung-Fu and the virus in China. The user also directly states a difference in social groups between the Filipinos and Chinese that override the shared identity of "Asian." They do not perceive any connection between themselves and the "other" social group of the Chinese. In its conversational meaning, the comment suggests a lack of sympathy for those who are directly connected to the Kung-Fu stereotype of such as mainland Chinese or Chinese Americans. This exemplifies a perspective within Asian Americans that distances the different Asian ethnicities even in times of collective xenophobia against all Asian Americans.

In the search for "Wuhan," the first post, titled "Sen. Kamala Harris Introduces Resolution: 'Wuhan Virus' Is Anti-Asian," further provides examples of Asian American opinions about controversial naming of the pandemic. One of the most popular comments with a score of 106 states a widely agreed upon perspective in the community.

(27) "It already has a name, so there's no reason to call it the 'Wuhan Virus' or 'Chinese Virus', except to target Chinese people."

Commenter (27), in a conventional implicature, directly states that the ethnically framing names are tools of racism to target a specific group. This statement garnered much support in its upvote ratio to represent a supportive and empathetic perspective that many members of the subreddit agree with. The direct statement also speaks to the user's awareness of the influence the names can have as a way to target certain people. In its conversational meaning, the specific mention of "Chinese people" does not reference the detriments naming has on the generalized Asian

American population which suggests a separation of the Chinese identity from a larger social group of Asian Americans.

However, in opposition a number of hidden comments claim support of the usage of the controversial naming.

(28) “I agree. The very first label for the Virus was very literal in Vietnam / Australia and even China.

The Wuhan Virus ; A virus from the City of Wuhan. It's simple and the most descriptive and effective way to communicate what was happening.

Racism in West has given the term a new context, and it's doesn't really hold the same connotations for most Asians in Asia.

It's purely a superficial western issue. You use the term 'Wuhan Virus' in Asia and nobody will bat an eye let alone call you a racist.

Having said that...i think Kamala Harris' bill is a great thing. I couldn't care less about the term Wuhan Virus though. It's not racist to me. What's racist is acts of violence and intimidation towards Asian Americans, which is what this bill addresses.

Debates about terminology are a waste of time.”

Comment (28) introduces the point that “The Wuhan Virus” was widely used in Asian countries neighboring China as a means of stating the origin of the virus. In its conventional meaning , the user proposes that changing the naming will not have much influence on xenophobic attitudes because the original name only takes on conversational meaning of racism when used in America. The user themselves also conventionally states that the naming is not racist or problematic when used within Asian populations such as Vietnam. However, in its conversational implicature, the user explains that the naming is not a problem for “Asians in Asia,” but does cause racism for “Asian Americans” which establishes a boundary between mainland Asians of their respective countries and Asian Americans. Despite collective Asian identity that is a point of support across nation lines for many users in the subreddit, this comment exemplifies another perspective of separating groups based on country boundaries.

Within the same keyword search, comments in the previously covered eleventh post on Trump’s push for incriminating names introduce a new perspective on the dichotomy of supporting or refuting the nomenclature. A user presents exceptions to appropriate and

inappropriate names for the pandemic.

(29) “From what I've seen, no one seems bothered by Wuhan virus, but 'Chinese virus' is pinning it more on a ethnicity than a place so that's why it bothers people. And it's officially called COVID-19 in and outside the US.”

Commenter (29), in its conventional meaning, makes an interesting proposition that the naming of “Chinese Virus” is more controversial because of its pinning of an entire ethnicity rather than a location. They use the official, non-ethnicity related name of COVID-19, but still present the idea that connection to the Chinese would be inappropriate, giving empathy towards the social group of the Chinese. However, in its conversational implicature, the comment does not give the same sentiments for the specific group of Wuhan residents by considering “Wuhan virus” a name that only frames a specific location. This displays the flexible limits of “in” and “out” groups that are targeted in the nomenclature based on individual determinations of boundaries for their social groups. This user presents “Chinese” as an ethnicity that many people belong to, but differentiates that identity from “Wuhan” and its citizens. As the comment has a score of 44, the comment presents a relatively popular opinion in the subreddit in which members of the group also perceive a difference between the two incriminating names.

6. DISCUSSION

This study, as a corpus of Reddit posts and comments that represents ongoing discussion about the pandemic, takes the social media focuses in the Ebola studies to a comprehensive level with a focus on the current conversation revolving around an issue. It uses a social media platform that allows for longer posts and word-based threads and expands past the analyses in the Ebola studies to investigate the effect of language on certain social groups. With anonymity of Reddit, the posts of this study move beyond supportive prayers on more open social media platforms to include a variety of standpoints on the language of COVID-19 that then speak to treatment and perceptions of the Chinese in comparison to other Asian ethnicities within the Asian-American community.

With the theme of criticizing Chinese “exotic” food culture, comments that propagate the stereotype and use it as a means to justify incriminating language of the pandemic appear throughout the four keyword searches. The results in this section speak to Eichelberger’s study on SARS as they also feature common perceptions of dirtiness from this stereotype and its

association to pandemics. For some users this association then translated into identification as an American rather than an Asian ethnicity, leading to further scrutiny of mainland Chinese and China itself. The data collected through Reddit mirror Eichelberger's findings in Chinatown to create a pattern of ethnic discrimination and its language in instances of widespread disease in which everyone, including Asian-Americans themselves, internalize and propagate discrimination against a perceived source of the pandemic.

Much of the results presented a dichotomy between the framed ethnic group of the Chinese and America. As with Kraut (2010), many users identified a polarity between two main social groups and aligned with one side. In cases of excessive nativity, as with the rejection of all German goods during the Spanish Flu pandemic because of conspiracies that Germany spread the disease, several comments claimed clear American identities before any Asian ethnicity as a priority. This connected to support of divisive language in the naming of COVID-19 which then heightened American patriotism in the face of a common enemy of China. However, the results of this study extend past Kraut's discoveries with the reveal of users who present the Asian-American as its own social group aside from this dichotomy that does not align to either entirely the Chinese or Americans. This particular social group represents a new perspective for younger groups of Asian-Americans on Reddit who find their identity in being specifically Asian-American.

As predicted, there was a significant number of comments that presented divides between Asian ethnicities that are more closely linked to China and Asian-Americans themselves despite shared Asian heritage. In response to the language of COVID-19, many users referred to the "them" of the Chinese and the "us" of Asian-Americans as separate, presenting a clear difference between the two groups. In some comments, this differentiation translated to discrimination against mainland Chinese people and at times, Chinese tourists or immigrants as sources of disease and corruption. However, there was no mention of scrutiny of Chinese-Americans themselves. The distinct social group of Asian-Americans and the influence of the American identity had greater power where Chinese-Americans were not associated with the pandemic but were rather perceived as fellow Asian-Americans who suffered from xenophobia.

In a review of comments directly about the naming, some comments rejected any possible influence in the naming of the pandemic with the reasoning that racism would follow the pandemic even with neutral terminology such as COVID-19. There was also

acknowledgement of the use of the controversial naming in Asian countries with following claims that the names hold conversational implicature of racism in American society of mixed ethnicities. An innovative point of agreement for this theme was in thoughts about the difference between the names with “Chinese Virus” as more offensive compared to “Wuhan virus.” This differentiation established a separation of the Chinese and the specific area of controversy, placing distance from Wuhan residents. However, a great majority of the comments in this section were rebuttals and criticisms of any usage of the ethnically framing names as a simple means of targeting either the Chinese or all Asian Americans.

On the note of collective support, just as many comments presented supportive attitudes that criticized the usage of divisive language. Although many of these users still differentiated between mainland Chinese and Asian-Americans, they also presented the mindset that racism against any Asian group induces danger to all Asians. Regardless of differences between the ethnicities, the Asian identity had a greater influence on these users’ perceptions, translating to overt criticism of any divisive and incriminating language against any Asian group. This viewpoint represents a number of Asian-Americans in the subreddit who identify the naming of COVID-19 as a tool of xenophobia to a collective identity of Asians and those who can be perceived as Asian, speaking to the importance of being wary of ethnic framing in the language of the pandemic.

7. CONCLUSION

In future developments of this research, there are several changes that can be made to fully delve into Asian American opinions about the naming of COVID-19. Although the subreddit is moderated, the anonymity of the posts and comments makes maintaining a purely Asian American sample difficult. Also, the platform of social media limits the age group of Asian Americans to younger generations which neglects representation of older members of the group. Although collection of direct statements through interviews was not a viable option due to the quarantine for the pandemic, inclusion of interviews would supplement the gaps in representation from using Reddit. Also, the sample size of posts and comments can be expanded to more fully represent opinions on the topic as the removal of repeated posts and posts without comment minimized the size of the data. As time passes, more posts and comments will continue to appear, so tracking the discourse over a longer period of time will provide a view into possible

changes in opinion as the pandemic winds down in the U.S.

Review of research on the xenophobia arising from the language and terms used during past pandemics establish patterns of how terminology can incriminate certain ethnicities, but few studies have delved into how members of the framed ethnicities perceive the lexicon.

Investigating the influence on Asian Americans' perceptions and how those changes could possibly affect formation of social groups can provide insight into prevention of further discrimination within the ethnicity. In situations where xenophobic behaviors and violence occur with heightened perceptions of threat and foreignness in the Asian population, reduction of that same apprehensiveness between Asians will help raise support and solidarity. Further evidence of the detriments behind terms that blame specific groups will aid in prevention of such language in future disease outbreaks while increasing a sense of caution and attentiveness when speaking about pandemics. Through this study, I contribute to public awareness of the power of language to influence thought and ultimately actions, but also the importance of taking care in one's words and their effect on others.

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