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# Critical Analysis of Anti-Asian Hate in the News

by

Benardo Douglas Relampagos

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

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## Abstract

Since 2019, the United States has had an increase in violence against Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities along with an increase of mainstream anti-Asian racist rhetoric. Between 2021 and 2022, The Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism reported an overall 164% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes (Report to the Nation, 2021). While racism against black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) communities has been the topic of an ever-growing body of critical discourse, prior to 2019 few publications had addressed racism and injustice regarding language choices and discourse in the context of anti-Asian rhetoric in the US, specifically regarding the intersection of language and anti-Asian sentiment (Chun & Zalokar, 1992; Palumbo-Liu, 2001). The recent increase in violence against Asian Americans has coincided with the discourse of the COVID-19 pandemic and is grounded in the longstanding history of associating Asian immigrants with “disease and filth” (Li & Nicholson, 2020, p. 4), a discourse historically perpetuated in the US press (Li & Nicholson, 2020).

Given the context of increased anti-Asian hate crimes, historically rooted anti-Asian racism and the lack of previous research I found the need to conduct this three-part study that used news article data from the Corona Virus Corpus to analyze metaphor, Theme and Rheme, and transitivity in modern anti-Asian discourse. The first part of this study analyzed metaphors at the intersection of COVID-19 and racism and the role of metaphor in anti-Asian rhetoric. In the second part of this study, I created a sub corpus of 100 news articles written about the March 16, 2021 murder of six Asian women in Atlanta, GA (Davies). I

examined articles for Theme and Rheme to determine how corporate news media emphasized specific information regarding the shooting. Then I used a transitivity analysis to identify how corporate news media framed the racialized victims vs. the alleged killer through the use of marked lexical and thematic choices. This analysis helped uncover the intersection between metaphor and anti-Asian hate as well as how marked grammatical choices such as nominalization and passivation helped obfuscate the agency of the perpetrator and dehumanize the victims of the March 16 shooting. The study explores 1) how historically, news media has been the main medium of disseminating racism against Asians in the American context, and 2) the importance for linguists to continually investigate historicized racism in corporate media.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

Since 2019 in the United States, violence against Asians has increased along with an increase of mainstream anti-Asian racist rhetoric. The Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism reported an overall 164% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes between 2020 and 2021 (Report to the Nation, 2021). US news coverage of anti-Asian hate has also become increasingly prevalent. The increase in xenophobic and racist rhetoric in news media and social media surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, e.g., *Kung-flu, Chinese virus,* etc., was followed by a major spike in hate crimes against Asians in the US (Ong & Zhang, 2021). Ong and Zhang's report addressed the implications of the recent mass murder of six Asian women in Atlanta, Georgia on March 16, 2021, and the urgency to dismantle hegemonic narratives that have promoted violence against Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) people (2021).

While the COVID-19 pandemic has a direct correlation to the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, violence against Asians is not a novel concept in American history. For instance, the Chinese Exclusion act of 1882 marked the United States' first anti-immigration law targeted at Chinese people, barring new Chinese people from immigrating to the US for work (Au, 2022; Chun & Zalokar, 1992; Melillo, 2022; National Archives and Records Administration). This law also barred Chinese people residing in the US from traveling between the US and China. The Chinese Exclusion act of 1882 later broadened its exclusion thus barring other Asians from immigrating such as Japanese, Filipino, and Indians

(Chun & Zalokar, 1992). Carlos Bulosan's "America is in the Heart" documented the violence and lynching of Filipinos on the west coast at the beginning of the 1920s, set off by a Filipino man walking with his white fiancé (Bulosan, 1943). Perhaps the most famous documented example of anti-Asian sentiment prior to 2020 is the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans in the Japanese internment camps of the 1940s during WWII. The US had justified the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans because of an assumed allegiance with imperial Japan. Modern violence against Asian Americans is rooted in a system of racism reproduced by the dominant discourse that developed as a result of this history. Specifically, the American cultural and political infrastructure is built around a system of racist motivations. The long-standing issue of America's systemic racism has an opaque intersection of class and race that are buried and normalized in modern discourse. The US is built upon an unspoken caste system, where specific groups are divided into a hierarchical structure based upon "immutable traits," such as race and economic background that define a group's position in the caste system (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 39). However, the practice of categorizing US citizens by race and economic status has often not been questioned and the critical issues behind such practices are obfuscated as a result of hegemonic discourse deeming such practices as normal (Wilkerson, 2020).

While racism against black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) communities has been the topic of an ever-growing body of critical discourse,

there are very few past publications that have addressed racism and injustice regarding anti-Asian language choices and discourse in the context of the United States (Iwamoto, 1995; Palumbo-Liu, 2001). The continuation of anti-Asian racism in America directly relates to the hegemonic system of power and its production of discourse that has been part of the United States since the founding of the country.

Perhaps the issue of anti-Asian hate has been largely underrepresented in research because of the scope of context required for a critical analysis, that is, critical analyses require a large body of historical context to fully understand the issue in question (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Fairclough, 1995; Foucault, 1980; van Dijk 1993;). If there isn't enough recorded historical context, then the issue might be harder to analyze. Additionally, if there is too much context to cover, a critical analysis might be too big of a project to conduct. Perhaps it is the discourse surrounding anti-Asianness in America stemming from ideas such as the model minority myth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2021; Li & Nicholson, 2021; Palumbo-Liu, 2001) which has operated under the assumption that Asian Americans have successfully assimilated into the fabric of American society. Moreover, the assumption of Asian American assimilation and success has positioned their "Americanness" as equal to "white Americanness" (Palumbo-Liu, 2001). Therefore, to some extent a reason for the little research on anti-Asian hate is that there is no popular perception of an issue despite the existence of the ongoing history of discrimination (Palumbo-Liu, 2001).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

To better understand the discourse of anti-Asian rhetoric, it is important to consider Foucault's idea of "the relations of power in the production of discourse of truth" (1980, p. 93). Foucault placed a heavy focus on the recursive nature of power and truth in which he suggested that the ideas of power, right, and truth are set up in a specific system that mutually interacts (Foucault, 1980). This cycle of and production of truth is similar to the production of wealth, both of which are gained and treated as capital (Foucault, 1980). Importantly, wealth is a measure of power. Wealthy people and institutions are treated as trustworthy because of this power. Thus, trustworthiness is a form of power (Foucault, 1980). This concept of trustworthiness as power becomes relevant when examining news media. There exists a normalization and willingness to accept or trust large and wealthy news media as objective information, void of ideology . However, such is hardly the case when we begin to uncover and consider all factors that are involved in producing news media and its role in the hegemonic discourse that is disseminated (Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

Critical Discourse Analysis includes a set of analytical frameworks focus attention to the value and perceived legitimacy of those in control of power (van Dijk, 1993). Although there is no one method for doing CDA (van Dijk, 2015), Fairclough's (1995) critical analysis framework of media discourse provides tools for the examination of the hegemonic factors of news discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 2011). Examples of such applied frameworks include Teo's

critical analysis of anti-Asian rhetoric in Australian news and Palumbo-Liu's work on uncovering the "model minority" myth (Palumbo Liu, 2001; Teo, 2001).

In this thesis I discuss some possible sources for the genesis of the recent spike in anti-Asian hate crimes. I believe that there is evidence that extremist conservative rhetoric and neo-populist framing have promoted violence against Asians. I also believe that American neoliberal media as a whole has also contributed to this issue. COVID-19 related anti-Asian, anti-China and other racist Asian rhetoric has reawakened the idea of Yellow Peril—the long-standing stigmatizing myth that the East Asian people and the East Asian way of life are a threat to all of Western Society (Chun & Zalokar 1992; Milello, 2022). Concurrently, in the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the model minority myth has been challenged (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2021; Li & Nicholson, 2021). The model minority myth falsely assumes that Asian Americans have successfully assimilated into US society. However, historical contexts and previous research on anti-Asian violence and anti-Asian hate have shown that media effects have increased racial bias. Therefore, I believe that language and hegemonic discourse plays a major contributing factor in the promotion of anti-Asian hate.

**Anti-Asian hate: Resurfacing stigmatizing discourse against Asians**

Coinciding with the documented 223% increase in anti-Asian hate (Report to the nation), Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) conducted a study that examined

the correlation between the increase in implicit bias towards Asians and the coinage of the terms *Chinese Virus* and *Kung-flu* (2020). They found that in March 2020 there was an 800% increase of *Chinese Virus* and related terms in conservative news media (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This increase in *Chinese virus* and related terms appeared to show that language influenced and/or perhaps reflected the perception of racial issues regarding Asians and the pandemic. Particularly, Hswen et al. (2021), found that there was a measurable increase in anti-Asian Twitter posts during the spread of the terms *Chinese virus* and *Kung-flu*. However, prior to Darling-Hammond et al (2020) and Hswen et al's (2021) examination of anti-Asian hate there is a large gap in research on the topic of Asian Americans and racism.

**The influence of metaphor on COVID-19 and anti-Asian rhetoric**

The framing of COVID-19 as the Chinese Virus and Kung-flu has amplified what had been implicit bias toward Asian Americans (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2021). Both of the following racist metaphors *Chinese virus* and *Kung-flu* were coined by Donald Trump and affiliates at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2020). As previous studies have shown, the use of metaphor in discourse can steer peoples' reasoning in a specific direction (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Thibodeau & Boroditsky 2011). In five separate experiments investigating the influence of metaphor on the perception of fictional criminal event, Thibodeau and Boroditsky

found evidence that certain metaphors have a “powerful influence” on peoples’ decision making and reasoning (2011, p.10). In this that study participants read a passage depicting a crime scenario. In this study participants were given a scenario about a fictional city that had an issue with crime. The scenario was framed in two different ways to include one of two metaphors: *crime as a beast* or *crime as a virus.* Afterwards, participants were instructed to create a solution to the crime scenario*.* Their findings showed that participants who were given the *crime as a beast* metaphor were shown to be 65% more biased toward punishment as a solution whereas, *crime as a virus (35%)* was met with solutions based on legal reform on laws (Thibodeau & Boroditsky 2011). Additionally, their experiments also found that the metaphor will have influence on decision making whether it occurred initially or finally in the discourse. Metaphors that occurred toward the beginning of the discourse had just as much influence over participants’ decision making as metaphors that occurred toward the end of the discourse. Therefore, regardless of where the metaphor appeared in the text, the metaphor had power to influence cognition (Thibodeau & Boroditsky 2011). Their findings have implications of the importance of analyzing metaphors in framing, especially regarding the activation of certain schema with specific metaphors e.g., crime as a *virus* or crime as a *beast* (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). Thibodeau and Boroditsky’s implications for the power of metaphor are reflected in Darling-Hammond et al.’s findings on the increase in implicit bias against Asians (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021). Their study found a correlation between

the increase in bias towards Asians and Donald Trump publicly coining the racist terms Chinese virus and Kung-flu (2021). The data in their study originates from Project Implicit's Implicit Association Test (IAT). By sampling IATs between 2007-2020, Darling-Hammond et al. were able to measure bias towards Asians prior to the coinage of the metaphors Chinese virus and Kung-flu (2021). They measured overall trends in implicit bias towards Asian between 2007-2020 and for trends between February 11, 2020-March 31, 2020—the time period in which the World Health Organization (WHO) announced guidelines for not using stigmatizing terms to discuss COVID-19 and when Trump affiliates first used the term Chinese virus and Kung-flu (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Findings from their study indicate that between February 11, 2022- March 31, 2022 there was an increase and "immediate, measurable impact" on collective biases towards Asians (2020, p. 877).

A similar study on anti-Asian hate focused on an increase in anti-Asian hashtags on Twitter during a similar timeframe (Hswen et al., 2021). Hswen et al. approached anti-Asian hate by examining all instances of #covid19 and #chinesevirus and hashtags that occurred with #covid19 and #chinesevirus in Twitter API data (2021). Their study examined anti-Asian hashtags associated with the specific hashtags *#covid19* and *#chinesevirus*. Anti-Asian hashtags associated with both #covid19 and #chinesevirus rose 650% after Republican lawmakers began publicly using hashtags and terms such as "kung flu and "Chinese Virus" (Hswen et al., 2021). Associated hashtags were littered with

racist rhetoric and anti-Asian and xenophobic sentiment (Hswen et al., 2021). From these studies alone it is apparent that such racist rhetoric has measurable outcomes, such as the direct influence of specific metaphors on decision making and the increase in anti-Asian bias and sentiment.

**Neo-Populism: The role of charismatic leaders**

The terms Chinese virus and Kung-flu are directly attributed to Donald Trump, Mike Pompeo, and other Republican lawmakers. In this section I will discuss how Trump-era use of populism has contributed to the increase in anti-Asian rhetoric and anti-Asian violence in the United States. The populist ideology as suggested by Kramer (2014) is complex in nature and, at times, it is hard to discern the framed antagonist and protagonist within the ideology. That is, populism as both a frame and ideology focuses on an in-group often construed as *the people* or the perceived majority and an oppressive, *elite* out-group to blame for threats and injustice to the people (Bos et al., 2020; Hameleers et al., 2018; Kramer, 2014). Traditionally populism has been an ideology that helped mobilize the disenfranchised to push back at their oppressors, helping change hegemonic policies (Bos et al., 2020). However, while populism had initially embodied fundamental definitions of the people versus the elites, mainstream media and hegemonic powers have coopted the populist frame to perpetuate continual oppression upon marginalized groups (Bos et al., 2020; Hameleers et al., 2018; Kramer, 2014).

At its core, populism has been described as “a style and rhetoric irrespective of any content” (Kramer, 2014, p. 45). In this respect, populism is not an ideology that one abides by, but rather a style or rhetoric that one reproduces and utilizes. This populist style/rhetoric is associated with charismatic leadership simultaneously positioned, metaphorically *above* the political institution to judge the elite, and *below* the political institution to appeal to the *common people* (Kramer, 2014). Moreover, charismatic leaders that appeal to “the common people,” position themselves as a member of the “silent majority” (Kramer, 2014, p.45). Again, those who create populist discourse attempt to do so by construing themselves as one and the same as *the common people* —although this is not always the case as I will illustrate. Hegemony, the mechanisms by which dominant groups persuade the subordinate groups of a status quo is at work in how the term *populism* is used by modern mass media as a means of its generation of consent to the legitimacy of news discourse (Bos et al., 2020; Gramsci, 2012; Hameleers et al., 2018; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Kramer, 2014). That is to say that news media has legitimized this new definition of populism through continual use and dissemination.

The concept of a charismatic leader in populist ideology is especially true in the case of recent right-wing extremist discourse, e.g., Trump and affiliated Republican lawmakers. Republican lawmakers have successfully positioned themselves as part of the silent majority and have mobilized the disenfranchised white American population against a common threat, the *Chinese virus.* The

COVID-19 narrative, through this populist discourse, blamed Chinese people as the main cause of the pandemic. In this populist narrative, reproduced by Trump and other Republican lawmakers, Americans (particularly white Americans), which have been construed as *the people,* are pitted against a perceived xenophobic threat, which in this case has been construed as Chinese people (Darling-Hammond et al., 2021; Hswen et al., 2020; Kramer, 2014).

**Yellow Peril**

Construing Chinese people as a biological threat is far from a novel concept in the American narrative. The *Yellow Peril* narrative has situated Asians as a threat to the Western World (Palumbo-Liu, 2001). The prevalence of anti-Asian hate appears to have caused a resurgence of the *Yellow Peril* narrative during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. *Yellow Peril* is a form of "anti-Asian political communication" (Mellilo, 2022) that has historically framed Asians as a threat to the Western people and their ideologies. This stereotype has construed Asianness and Asians as a danger and thus perpetuates xenophobic alienation, or *othering.* While words are often cited as harmless, the racist discourse tied to the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly had immediate and harmful effects on Asian American communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2021; Ong & Zhang, 2021). Importantly, "repeated exposure to cultural cues based on threats and fears work on a subconscious level" (Mellilo, 2022, p. 185), and previous research on implicit bias has been shown to directly affect negative

associations, perceptions and behavior of specific populations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2021; Ong & Zhang, 2021). In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw the resurgence of the Yellow Peril narrative, with portrayal of China as the blameworthy epicenter of the pandemic and later with the rise of violence against Asians and the misinformed idea of Asians as primary spreaders of the COVID-19 virus, among a resurgence of a variety of other stigmatizing stereotypes targeted at Asians (Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism CSUSB, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al, 2020; Hswen et al., 2020; Palumbo-Liu, 2001; Ong, & Zhang, 2020).

Although instances of the Yellow Peril narrative can be traced to the Enlightenment period, political cartoons from the mid to late 1800s depicting derogatory stereotypes of Chinese and Filipinos began to popularize the idea that Asians were a threat to American values (Chun & Zalokar, 1992; Mellilo, 2022). Racist caricatures and derogatory political cartoons gave rise to many of the stereotypes Asian still face today, for example, slanted eyes, dirty hygiene, emasculation of Asian men, and the hypersexualization of Asian women.

As previously mentioned, the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII was driven by an anti-Japanese political platform after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In 1942, the editorial board of the Oregonian (the state's largest newspaper), supported the incarceration of its Japanese residents (Davis, 2022). The board falsely claimed that people of Japanese descent had clustered in dangerous places, near the airport, shipyards and the Bonneville Dam,

suggesting the possibility of acts of war similar to Pearl Harbor (Davis, 2022). The state of Oregon and The Oregonian newspaper have been historically rooted in white supremacy with its support for segregation, justification for lynching and stigmatization BIPOC communities (Davis, 2022).

Moreover, anti-Asianness has immediate political ties to the continually growing anti-China rhetoric amongst US politicians and mainstream press media. As I will later explore, the idea of “China” and “Chinese” has historically been conflated with and generalized as “Asian” and “Asianess.” This generalization 1) is partially rooted in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 with the later inclusion of other East Asians and 2) has had a direct negative impact on all Asian Americans in the era of COVID-19 (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2021; Ong & Zhang, 2021).

The US had established the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was the first major law to restrict immigration in the United States. The Chinese Exclusion act barred Chinese people residing in America from travelling between America and China, restricted their ability to find work in America, and barred further Chinese immigration into America (Chun & Zalokar, 1992). Restricting the immigration of Chinese people was at the discretion of white American lawmakers to protect white American employment (National Archives). In 2020 US lawmakers implemented similar racist policies barring Chinese graduate students and researchers from studying and/or working at U.S. universities “if they had been previously affiliated with Chinese institutions” in support of China’s

"military-civil fusion (MCF) strategy" (Zwetsloot et al., 2021, p. 3). While anti-Chinese and anti-Asian rhetoric is not novel in American history, the issue of anti-Asian sentiment continues to persist in political discourse.

A major issue with the Trump-era populist frame is that Chinese people in the context of the US (and other countries with Asians in diaspora) is conflated and generalized as *Asian American* and *Asian* (Palumbo-Liu, 2001; Ong & Zhang 2021; Teo, 2001). Such misconceptions are the root of the *Yellow Peril* narrative, which has historically villainized Chinese people and depicted Asians as a threat to western society (Palumbo-Liu, 2001; Ong & Zhang 2021; Teo, 2001).

Therefore, it is critical that continual research be conducted to further empirically investigate how neo-populist and racist rhetoric produced by Trump-era politics has had a quantifiable negative effect on Asian American communities. As shown in the body of ongoing research, BIPOC communities, especially Asian American communities, have fallen victim to physical harm rooted in racist discourse produced by the systems of hegemony (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Hswen et al., 2021; Ong & Zhang, 2021).

I believe that the increased spike of crimes on Asian Americans, hate speech directed at Asian Americans and the increase of implicit bias towards Asians reflects Trump's successful populist framing. Therefore, Trump, as a right-wing aligned politician reproducing rhetoric of white supremacy, xenophobia, and racism, successfully positioned himself as one and the same

with *the common people,* filling in the populist role of charismatic leader and one of the *silent majority* (Bos et al., 2020; Hameleers et al., 2018; Kramer, 2014).

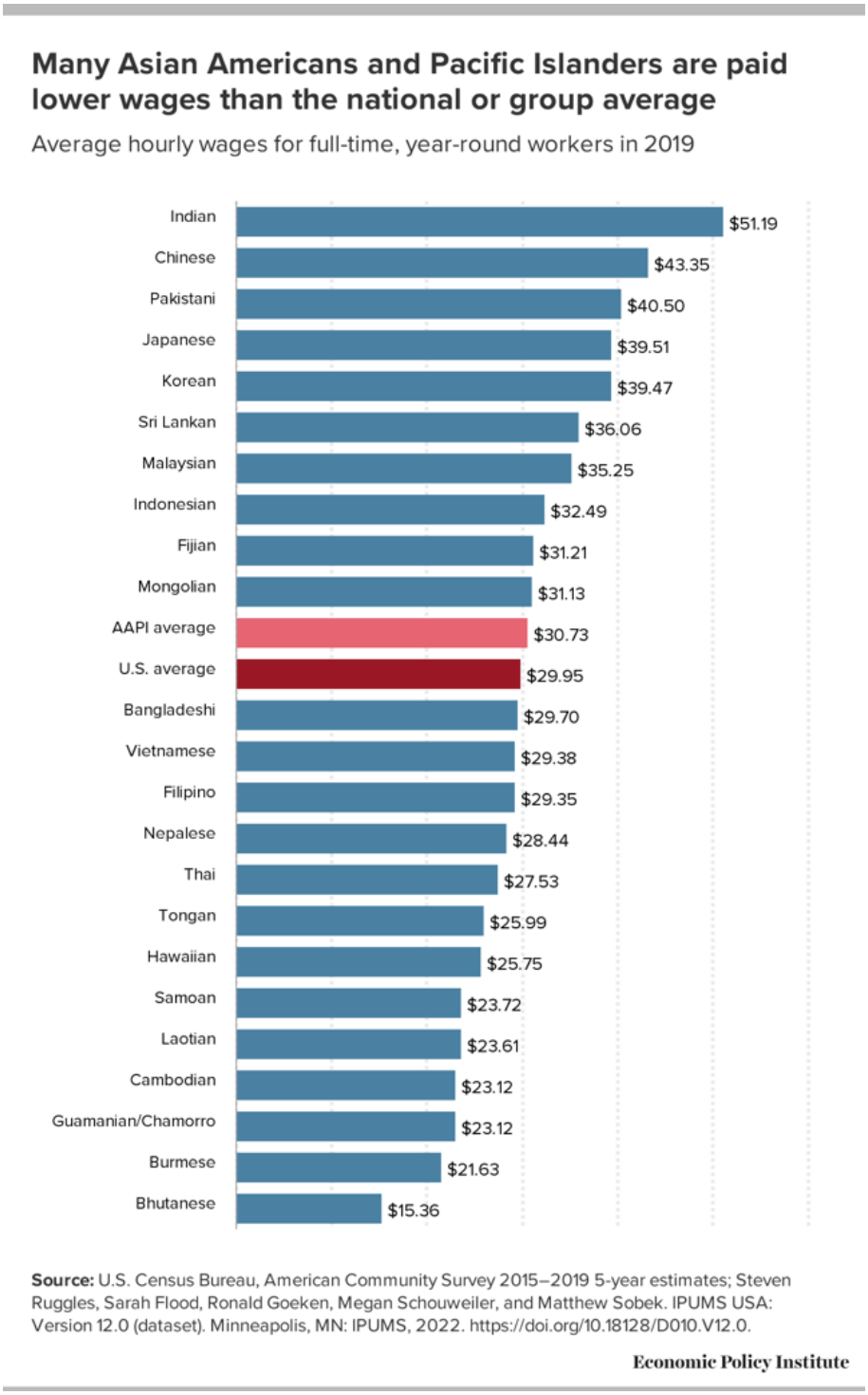
Turning the focus to the idea of mobilization and populism, previous research has confirmed that anti-elitist rhetoric has an effect on the persuasiveness and potentiality for mobilization among the people (Bos et al., 2020). Specifically, Bos et al. examined the exposure to anti-elitist populist identity frames and high relative deprivation to outside frames (frames that differed or challenged one's own perception of a conflict). They found that people would exhibit an increase in the potential to mobilize against a specific conflict with more exposure to anti-elitist frames and deprivation to outside frames. However, as previously mentioned, although the traditional approach to populism has allowed for the mobilization of the disenfranchised to help change policies in favor of the disenfranchised, recent uses of populism have misconstrued supremacy groups as the disenfranchised, thus favoring changes toward an already powerful group or entity. This has been the case with Tucker Carlson and other outspoken political commentators and leaders expressing sympathy for *legacy Americans* a dog whistle term for disenfranchised white supremacists (Confessore, 2022). Hegemonic discourse produces an insidious amount of influence that shapes public opinions (Bos et al., 2020; Hameleers et al., 2018; Kramer, 2014). Thus, neo-populist discourse has potentially helped the mobilization of supremacy groups against marginalized populations. This is the case for extremist right-wing racist rhetoric towards Asian Americans.

### *The model minority myth*

As the body of research on violence against Asian Americans continues to grow, I have no doubt that the overall connection to media effects on implicit bias will continue to be uncovered. The Asian American narrative has fallen into two competing myths. The discourse around the *model minority* has placed Asian Americans in a purgatory between marginalized and not marginalized in accordance with the dominant discourse of the time (Palumbo-Liu, 2001). That is, the white American narrative holds that Asians, as the *model minority* are a superior minority in comparison to other minorities, and reciprocally, the *model minority* myth creates a probabilistically unlikely standard that Asian, Asian America, Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities may feel that they fail to meet (Palumbo-Liu, 2001).

Throughout US history Asians have been given the title of *model minority* or *honorary white,* the monolithic label of *Asian American* has also obscured the economic disparities that many Asian Americans face (Au, 2022; Palumbo-Liu, 2001). For example, Figure 2.1 shows that within the AAPI label, many AAPI groups are paid lower than the national average.

**Figure 2. 1 Economic disparities in Asian American and Pacific Islanders' income**



(Ruggles, et al., 2022)

Figure 2.1 illustrates the economic disparities of many AAPI groups by showing their average incomes falling below the overall average US income. The issue of hate speech against Asian Americans is made even more complex by the historical discourse of model minority. The model minority myth is the racialization of Asian Americans' socio-economic and educational success (Au, 2022; Palumbo-Liu, 2001). The model minority myth acts as justification for Asians' educational success and ability to economically succeed in the American capitalist economy. However, the model minority myth asserts that Asian's perceived economic success is the model which other racial groups should aspire to (Au, 2022). This also presupposes the idea that other racial minority groups are not successful and exist on a hierarchy (Palumbo-Liu, 2001). While this term originates from Japanese Americans' economic success post WWII, the category of Asian success has expanded to include all East Asian and Southeast Asian Americans. Historically, Japan's increasing economic success allowed for new hegemonic discourses to arise regarding Japanese Americans' success in American assimilation (Palumbo-Liu, 2001). The origin of the model minority myth is as Palumbo-Liu suggested, a product of "the convergence of domestic civil rights activism and an emergent Pacific Rim discourse" (2001, p. 214). The emergent Pacific Rim discourse refers to the discourse of framing Japanese Americans as successfully assimilating into America's socioeconomic ranks (Palumbo-Liu, 2001). At the height of Japanese American economic success,

such discourse was coopted by anti-civil rights legislation as a counterpoint that "urban poverty and violence were not the outcomes of institutionalized racism," but instead indicative of "constitutional" shortcomings in other minority groups (Palumbo-Liu, 2001, p. 215). Thus, the idea of a model minority, suggests a challenge for other minorities to emulate and for white-Americans to surpass, (Palumbo-Liu, 2001).

Palumbo-Liu's further examination of the dissemination of the *model minority* myth in news media and literature showed that media framed the success of Japanese Americans and the failures of black Americans as a product of determination and work ethic (2001). As previously mentioned, such ideas were utilized by anti-civil rights proponents to exemplify the flaws when minority groups were not successful. In Palumbo-Liu's work, I encountered his idea of the necessity for a successful *other* in order to perceive upward mobility in the American landscape (2001). The discourse around the *model minority* has placed Asian American groups in a purgatory between marginalized and not marginalized ethnically defined communities in accordance with the dominant discourse of the time (2001). That is, the white American narrative holds Asians, the model minority as an example to compare to other minorities and themselves. Therefore, systemic racism is still the root of the model minority myth regardless of framing Asians as successful, an ostensibly positive frame.

Palumbo-Liu's examination of the model minority myth also exemplified van Dijk's (1993) *us versus them* narrative where the success of Asian

Americans created an *other* category separate from 1) other people of color, and 2) white Americans. Thus, I believe that the creation of a racialized purgatory for the Asian American has contributed to the obfuscation of the history of violence against Asian Americans. That is, the complex two-sided nature of the model minority myth and the recent rise in news coverage of violence against Asian Americans calls for further critical analysis on implications of historical and political discourse that surrounds Asian Americans.

**Media effects and anti-Asian hate**

The populist rhetoric produced by Trump and affiliates also reflects Kramer's two important effects of media populism. Kramer (2014) suggested that media populism activates certain schemata that create notions about in-groups and out-groups (2014). The populist discourse is then reproduced, and these schemata are then reinforced and treated as common sense (Kramer, 2014). The second important effect of media populism refers to the attitudes towards politics and certain concepts like "in-group favoritism" (Kramer, 2014, p. 55). These attitudes cascade into what Kramer refers to as the "climate of opinion," in which he argues that producers of populist discourse may misrepresent themselves as "typical members of the population," e.g., acting "below" the politics which they are questioning (Kramer, 2014, p. 55).

Media effects regarding racial bias were seen in Darling-Hammond et al.'s research on anti-Asian hate and COVID-19. Since March 19, 2020, 2,583 Asian

Americans have been victims to COVID-related hate crimes showing the correlation between extreme right-wing populist discourse and the overwhelming increase of anti-Asian hate crimes and anti-Asian hate discourse over since 2020 (Chinese for Affirmative Action and Asian Pacific Policy & Planning Council, 2020 as cited in Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

**Relations of power in dominant discourse**

It is important to understand that power isn't static nor does a single entity produce the entirety of hegemonic discourse (Foucault, 1980). Foucault argued that power circulates and is represented in the form of a chain, rather than one controlling entity or institution; "power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization" (1980, p. 98). That is, power itself is also not its own entity. Rather, power is a piece of the hegemonic structure, and individuals moving within the structure are simultaneously interacting with the dominant discourse while both producing and reproducing the dominant discourses, thus legitimizing dominant discourse through such interactions (Foucault, 1980). It is from this understanding of how hegemonic discourse is disseminated and acted upon that the dominant discourse can be the subject of analysis. The junctures of which individuals interact and exchange power within the hegemonic network are what Foucault would have considered a starting point to build the context of critical issues from the most basic levels of hegemony (Foucault, 1980).

**Critical discourse analysis**

Teun van Dijk built upon Foucault's call for a full examination of hegemony and created a framework for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (van Dijk, 1993). van Dijk builds his CDA framework upon a necessity to question "the role of discourse in the reproduction/production and challenge of dominance" (1993). In a way, this connects Foucault's position regarding the analysis of power as an ascending method starting at a discourse level (1980). CDA is not specific to a particular discipline or field; rather, critical issues exist within every discipline and field (van Dijk, 1993). Critical issues are issues that are focused on power structures and the dominance of those power structures (van Dijk, 1993). However, as Foucault had cautioned, power structures are not static; they exist as a chain network (1980). Therefore, to address the complexities of CDA, van Dijk placed emphasis on the multidisciplinary approach required to uncover junctures where the dominant discourse is exchanged, expressed, and challenged (1993).

The emphasis on multidisciplinary theories is crucial to understanding implications of the relationships between the dominant discourse and the individuals interacting with the dominant discourse (van Dijk, 1993). CDA aims to examine the complex relationships between discourse and power by questioning a text's social political aspects and motivations, specifically the relationships "between language, social cognition, power, society and culture," (van Dijk, 1993, p. 253). In van Dijk's frameworks, social power is acquired through access to

“valued resources,” which include wealth, money, and knowledge among other factors (van Dijk, 1993). Again, this bridges van Dijk’s (1993) work with Foucault regarding the relationship of power and the perception of trust, in which trustworthiness is valued similarly to wealth (Foucault, 1980). Therefore, if power involves control of valued resources, then those who control trust and the perception of trustworthiness are in control of power.

**News media and critical analysis**

Building off van Dijk’s examination of the controllers of trust and power, I shift my focus from trust as power and move to examine the relationship of trust and power to corporate news media starting with a recent Pew Research Center study conducted in 2020 on consumer trust in American news outlets (Pew Research Center, 2020; van Dijk, 1993). According to their findings, most American corporate news media consumers align their trust with one of two polarized news stations: CNN or FOX. Both CNN and Fox fall on opposites ends of the political spectrum, liberal to conservative, respectively (Pew Research Center, 2020). As its namesake suggests, mass media is a form of discourse that has properties of mass dissemination and interaction (Fairclough, 1995). Fairclough also described mass media as a “chain of communicative events, with unique properties that connect the public domain to the private domain (1995, pp. 36-37). For example, prior to modern social media such as Twitter and other short forms of news dissemination, there was no direct communication between

audience and news broadcast, yet there was still a transfer of public information (i.e., news) from the public sphere into the private sphere, where the private sphere is made up of the consumers of news (Fairclough, 1995). However, perhaps this idea of public and private domains has shifted since the inception of social media, with the option now for audiences to participate and interact in ongoing news discourse. Trust was also relevant to Herman & Chomsky's critique arguing that corporate media hides its corporate nature to gain the trust of consumers by portraying themselves as objective and unbiased (2002).

In this regard, a salient feature of mass media is its wide reach, but with such capabilities of mass dissemination, critical issues of bias arise when examining sponsors and funders of media outlets (Fairclough, 1995; Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Fairclough (1995) determined that mass media is intertwined with hegemonic discourse. For instance, according to the Corona Virus Corpus (a corpus of news collected since the start of the pandemic, which I will refer to later in my analysis) the Manhattan Institute is a widely cited think tank of *experts* quoted for evidence in media sources across the range of political views (Davies). Careful examination shows that the biggest donors for the Manhattan Institute are extreme right-wing conservative groups such as the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation; and big corporations such as Exxon Mobil (Conservative Transparency; Fact sheet: Manhattan Institute. Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation; Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, 2021; Wallace-Wells, 2021). These funders, or *frame sponsors* of news have a stake in what

news is produced and how narratives are framed (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Corporate news media is built on the sponsorship of political actors and consumers' neglect of questioning affiliations of corporate news media (Carragee & Roefs, 2004). Neglecting to recognize the relationships between frame sponsors and corporate news media contributes to the legitimacy of hegemonic news discourse.

van Dijk's ideas of trust and power as valued resources and Fairclough's interest in the conflict of interest within news media help identify the critical implications of Pew Research Center's study on America's trust in news (van Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1995; Demographics and political views, 2020). Pew Research Center (2022) indicated that America's trust in major corporate news media is further rooted in trusting "expert research" that is directly tied to the dominant groups (Fairclough, 1995). Moreover, the use of expert opinions and bodies of research act as a mechanism to legitimize evidence for audiences (Fairclough, 1995). However, cited expert opinions are in fact the product of those in power with "vested interest in commonly held opinions," in which those in control of news media (investors, producers, political affiliates, etc.) have chosen what is considered "expert" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 23). Therefore, it would seem impossible for any news media to claim objectivity when there are specific interests in mind. This idea falls under Herman and Chomsky's 'Propaganda model,' which focuses on the inequality of wealth and power and the pipeline in which such power influences interests in mass-media

(Herman & Chomsky, 2002). Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda model illustrates how mass-media passes through a series of five filters before leaving what they refer to as "cleansed residue fit to print" (2002, p. 2). The five filters are as follows:

- size, ownership, and profit orientation of the mass media
- advertising as the primary income source of mass media
- the reliance of media on information provided by government, business and experts funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power
- 'flak' as a means of disciplining the media; and
- 'anticommunism' as a national religion and control mechanism.

Mass news media consumers have normalized news media as objective and neutral, thus creating the status-quo of consenting to inherently biased news media. As a result, the most radical and dissident news is often marginalized to the point of censorship (Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

"The elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents" that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and good will, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news 'objectively' and on the basis of professional news values (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 2). The limits of the filter constraints, "are so powerful, and are built into the system in such a fundamental way, that alternative bases of news choices are hardly

imaginable" (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 2). While there are countries in which there is a state run and controlled mass media system, where censorship is often transparent and it becomes clear that "media serves the ends of a dominant elite" (Herman & Chomsky, pp. 1-2, 2002). However, in the case of American media, media outlets often actively compete, attack, and expose issues with governmental and corporate entities, while also positioning themselves as arbiters of free speech, catering to "general community interests" (Herman & Chomsky, pp. 1-2, 2002). Again, as Herman and Chomsky point out, such "critiques" and "attacks" on corporate and governmental entities still pass through the five filters of the propaganda model, leaving only a digestible and marketable message, one that results in a "cleansed" publication version of current events that aligns with sponsors, funders, political affiliates, etc., (Herman & Chomsky, pp. 1-3, 2002).

Due to the hegemonic biases of corporate-influenced news media, the role of neo-populism on the mobilization against the *Chinese virus,* and the tendency for corporate news media to historically maintain a status quo, it appears that the systems of hegemony all played a continual role in anti-Asian discourse. While each factor is fraught with historical contexts, it's imperative to understand how their intersections contribute to the marginalization of AAPI communities. With this understanding of the complex nature of the structures and systems in control of trust and power in mass media I now narrow the focus of this thesis to a CDA

of language choices in the dominant discourse surrounding violence against Asian Americans.

**Racism in the news: Teo's critical discourse analysis of racism in the news**

Aside from a growing body of critical reports and analyses published during the past two years starting from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a relatively small body of critical analysis on violence against Asians in diaspora (Teo, 2001). Teo critically analyzed discourse in Australian news coverage of a Vietnamese gang. In this analysis he examined the conflation of Australian Vietnamese gang *5T* and "Asians"—a discourse technique which he refers to as generalization (2001). Generalization occurred in phrases such as "violent *Vietnamese* gang" which were used synonymously with "violent *Asian* gang" (Teo, 2001). Teo argued that "over time the terms 'Asian' and 'criminal' have become resistant to challenge and change, which in turn breeds stereotypes (Teo, 2001, p. 20).

Teo utilized Critical Discourse Frameworks from van Dijk and Fairclough with elements of Halliday's Textual Metafunction analyses to analyze news articles and headlines covering the Australian Vietnamese gang *5T* (van Dijk, 1995; Fairclough, 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In his analysis, Teo approached a corpus of news articles with several different methods of analysis. Part of Teo's framework examined news headlines and leads. Headlines and leads act as way to direct and conceptually frame the readers understanding of a

news article (Teo, 2001). This is partially due to the upside-down pyramid structure of news articles, which places the most important information first (Teo, 2001).

Several important findings from Teo's work that connect the marginalization of Asian Australians to hegemonic discursive practices are the instances of "generalization," or "the extension of the characteristics or activities of a specific or specifiable group of people to a much more general and open-ended meaning" (Teo, 2001, p. 16). In his analysis "Vietnamese gang" became synonymous with "Asian gang," thus over-generalizing the participants in violent gang crimes as "all Asians" (Teo, 2001). The headline and lead analysis yielded findings that the depiction of power was given to the police while words associated with violence were connected to Asians. Teo connects these finding to van Dijk's idea of "us versus them," where the "us" is positively represented and "them" is negatively represented (van Dijk, 1991). Teo's analysis of hegemonic discourse provides evidence that the dominant discourse is the product of both the creators of the dominant discourse in news as well as the audience's interaction with the dominant discourse. He refers to this as being both "a 'top-down' relationship of dominance and a 'bottom-up' relationship of compliance, acceptance, and reproduction" (Teo, 2001, p. 43). Returning to Foucault and the production/reproduction of dominant discourse, this top-down, bottom-up relationship shows that news is a juncture where hegemonic

discursive practices occur, and the audience is simultaneously interacting with and reproducing the dominant discourse.

**Summary of the theoretical grounding for the analysis**

Returning to Foucault's suggestion of close examination of the most basic levels of hegemony (1980) and Carragee and Roefs' notion of the inclusion of context in critical frame analyses (2004), I have found that both of their concepts are important heuristics to follow when attempting to locate the origins of frames and the frame sponsors behind such frames. van Dijk's strategies of examining the "discursive reproduction of dominance" and its two factors: "production and reception" provide a framework that allows for careful analysis of critical issues (1993 p. 262). van Dijk's strategies for understanding hegemony within discourse are yet another reflection of Foucault and Carragee and Roefs' ideas calling for close examination of the social and cognitive mechanisms that produce "power-relevant discourse structures" (Carragee & Roefs, 2004; Foucault, 1980; van Dijk, 1993) Similar to Foucault's position on wealth, power and trust, van Dijk acknowledges the recursive nature of dominant discourse (Foucault, 1980; van Dijk, 1993). Regarding the critical analysis of news media coverage of violence against Asian Americans, further examination of the historical and political contexts yields even more implications on the mechanisms and structure of powers at play.

With the given context of the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes I will align my analysis with Teo's (2001) research on news media and the influence of anti-Asian hegemonic discourse. I use the Corona Virus Corpus to analyze collocations of Asian hate/violence against Asians. Subsequently, I analyze a sub corpus of data focused on news articles regarding the six Asian women murdered in Atlanta, Georgia, on March 2021, with Halliday's thematic and transitivity analyses.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

Both Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) and Hswen et al., (2020) reported that a significant quantifiable increase in anti-Asian rhetoric occurred in direct relation to the coinage of the two racist metaphors *Kung-flu and Chinese Virus.* Both studies focused on the media effects of these stigmatizing terms. Importantly, “the influence of metaphorical framing is covert, and people often do not recognize metaphors as an influential aspect in their decisions” (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011, p. 10). Therefore, explicitly recognizing and identifying the metaphors and frames present in this anti-Asian hate discourse might help unpack and ameliorate future outcomes for AAPI communities.

## *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)*

Critical discourse analysis of anti-Asian rhetoric has implications for legislation reform and political activism (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, Hswen et al., 2021; Teo, 2001). Therefore, by examining social practices, policies, contexts, and sources, CDA provides a framework to analyze power relationships and their often-negative effects on marginalized and minoritized populations (Evans-Agnew et al., 2016; Fairclough, 2011; Fairclough, 1995; Foucault, 1980; Mackey et al, 2020; Teo, 2000; van Dijk, 1993). In regard to media framing, CDA plays an important role in understanding the covert hegemonic influence embedded within the dominant discourse, such as how specific lexical and

grammatical choices can affect how one might perceive minoritized communities (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 2011; Foucault, 1980; Teo, 2000; van Dijk, 1993).

### *Corpus Methods*

Early critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been criticized for its subjectivity and biased methodologies relying on strictly qualitative analyses with purely “intuitive based interpretations” and questionable reliability due to the use of small sets of data (Cheng & Lam, 2021). Corpus linguistics is a method that helps alleviate some of these subjectivity and reliability issues. Corpus methodologies include the ability to search a large body of texts for specific *collocations* (words that co-occur in proximity) and *concordances* (every context that a specific word occurs). The ability to examine these large bodies of text aids the observation of generalizable patterns and frequencies in order to make reliable and data-driven claims (Cheng & Lam, 2021).

The Corona Virus Corpus is a collection of 1,492,979,248 words from 1,873,327 corporate news articles between January 2020- December 31, 2022. At the start of this investigation the corpus was continually being updated. However, news stories past December 31, 2022 have now been continued in the larger NOW corpus. I utilized several features of the Corona Virus corpus in my searches. The first feature was the ability to search for lemmas, or variations of a specific search term. For example, to include lemmas of a specific search term, I

had to search with all capitals as in, PANDEMIC. The search results for *PANDEMIC* included *pandemic* and *pandemics.*

Examination of an online corpus such as the Corona Virus Corpus also allowed for the search of collocations, or words that occur in specific proximity to a given search term. For example, the corpus allows for collocations up to four words before or after a given search term. In the second part of this analysis, I searched explicitly for collocations of *Chinese* + *VIRUS.* First, I searched for collocations that occurred anywhere before after the word Chinese, as shown below:

**Figure 3.1. Collocation positions**

| **-4** | **-3** | **-2** | **-1** | **0** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Chinese* | authorities | say | the | *virus* |

In the example above "*Chinese* authorities say the *virus* does not transmit easily between people," the word *virus* is four words away from the word *Chinese*. In a broad -4/+4 search, the word *virus* can occur in any position four words before or after the word *Chinese*. The proximity of the words was important for treating collocations of Chinese +VIRUS as metaphor. For the second part of the analysis, I was mainly concerned with the collocations of *virus* that occurred in the +1 position after *Chinese.* I narrowed this search down to

immediate positions (-/+1) before and after the word Chinese which yielded 2000 results.

### *Keyword in Context (KWIC)*

Another tool I used for this analysis was the Keyword in Context (KWIC) function. Below is an example of a KWIC result as it might appear in the Corona Virus Corpus. A KWIC differs from collocation positions by centralizing a search term which helps show constituents occur to the left and right of the search term. Results show full constituents that occurred to the left and right of a given phrase as shown in Figure 3.2.

**Figure 3.2. Example of Keyword In Context Search Result**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| # The vow to vote no came a week after six | Asian women | were killed in an attack on three spas in the Atlanta |

For the KWIC portion, I searched for the term *Asian women* during the months of March and April 2021. During this length of time the term *Asian women* occurred 735 times which was the highest frequency of the term in the entire corpus. Afterward, I took a random sample of 100 instances of the term *Asian women* between March 14, 2021 and April 14, 2021 and created a sub corpus of data. The purpose of this sub corpus was to examine theme/rheme and transitivity patterns.

***Metaphor***

Upon initial investigation of the framing of anti-Asian racism, in the corpus I searched for broad terms that I felt were at the root of the *Kung-flu* and *Chinese Virus* metaphors analyzed by Darling-Hammond et al (2020) and Hswen et al., (2020). I was particularly interested in the term *Chinese virus* because of its association with the scapegoating of Chinese people for the COVID-19 pandemic. I categorized the term *Chinese virus as a* metaphor because of its metonymic structure. Metonymy is a subset of metaphor that allows the use of "one entity to stand in for another, not only for reference but for providing understanding" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 45). I found that this term to fell under Lakoff and Johnson's idea that metonymy "allows us to conceptualize one thing by means of its relationship to something else" (1980 p. 47). By lexically associating the COVID-19 virus with China, the term *Chinese virus*, can be viewed as possession such as *China's virus* or *a virus belonging to China*, thus framing China as allegedly being responsible for the COVID-19 virus. Additionally, Chinese in the term *Chinese virus* can also be seen as something exclusive to China and Chinese people, thus making COVID-19 a *Chinese virus*. Moreover, with the historical conflation of *Chinese* and *Asian*, the term *Chinese virus* in the American context has affected AAPI communities. Therefore, the use of *Chinese virus* cognitively maps these two separate entities together creating an association of *Chinese* with the COVID-19 *virus.*

I had chosen to start my search in the Corona Virus Corpus with a broad search of the word “pandemic,” to see what terms were most frequently juxtaposed next to “pandemic.” However, this search was not fruitful because *pandemic* itself yielded over two million results. Therefore, based on the implications of previous research on anti-Asian racism and heightened racism during the pandemic (Center for the Study of Hate & Extremism CSUSB, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al, 2020; Hswen et al., 2020; Palumbo-Liu, 2001; Ong, & Zhang, 2020), I searched for the following collocates: *racism* + *PANDEMIC*, *Asian* + *PANDEMIC,* and *anti-Asian* +*PANDEMIC*. The purpose of this 2-word phrase search was to explore what other metaphors were present in American news media’s framing of the co-occurrence of COVID-19 with the spike in anti-Asian hate crimes and anti-Asian rhetoric in addition to the existing explicit metaphors such as Chinese virus.

As previous research has suggested, shifts in metaphors are often related to shifts in policy (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). This shift is exemplified by earlier metaphorical framing, such as Ronald Reagan’s declaration of a “war on drugs,” which has corresponded with a quadruple rate of incarceration for drug-related incidences since the 1980s (2011). Research on metaphor has also indicated that metaphors have an influence on an individual’s decision making and cognitive perception (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). For example, Thibodeau and Boroditsky’s research on framing “crime as a beast,” vs. “crime as a virus” showed that these metaphors have a

clear influence on an individual's choice on whether or not they leaned toward enforcing laws or reforming laws (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011). Furthermore, I believe such findings justify the need to examine metaphors within news framing. I believe this also reinforces the Darling-Hammond et al.'s findings that the use of harmful metaphors such as "Chinese virus" have a measurable "impact on collective biases," (2020 p. 877).

Importantly, public discourse on COVID-19 and racism has direct ties with the hegemonic reproduction of metaphors, i.e., the direct relation between negative public attitudes towards Asian Americans and the rise of terms such as Chinese virus and Kung-flu (Darling-Hammond et. al, 2020). Although the metaphors of Chinese virus and Kung-flu appear explicit in form, the influence of such metaphors are covert in the way they affect individuals' perceptions and decision making (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011).

## *Halliday's Textual Metafunctions*

### *Theme/Rheme*

Thematization shows the choices a writer makes to organize information in a clause (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Leong, 2023; Teo, 2001). Halliday believed that our perceptions of the world are built around the language we use and how we use it (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Leong, 2023). Halliday suggested that there are three "lines of meaning" in a clause:

- Theme: psychological subject

- Subject: grammatical subject
- Actor: logical subject

(Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, pp. 81-83).

Halliday's Textual Metafunction divided clauses into two main elements: the Theme and the Rheme. *Theme* is "the point of departure for the message of the clause", grounding what the speaker will convey (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 83). Although *Subject* might occur in a similar position as *Theme*, *subject* differs in that it acts as the "element the speaker makes responsible for the validity of what is being said," meaning that a *subject* in this paradigm construes the clause as an exchange whereas the *Theme* is the clause's message (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 83).

Thematic elements are constructed as a hierarchy with *Theme,* holding a distinct status above *Rheme.* In English the *Theme* always comes before the *Rheme* (Leong, 2023). *Theme* often orients the audience toward an intended emphasis or message (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The Theme as the initial element is realized as having prominence and importance. (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Similarly, the Theme also provides a focus that guides a message and the context of a message. Thompson (2014) identified four categories of Theme in declarative clauses: (Figure 3.3-3.6).

**Figure 3.3. Subject as Theme**

| **Theme** | **Rheme** |
| --- | --- |
| Six ASIAN WOMEN | died in the attacks on Tuesday, prompting widespread concern that the killings could be the latest in a surge of hate crimes against Asian Americans. |

The subject occurring as the *Theme* in a declarative clause is the most common type of *Theme* and thus is considered unmarked (Thompson, 2014). In Figure 3.3, the phrase *six Asian women* both occupies the role of *Theme* and grammatical subject. In instances of *Subject as Theme*, the *Theme* is often easy to identify. In a Figure 3.4. the Theme is a complex nominal grouping that as one-unit functions as the Theme and grammatical subject.

**Figure 3.4. 'Heavy' subject as Theme**

| **Theme** | **Rheme** |
| --- | --- |
| The Georgia sheriff's official, who said during a press briefing that Robert Arron Long, the man accused of killing six ASIAN WOMEN and two others in shootings at spas in the Atlanta area, had " a bad day ", | had earlier blamed China for the Covid-19 pandemic on social media. |

In cases where there is a *'Heavy' subject as* Theme there might be instances of embedded clauses and/or subjects with long postmodifiers, as is shown in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.5. shows an example of *Adjunct as Theme,* where the position of the *Adjunct* is somewhat flexible and separate from the grammatical subject and able to be moved and still be grammatical (Thompson, 2014).

**Figure 3.5. Adjunct as Theme**

| Theme | Rheme |
|---|---|
| While authorities are still investigating the motive behind Tuesday's shooting spree at three Atlanta-area spas that left eight people dead, including six ASIAN WOMEN, | some advocates say the violence is inextricably linked to a history of racism and misogyny against ASIAN WOMEN. |

In these instances (Figure 3.6), the grammatical subject occurs in the Rheme.

**Figure 3.6. Complement as Theme**

| Theme | Rheme |
|---|---|
| As it appears to be the case in the Atlanta shootings, where a gunman targeted ASIAN WOMEN | he associated his struggles with faith and sex. |

The least common constituent as a Theme occurs with *Complement as Theme* —e.g. see Figure 3.6. In Figure 3.6. the Complement is “is being contrasted with something else in the text” (Thompson, 2014, p. 149). Unlike *Adjunct as Theme,* Complement is less flexible with where it could occur syntactically (Thompson, 2014).

As illustrated in Figure 3.3 & 3.4, the most common type of Theme is a grammatical participant, realized by a nominal group (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2014).

Teo (2001) exemplified the use of Thematic Analysis frameworks in CDA when looking at marked Themes (as in Figures 3.4-3.6) in Australian news articles’ coverage of clashes between a Vietnamese gang and the police. Theme

indicates the emphasis of importance in a clause, “indicative of the kind of prominence or foregrounding the writer wishes to attribute to it” (Teo, 2001, p. 29). The use of marked Themes “refers to the organization of a piece of information in an atypical way” (Teo, 2001, p. 29). Therefore, the analysis of marked Themes can uncover possible motivations behind the specific organization of information. I used Thompson’s Theme schema to identify what types of Themes were present my sub corpus. After categorizing types of Themes, I identified Thematic patterns and determined what topics were emphasized when talking about the murder of the six Asian women in Atlanta, GA. Finally, with the Thematic analysis I discuss the implications of these findings and how they relate to critical issues in framing in news coverage.

***Transitivity***

Transitivity is a part of Halliday’s Ideational Metafunction (an aspect of Transitivity Analysis) framework to determine and categorize verb process types (the semantics of the verb) and participants within the clauses. In the final analysis I utilized a transitivity analysis which in a basic sense is the determination of “who does what to whom,” (alvinlong.info; Iwamoto, 1995; Teo, 2001).

Halliday’s transitivity analysis have been previously used for discourse analysis and Critical discourse analysis directly related to racism against Asians in diaspora contexts (Iwamoto 1995; Teo, 2001). Transitivity analyses delve into how events are construed and how participants in events are given agency. I

used Teo's adaptation of Halliday's transitivity frameworks and applied these to my "Asian-women" sub corpus with hopes of finding common patterns and structures of news media's framing of the Asian women's murders. Thus, this method is ideal in understanding how news media portrays racialized victims vs. alleged killers and the implications of marked lexical choice and syntactic structures.

Figure 3.7 illustrates Teo's adaptation of Halliday's process types categories and examples.

**Figure 3.7. Teo's Summary of process types (adapted from Halliday, 1994)**

| Process types | Examples |
|---|---|
| **1. Material** | |
| *a. Action* | The lion **caught** the tourist |
| *b. Event* | The mayor **resigned** |
| **2. Behavioral** | She **smiled** at him |
| **3. Mental** | |
| a. Perception | I hadn't **noticed** that |
| b. Affection | Mary **liked** the gift |
| c. Cognition | No one **believed** his story |
| **4. Verbal** | John **said** he was hungry |
| **5. Relational** | |
| a. Attribution | Sarah **is** wise |
| b. Identification | Tom **is** the leader |
| **6. Existential** | There **was** a storm |

Table 3.1 shows Teo's (2001) adaptation of participant types that occur with specific verbal processes. In my sub corpus I coded each KWIC instance by the process type, and their participant type.

**Table 3.1. Processes and participant types**

| Process | Participant type |
|---|---|
| Material | Actor; goal; scope; attribute; client; recipient |
| Behavioral | Behaver; behavior |
| Mental | Senser; phenomenon |
| Verbal | Sayer; receiver; verbiage |
| Relational | Carrier/attribute; token/value |
| Existential | Existent |

Each material process has its own specific participant types. Identifying the participant type can help with identifying the process and visa-versa. I coded processes and participant types according to Alvin Leong's breakdown of participants types. A sample set of the sub corpus data was coded by two other coders to ensure consistency in the coding. There are six process types, each with its own specific characteristics and participants.

Material processes consist of physical actions, or the process of "doing or happening," (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Leong, 2023; Simpson 1993). Material processes are realized by the following participants:

- Actor—the one performing the action
- Goal—that which is affected by the action
- Scope—that which remains unaffected by the action
- Attribute—a quality ascribed or attributed to an entity
- Client—for whom/which the action occurs
- Recipient—the receiver of goods or services

Behavioral processes are semantically the actions of behaving; these are often realized by an intransitive construction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Leong, 2023; Simpson 1993). Behavioral processes have two possible participants:

- Behaver—the one performing the behavior
- Behavior— the specific action of the behaver

Mental processes are ones that are not realized through physical means, therefore mental processes as its name suggests are those processes that occur mentally. There are two participants that occur in mental processes:

- Senser— the one who feels (emotionally), thinks and perceives
- Phenomenon—that which is felt (emotionally), thought about or perceived

Verbal processes are straightforward in that they are the processes which someone conveys a verbal message to someone or something. There are three possible participants in verbal processes:

- Sayer– the addresser
- Receiver— the addressee, or the entity targeted by the saying
- Verbiage— the content of what is said or indicated

Relational processes are split up into two categories, identifying and attributive. In identifying processes, one phrase acts as an identifier for a second phrase. These types of phrases have two types of participants:

- Identifying
    - Token— the phrase that represents the identity of a following phrase
    - Value— the phrase being identified

Attributive processes on the other hand are phrases where a specific phrase is given an attribute. This differs from identifying processes in that the carrier and attribute often cannot occur in reverse order, whereas identifying processes can occur in reverse order (Leong, 2023)

- Attributive
    - Carrier—the phrase that gets attributed
    - Attribute—the phrase which the carrier is being attributed

Existential processes are instances where the participant is realized by a phrase starting with *there*. There is only one participant that can occur in the existential process:

- Existent—realized by empty *there* in subject position

(Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Leong, 2023; Simpson, 1993).

Categorization of processes and participant types allowed for further examination of the clauses beyond just Theme and Rheme and provides insight on overall patterns of emphasis in digital news media. In relation to CDA, it is important to understand that there is no neutral news media and authors may make specific lexical choices in order to frame a specific perspective. Transitivity analyses helps uncover "how certain meanings are foregrounded while others are suppressed or obfuscated" (Simpson, p. 104,1993). This is exemplified in specific uses of passive voice and what Trew (as cited in Simpson, 1993) referred to as passivation and the deletion of agency. Trew's examples of headlines and sub headers (Figure 3.8) illustrated the contrasting framing practices of passive vs. active clauses in news headlines and the ability to shift the focus toward specific elements in each text. In Figure 3.8, Trew shows that lexical choice and the choice of active or passive clausal structures allow news discourse to frame the same event in different ways.

**Figure 3. 8 Trew's News coverage on Zimbabwe police vs. African demonstrators (1979):**

**Active**
Police shoot 11 dead in Salisbury Riot
*Riot police shot and killed 11 African demonstrators*
**Passive**
Rioting blacks shot dead by police
*Eleven Africans were shot dead and 15 wounded when Rhodesian police opened fire on rioting crowd.*

Trew found that in the context of shootings in Zimbabwe involving police and African demonstrators, passivation allowed for emphasis and agency to be taken away from the shooters (the police), thus shifting focus towards framing the

African demonstrators. Furthermore, in the passive example above, there is a specific lexical choice of “Rioting blacks” instead of “African demonstrators” which both frame the same event in two different ways.

Previous research has stated that obfuscating discourse through lexical choices and specific configurations of grammatical structures can be used as a tool to frame a specific event that is politically motivated (Simpson, 1993; Teo, 2001).

# Chapter 4: Metaphor Analysis

## Metaphors occurring in COVID-19 discourse

Returning to the metaphor of *Chinese virus* I began my initial search for other existing salient metaphors used in news media that were related to anti-Asian racism. Again, the use of metaphor in discourse can steer peoples' reasoning in a specific direction (Thibodeau & Boroditsky, 2011); therefore I focused the first part of this analysis on a qualitative examination of the frames and metaphors related to anti-Asian racism and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 4.1 below show the specific search terms and the total frequency per search term.

**Table 4.1. Collocations per 1000 words**

| | **racism+PANDEMIC** | **Asian +PANDEMIC** | **anti-Asian+ PANDEMIC** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total instances of collocation/total occurrences of search term** | 643/54803 | 626/93743 | 127/4991 |
| **Frequency per 1000 words** | 12 | 7 | 28 |

The search terms I explored were the collocates *racism* + *PANDEMIC* which yielded 643 instances, *Asian* + *PANDEMIC* which yielded 626 instances and *anti-Asian +PANDEMIC* which yielded 127 instances. I will note that *Asian* +

*PANDEMIC,* and *anti-Asian +PANDEMIC* are separate items in the Corona Virus Corpus, thus they yielded differing results.

In this preliminary search I examined the search results for patterns of metaphors. I noticed that there were three prevalent recurring metaphors:

[RACISM AS A VIRUS]

[RACISM AS WAR]

[PANDEMIC AS WAR]

*Racism as a virus*

Instances of racism being referred to as a virus suggest that there are two simultaneous pandemics—The COVID-19 pandemic and racism as a pandemic. On several occasions, the exacerbation of racism during the COVID-19 pandemic was referred to as a "shadow pandemic," or "parallel pandemic," as shown below in the following examples highlighted in yellow:

**(1)** The **pandemic** called COVID, and yet we still have not addressed the **pandemic** called **racism**.

**(2)** The' Shadow **Pandemic**' of Anti-Asian **Racism**

**(3)** the Asian American community has been fighting two viruses -- the COVID-19 **pandemic** and **anti-Asian** hate [pandemic]

*Racism as war:*

Embedded within this “double pandemic” context there was another prevalent metaphor—**racism as a war.** The following examples show the use of metaphorical language of fighting against racism:

**(4)** protecting against the **pandemic** and fighting **racism**

**(5)** Part of fighting this **pandemic** is fighting against **racism** and misinformation.

**(6)** an organization formed during the COVID-19 **pandemic** to combat **anti-Asian** discrimination

*Pandemic as war*

The third salient metaphor is the **pandemic as a war.** Similar to “racism as a war,” “pandemic as a war” also used metaphorical language regarding war and combat as shown in (7)-(9):

**(7)** faith in government, fighting the **pandemic**, dismantling systemic **racism**, reducing gun violence and doing something about a warming planet.

**(8)** Part of fighting this **pandemic** is fighting against **racism** and misinformation.

**(9)** Asian-owned businesses have had to fight two foes during the **pandemic**: **racism** and the COVID lockdowns

In several instances, the metaphors co-occurred as in the following (previously stated in Racism as a virus and Racism as a war example number 3):

**(10)** the Asian American community has been fighting two viruses -- the COVID-19 **pandemic** and **anti-Asian** hate

**(11)** Asian-owned businesses have had to fight two foes during the **pandemic**: **racism** and the COVID lockdowns

In the above examples there was an intersection in both COVID and anti-Asian hate framed as viruses that are being fought.

***The "Chinese Virus"***

In the second part of this analysis, I searched explicitly for collocations of *Chinese + VIRUS.* First I searched for collocations that occurred anywhere before and after the word Chinese, which yielded 3565 results. Table 4.2 shows the frequency results for collocations of *Chinese+VIRUS.*

**Table 4.2. Chinese+VIRUS search term frequencies**

| | **Chinese+VIRUS -4/+4** | **Chinese+VIRUS -1/+1** |
|---|---|---|
| **Frequency (total instances in corpus)** | 3565 | 2000 |

Given the political contexts surrounding the association of China and COVID-19, such high frequency was not surprising. However, I believe that the high frequency of this collocation is indicative of the influence of the reproduction of racist media frames and metaphors.

The term had been present in news dating back to Jan. 1, 2020, prior to the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring the COVID-19 pandemic an international emergency on Jan. 30 2020. In total there were 42 instances of the term *Chinese virus* prior to the Jan. 30th. Below in Figure 4.1 are some examples of the use of *Chinese virus* prior to Jan 30, 2020.

**Figure 4. 1 Examples of "Chinese virus" prior to Jan 30, 2020**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Jan 1, 2020** | An Australian tabloid, the Herald Sun, featured the headline " Chinese virus PANDAMONIUM |
| **Jan 20, 2020** | CDC to begin airport screenings for cases of new Chinese virus |
| **Jan 21, 2020** | The Chinese virus scare however had its victims on the stock market: luxury stocks fell across… |
| **Jan 23, 2020** | Texas are investigating a second suspected case on US soil of a new and deadly Chinese virus, officials said Thursday. |

During the two-month period between Jan 1, 2020 and March 6, 2020 there were a total of 275 instances of Chinese + VIRUS. Then Secretary of State Mike Pompeo coined the stigmatized version of the term *Chinese virus* on two cable networks (Fox and CNBC) on March 7, 2020, However, as Darling-Hammond et al., had discovered, March 9, 2020 saw an 800% increase in the number of online news articles using stigmatizing terminology in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, and a 650% increase in tweets with the term *Chinese virus* (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). During the two-month period following the mass dissemination of Pompeo and other Trump affiliates use of the term *Chinese virus,* there were a total of 1278 instances of the use of *Chinese virus* in the corpus, a 364.73% increase in frequency. As suggested by Darling-Hammond et

al. (2020), and Hswen et al., (2020) this directly reflects the increase of both terms on major American news stations and the Twitter sphere. According to my analysis of instances of *Chinese virus* after March 8, 2020, most are heavily attributed to Donald Trump or other Trump + other Republican lawmakers, or Democratic lawmakers, as seen in Figure 4.2.

**Figure 4. 2 Examples of people who are quoted saying "Chinese virus"**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mar 16, 2020** | Governor Andrew Cuomo, and Trump again referred to the coronavirus as the " **Chinese Virus**, " further feeding into what critics say are racist and xenophobic tropes -- |
| **Mar 18, 2020** | " Trump wrote in a tweet. " The onslaught of the **Chinese Virus** is not your fault! Will be stronger than ever! " |
| **Mar 18, 2020** | Trump defied critics and opened his remarks by calling the disease the **" Chinese virus. "** |

Interestingly, there was only a single instance that mentioned Mike Pompeo's use of the term *Chinese virus;* all other instances were attributed to others.

### Metaphor Discussion

As obvious as it might seem, the negative association of "China" + "Virus" has reintroduced and heightened anti-Asian sentiment in the American context. Historically there have been similar sentiments such as the previously mentioned "Yellow Peril," which stems from late 20th century anti-China sentiment. This resurgence of a fear of China coincides with both growing political tensions and the exacerbation of racist rhetoric due to the politicization of COVID-19. The

possessive collocation of “Chinese virus” frames China as responsible for the virus. “Chinese virus” loosely falls into the metonymic category of what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) would refer to as “Controller of the Controlled.” In this type of metonym, “Chinese” is referential to the alleged origins of the COVID-19 virus, the physical place and the Chinese people. In addition to this metonymic use, there is also instances of the personification of the use of “Chinese virus.” Fox News quoted a tweet by Donald Trump that read:

**(12)** " The onslaught of the **Chinese Virus** is not your fault!”

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) had illustrated the use of personification in the case of ‘‘inflation *has attacked* the foundation of our economy.’ This personification is not merely framing *inflation* as a person, but as a specific kind of person, namely an “adversary.” Therefore, personification allows us to think about inflation in a specific way AND how to act toward it.

Inflation as an adversary “gives rise to and justifies political and economic actions on the part of our government: declaring war on inflation, setting targets… etc. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 43). Much in the same way, the personification of the use of “Chinese Virus” as something that can carry out an “onslaught” has created the perception of an adversary.

This directly overlaps with other war metaphors in the COVID-19 discourse like “racism as a war,” “pandemic as a war.” War metaphors “generate a network of entailment” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 176). In these types of metaphors, there is an “enemy,” which is often “targeting” or being “targeted.” We

have seen these types of metaphors in political agendas such as former President Carter's energy crisis as a "moral equivalent of War" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

> The *war* metaphor highlighted certain realities and hid others. The metaphor was not merely a way of viewing reality, it constituted a license for policy change and political and economic action. The very acceptance of metaphor provided grounds for certain inferences: There was an external, foreign, hostile enemy; energy needed to be given top priorities; the populace would have to make sacrifices; if we didn't meet the threat, we would not survive. (Lakoff & Johnson, pp 176-78).

The creation of an adversary or enemy directly relates to the coopted populist rhetoric in addition to long standing xenophobic American ideologies. Figure 4.3 shows the use of *Chinese virus* as an adversary with the presence of war metaphors (highlighted in yellow):

**Figure 4. 3 Examples of war metaphors + "Chinese virus"**

| | |
|---|---|
| Mar 20, 2020 | I only signed the Defense Production Act to combat the **Chinese Virus** should we need to invoke it in a worst case scenario in the future |
| Mar 20, 2020 | Some are being hit hard by the **Chinese Virus**, some are being hit practically not at all. |
| Mar 20, 2020 | We continue our relentless effort to defeat the **Chinese virus** |
| Mar 21, 2020 | Trump, in his opening statement, referred to America's " war against the **Chinese virus** |

Although populism had initially embodied fundamental definitions of people versus elites, mainstream media and hegemonic powers have historically coopted the populist frame to perpetuate continual oppression upon marginalized groups (Kramer, 2014; Hameleers et al., 2018; Bos et al., 2020). The neo-

populist framing of the “Chinese virus” pits the “American” people against the perceived threat of a “Chinese virus.”

The perpetual dissemination of stigmatized metaphors from hegemonic powers i.e., political figures on social media and news media, legitimizes such perceived threats. Therefore, the positioning of political figures as experts with expert opinions and bodies of research to back up their opinions, acts as a mechanism to legitimize evidence for audiences (Bos et al., 2020; Fairclough, 1995; Hameleers et al., 2018;  Kramer, 2014). In addition, Lakoff and Johnson might argue that the Western idea that there is “absolute objective truth is not only mistaken but socially and politically dangerous” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 181). The measurable effects of racist metaphors reinforce the idea that “truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in large part by metaphor” (1980, p. 181). Metaphors develop and change over time, but it is often hegemonic forces such a political leaders and mass media that continue to construe harmful metaphors as objective truths which then become encoded into culture and define absolutes and objectivity (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

## Chapter 5: Metafunctional analyses of anti-Asian hate discourse

Since 2020, hate crimes against Asian Americans have risen 223% (Report to the Nation). The rise in anti-Asian sentiment and hate crimes against Asian Americans has directly coincided with the use of stigmatizing metaphors like "Kung-flu" and "Chinese Virus." It was in this discursive context that on March 16th 2021, six women of Asian descent, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, and Yong Ae Yue were victims of a violent hate crime committed by a sexually repressed white man. This event along with the continuing patterns of anti-Asian hate crimes in America illustrate the fragility of the model minority myth which presupposes that Asians have become synonymous with white Americans thus relinquishing any marginalization. Importantly, this section also focuses on two of Halliday's functional grammar concepts including both his textual and ideational metafunctions. To investigate how hegemonic discourse influences racist rhetoric, I examined news coverage from the COVID Corpus on the murders in Atlanta, GA between March 16th and April 16th 2021 (when the highest frequency of Asian+WOMEN had occurred). I compiled a sub corpus of articles from my KWIC search. These articles had the collocation Asian + WOMEN. The first part of Chapter 5 examines patterns of Theme and Rheme as it relates to the collocation of Asian +WOMEN. The second part of Chapter 5 shows the results of a Transitivity analysis to better understand how specific verbal processes,

lexical choices and syntactic structures contribute to the framing of the March 16th murder of six Asian women.

## Thematicization

For the analysis of Theme and Transitivity, I performed a Keyword In Context (KWIC) search of *Asian women*, which allowed me to see where the specific search term was occurring structurally and what constituents were surrounding the specific search term.

In the Theme analysis, I first focused on identifying the Theme and Rheme of a random sample of 100 KWIC entries of *Asian women* between March 16 and April 16, 2021 (the time of the murder of six Asian women in Atlanta, Georgia). Breaking the instances into Theme and Rheme allowed me to focus on what was being emphasized in each instance. Figure 5.1 contains nine examples that mentioned *Asian women* in the clause. However, when *Asian women* are mentioned in the clause the phrase did not occur in a simple Theme, and when the phrase was the grammatical subject (5) and (6) they are not highlighted in the Theme.

**Figure 5. 1 Examples when *Asian women* is not foregrounded.**

| | **Theme** | **Rheme** |
|---|---|---|
| **(1)** | The shootings this month in Georgia of six ASIAN WOMEN | have brought up more personal issues in my life with regards to how ASIAN WOMEN are perceived in Western society. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **(2)** | The Georgia sheriff's official, who said during a press briefing that Robert Aaron Long, the man accused of killing six ASIAN WOMEN and two others in shootings at spas in the Atlanta area, had " a bad day " | had earlier blamed China for the Covid-19 pandemic on social media. |
| **(3)** | A shooting spree last week that killed six ASIAN WOMEN in Atlanta, Georgia | has also prompted renewed discussion of the issue in Canada. |
| **(4)** | Amid a horrific surge in targeted hate crimes, | six ASIAN WOMEN were murdered by a 21-year-old white man who has said to police that he was motivated to kill to curb his " sexual addiction. " |
| **(5)** | The slayings of six ASIAN WOMEN at spas in the Atlanta area | were seen Wednesday by some members of Massachusetts' Asian community as another expression of long-festering racism -- and part of a surge of anti-Asian hate crimes since the coronavirus pandemic began. |
| **(6)** | A week before that, | six ASIAN WOMEN were among eight people killed at three Atlanta-area spas |
| **(7)** | At least eight people, | including six ASIAN WOMEN were shot dead at day spas in the Atlanta, Georgia area, police said on Tuesday |
| **(8)** | Eight people | -- six of whom were ASIAN WOMEN -- were killed in a March 16 rampage in Atlanta. |
| **(9)** | The women who were killed faced specific racialized gendered violence for being ASIAN WOMEN and massage workers... | they were subjected to sexualized violence stemming from the hatred of sex workers, ASIAN WOMEN, working class people, and immigrants, " the group said in a statement. |

In Figure 5.1, except for (4) and (6) the term *Asian women* does not occur as the grammatical subject but rather as part of a phrase modifying the larger constituent before the clause. In the examples where *Asian women* did occur in the Theme it was not foregrounding the message of the clause. Rather, examples 1-3 in Figure 5.1 would be considered a heavy subject *as Theme*, in

which a larger complex constituent acts as the entire Theme. To further show this, I have highlighted the grammatical subjects (examples 1-5, Figure 5.1) to show that *Asian women* was not the subject of the clause. For example, examples 1 and 3 show that the grammatical subject is the event of "the shooting," where *Asian women* is part of a modifying phrase of "the shooting." In example 2, the Georgia sheriff's official is the subject of the clause, whereas everything else before the verb is modifying/describing "the Georgia Sheriff." The term *Asian women* occurs in this phrase as part of the larger adjective phrase that describes what the Georgia sheriff had said in a public report.

Examples (4)-(9) in Figure 5.1 illustrate instances where the Theme occurred in passive clauses. *Asian women* occurred in the Theme of two passive constructions (examples (5) & (9), Figure 5.1), but similar to examples (1)-(3), *Asian women* was not the grammatical subject nor the foregrounding for the Theme. Although examples (4) and (6) show that the grammatical subject is *Asian women,* the phrase did not occur as part of the Theme. Examples (4), (6), (7), and (8) in Figure 5.1 were also instances of an *Adjunct as Theme*.

Out of this sub corpus of 100 KWIC search results there were 26 occurrences of *Asian women* in the Theme, however, most instances occurred in a marked Theme (Figure 5.2). Of the 26 instances when *Asian women* occurred in the Theme there was only 1 unmarked instance where *Asian women* occurred as the grammatical subject of the clause and the Theme (Figure 5.2).

**(10) "Asian women" as both the Theme and Subject**

| **Theme** | **Rheme** |
|---|---|
| Six **ASIAN WOMEN** | died in the attacks on Tuesday prompting widespread concern that the killings could be the latest in a surge of hate crimes against Asian Americans. |

Example 10 shows that the grammatical subject, *Asian women,* is the foregrounding the message of the clause.

## Theme/Rheme Discussion

Thematic analysis allowed for the examination of the intertextual metafunction, how a writer chooses to foreground information in a given clause's message. The clausal message serves as a device for placing emphasis or importance on specific information. Although the phrase *Asian women* occurred the most between March-April 2021 in the entire Corona Virus Corpus, my findings indicated that *Asian women* was not foregrounded in the majority of the Themes. These findings were contrary to my original assumption that the spike in the frequency of the term *Asian women* might indicate that Themes during this high frequency spike in *Asian women* were likely foregrounded in the phrase *Asian women.* However, my findings show that news media chose to place emphasis on other information not foregrounded by the phrase *Asian women*, for example the event of the shooting.

I had also originally expected that with the spike in *Asian women* as a collocation, there would be more explicit mention of race as a factor in the shooting. However, there was very little mention of racism as a factor of the

shooting in the Theme. Explicit mention of racism in the Theme only occurred once in the following instance in (11) (Theme in bold):

(11) **The misogynistic racism directed at ASIAN WOMEN** is evident not just on platforms like Twitter, but in history -- the roots of our broken, racist immigration system began by banning entry of Chinese women under the Page Act.

In Example 11, there is mention of the intersection of misogyny and racism, but it is not in direct relation to the shooting; rather, the message in (11) is that there is prevalent racism that exists on social media platforms. While evidence points toward misogyny and racism as the main factors for the perpetrator, the Theme analysis showed that news media framed their stories toward the incident itself. Even when *Asian women* occurred within a Theme there was only one instance where *Asian women* served as both the subject and Theme. This was in contrast to the majority of Themes being concerned with the event of the shooting, or police activity related to the shooting. The lack of explicitly mentioned racism appears to reflect findings of previous research on the disparities between race and “newsworthy” mass shooting victim coverage that showed that showed white victims in mass shootings were often more humanized through narrative than BIPOC victims (Zhang et al., 2019).

Again, all other instances of *Asian women* occurring in the Theme, co-occurred with a larger marked Themes. The most common topics within these marked Themes were the *shooting* and the *victims*. Overall, the topics were more distributed across Theme topics than I had originally assumed and *Asian women* as a subject and Theme occurred much less than I had expected. This data

points towards a tendency for news media to focus more on the violence of the event, and the victims not as humanized individuals but as statistics. The following Transitivity analysis examines more closely how the messages in the clauses are structured by examining their verb process types and how who has agency over specific actions like *doing* or *speaking* plays a role in how news framed the shooting.

## Transitivity Analysis

The following section examines the sub corpus of the same 100 clauses further by categorizing verb process types and analyzing the implications of salient process types to understand the agency of Asian women. While the thematic analyses focused on an overall message and what is emphasized as important through clausal order, transitivity is part of the ideational metafunction and focuses on the semantics of the verb and who does what to whom and how. To underline the agency of the Asian women murdered in Atlanta, my analysis will be focused on who was given agency in this news coverage of the event and the implications of using specific process types over others. Table 5.1 shows each process type and its frequency of occurrence in the sub corpus.

**Table 5. 1 Process types by frequency**

| **Process** | **Frequency** |
|---|---|
| Material | 58 |
| Relational | 19 |
| Verbal | 14 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Existential | 3 |
| Mental | 2 |
| Behavioral | 0 |

Material verbs, semantically physical actions, were by far the most frequent of the verb process types totaling 58 instances, with Relational and Mental verbs the next two most frequent. In this chapter I will discuss the results of my transitivity analysis and their implications. Within the instances of Material processes, I found three other salient patterns of how the discourse portrayed who had agency in the shooting.

Of the 58 instances of material verbs there were a total of 39 instances that used nominalization, or a larger phrase that takes the place of a human actor as the actor. In the example texts In Figure 5.2 show several instances where there was use of nominalization.

**Figure 5. 2 Examples of nominalization as an actor**

| | **Actor** | **Process** | **Goal** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(12)** | A shooting at three spas in the Atlanta area | has left | six ASIAN WOMEN dead |
| **(13)** | Today, a murderous rampage at three spas in the Atlanta area | has killed | eight people, six of them ASIAN WOMEN. |

Examples (12) and (13) show sample texts that nominalized a material verb, *shoot,* into *the shooting* as the actor of the material process of each verb, thus making the entire constituent the grammatical actor. Figure 5.2 also highlights the use of different lexical choices for *the shooting, e.g., (12) a shooting* verses

(13) *a murderous rampage.* On the other side of the clause, the Goal that is acted upon were the victims of the shooting, e.g., (12) *six Asian women dead* and (13) *eight people, six of them Asian women.*

An important observation in the examples above is that there is no mention of the human suspect that was responsible for pulling the trigger of the gun. Moreover, logically, a shooting requires a person to operate and fire a gun, therefore a "shooting" itself is unable to perform the action of killing. Therefore, these examples construe the event of the "shooting" (a non-human concept) as the agent responsible for the deaths of the six Asian women, which obfuscates the human actor responsible for pulling the trigger.

In Figure 5.3, the sample texts illustrate another frame of the shooting that explicitly mentioned the perpetrator as the actor through varying lexical choices.

**Figure 5.3 Examples of the perpetrator explicitly mentioned as actor**

| **Actor** | | **Process** | **Goal** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(14)** | A racist white man | allegedly kills | ASIAN WOMEN he simultaneously fetishizes. |
| **(15)** | That the shooter | targeted | ASIAN WOMEN is not a coincidence |

(14) and (15) in Figure 5.3 were instances where a human actor was explicitly stated and given agency to the action of shooting the guns that killed the Asian women. These examples contrast with the previous nominalization examples (Figure 5.2) which gave a non-human nominalized phrase the agency over the deaths of the six Asian women. All the examples in Figure 5.3 framed the actual

human that fired the gun as the responsible actor of the killing. Likely due to legal reasons there were no incriminating clauses explicitly naming the human who fired the gun as the actor with the material verb for that action --e.g., *Robert Aaron Long killed six Asian women*. There was also variation in verbal lexical choice among explicit mention of the shooter. The only instance of *kill* as a material verb with a human actor occurred with the modifier “allegedly” as seen in (14) of Figure 5.3.

A third salient pattern in material process types was the use of the passive constructions as shown below in the following sample of texts (Figure 5.4).

**Figure 5.4 Examples of passive constructions with material verbs**

| | **Goal** | **Process (Passive)** | **Actor** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(16)** | Amid a horrific surge in targeted hate crimes, six ASIAN WOMEN | were murdered | by a 21-year-old white man who has said to police that he was motivated to kill to curb his " sexual addiction. " |
| **(17)** | At least eight people, including six ASIAN WOMEN | were shot dead | at day spas in the Atlanta, Georgia area, police said on Tuesday **actor omitted* |
| **(18)** | Eight people -- six of whom were ASIAN WOMEN -- | were killed | in a March 16 rampage in Atlanta |

Out of the 58 instances of material verbs, 9 were in passive clauses. In the passive construction there was only one explicit mention of the killer whereas, all other instances of passive constructions omitted the killer as the actor. In (18) of Figure 5.4, I observed another instance of a nominalization occupying the slot for

the actor e.g., “a March 16 rampage in Atlanta,” as the actor responsible for the death of eight people.

In all three patterns “Asian women” occurred as the goal. However, each pattern portrays a slightly different message about the event. Figure 5.2 showed examples of how news media gave agency to the *shooting* as the actor while also obfuscating the actual killer. Figure 5.3 included examples of framing the death of these Asian women as the outcome of the human actor killing the victims. Figure 5.4 showed examples where *Asian women* were foregrounded in the Theme position, however, the actor is obfuscated by the passive construction, which also allows the for option to omit the actor entirely as we see in examples (17) and (18) of Figure 5.4.

Through nominalization and passivation, news media obfuscated the role of the killer in the murders. Table 5.2 shows the overall frequency omitting the actor in all 58 instances of material verbs.

**Table 5. 2 Frequency of killer mentioned in text**

| Killer omitted/obfuscated | Killer mentioned | Other |
|---|---|---|
| 32 | 13 | 11 |

The *other* category included instances where the main clause was not directly related to a human actor killing “Asian women” such as example 19:

**(19)** The popular culture representation of Asian-American women **reinforces** this idea of Asian-American women being submissive and meek, and of being sexual playthings for white men, which also relates to the attacks in Atlanta.

In example (19) the main clause is related to “popular culture representation of Asian-American women” and the material verb is “reinforces.”

Table 5.2 illustrates that in more than half of the instances of material verbs, the human actor was omitted. However, whether the human actor was omitted or given agency, *Asian women* occurred 53 out of 58 times as the *goal* or part of the *goal* in which material process was acting upon.

*Relational* verbs were the second most salient verb process type with 19 instances. There was a total of 6 instances that explicitly state the victims’ races (Figure 5.5).

**Figure 5. 5 Examples of relational process and the race of the victims**

| | **Actor** | **Process** | **Attribute** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(20)** | Among the 8 people killed in the Atlanta shootings, 6 | are believed to be | ASIAN WOMEN |
| **(21)** | The victims | were | two ASIAN WOMEN , a white woman, and a white man, according to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. |
| **(22)** | Those fatally shot | were | two ASIAN WOMEN , a White woman and a White man. |
| **(23)** | Six of the victims | are | ASIAN WOMEN , but Atlanta police said it is too soon to know if the shootings were racially motivated. |
| **(24)** | Six of the victims | were | ASIAN WOMEN |
| **(25)** | A week before that, six ASIAN WOMEN | were | among eight people killed at three Atlanta-area spas |

In Figure 5.5 examples (20-24) the actor is given the racial and gender attribute *Asian women*. In (25) the opposite occurs where the actor, “six Asian women” is given the attribute of “among eight people killed at three Atlanta-area spas.”

There was only one instance where the shooter was the actor of a relational process (26):

| | Actor | Process | Attribute |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(26)** | Robert Aaron Long, 21, | is | facing murder charges for killing eight people -- including six ASIAN WOMEN -- from three massage parlors in Georgia on Tuesday |

In contrast to the attributes of race and gender given to the victims, the shooter had zero instances of relational processes that stated his race or gender.

Several instances of relational processes came from news commentaries directly related to violence against Asian women (Figure 5.5).

**Figure 5.6 Examples of relational process from commentary on violence against Asian women**

| | Actor | Process | Attribute |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(27)** | It | ‘s (is) | a whole environment of targeting ASIAN WOMEN , first as sexual objects of desire and then as objects of racial fear and hatred completely interconnected. |
| **(28)** | It appeared, based on what we're seeing, that this likely | may have been | a lot more targeted toward the Asian community and specifically, ASIAN WOMEN |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **(29)** | It | isn't | especially shocking to glance beneath a news story about murdered ASIAN WOMEN and see a slew of responses snickering about whether or not their lives had a happy ending |
| **(30)** | And in this case it | was | also part of a long history of anti-sex work violence, which can affect ASIAN WOMEN in very particular ways: On Tuesday, Long said he targeted massage parlors and the women who worked in them because they represented a " temptation he wanted to eliminate. |

In Figure 5.6, the pronoun *it* was given an attribute. All of the attributes in these instances were longer constituents commenting about historical implications of violence against Asian women and speculations about the shooting. The pronoun *it* also appeared to be an indexical referring to the *shooting* in (30).

Verbal processes were the third most frequently occurring process type in the data with 14 instances. There were five categories of Sayers of verbal processes, Table 5.3 is a breakdown of the categories and their frequencies:

**Table 5. 3 Categories of sayers by frequency**

| **Sayer** | **Frequency** |
|---|---|
| Police | 4 |
| Shooter | 2 |
| Expert | 2 |
| Government official | 1 |
| Victim advocate | 1 |
| Non-human nominalization | 1 |
| Individual | 2 |
| Reporter | 1 |

Police were the most frequent *Sayer* in verbal processes followed by shooters, experts and individuals. Experts and individuals who were *sayers* had verbiage about the history of racism and factors contributing to the overall rise in anti-Asian hate crimes rather than direct relation to the event of the shooting. Therefore, I chose to focus on the police and shooter in the following examples due to their direct relation to the actual event of the shooting. Interestingly the processes and *verbiage* of police and the shooter were not dissimilar.

**Figure 5. 7 Examples of police as a sayer**

| | Sayer | Process | Target | Verbiage |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(31)** | And while the police | said | N/A | that Mr. Long claimed he was not racially motivated, some saw a connection between strict sexual beliefs and violence against ASIAN WOMEN in particular. |
| **(32)** | Atlanta police on Thursday | said | N/A | they are still working to track down the next-of-kin for the four ASIAN WOMEN who were killed at two spas in the city on Tuesday. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(33)** | Less than a day after eight people were shot and killed at Atlanta-area spas -- six of them ASIAN WOMEN -- a Georgia official | told | reporters | the mass shooting suspect was having a " bad day. |
| **(34)** | Atlanta police | said | N/A | the suspect told them his actions were not racially motivated -- even though the shooter targeted businesses known for employing Asians, and six victims were ASIAN WOMEN |

When the *sayer* was a police official, the verb used was either *said* or *told*. In (33) a police official is portrayed as *telling* a *target* (reporters*)* about information related to the shooting. In all instances *police* were given the agency and their *verbiage* was reporting on the investigation and/or the motives of the shooter. The following examples in Figure 5.8 show the two instances of the shooter as the *sayer*.

**Figure 5. 8 Examples of shooter as the sayer**

| **Sayer** | | **Process** | **Target** | **Verbiage** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(35)** | Atlanta shooting suspect | told | investigators | killings of six ASIAN WOMEN at three Atlanta-area spas weren't racially motivated. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **(36)** | The suspect | said | N/A | it wasn't racially motivated, but on the other hand, he's going specifically to these spas where ASIAN WOMEN work precisely to serve the sexual fantasies of White males, " Palumbo-Liu said in an interview |

Figure 5.8 shows examples of news media giving the shooter the same verbal agency as police either through *telling* or *saying* his motives in the *verbiage.*

## Discussion

*Obfuscation of actors and omission of names*

A summary of the Atlanta, Georgia event might be as follows: a white man with a gun fired the gun, killing six Asian women and two white people; the man that shot the gun was responsible for the killings. The findings from the transitivity patterns in the discourse about the murder of six Asian women on March 16, 2021 showed the frequent omission of the shooter as the *actor* through passivation or obfuscation through nominalization (Figures 5.2 & 5.4). The deletion of the *actor* through passive clauses has been suggested as a way of encoding ideological bias, thus suppressing an “unpleasant activity” (Simpson, p.114, 1993). I would argue that the framing of the discourse from the sub corpus supports the idea that passive clauses dealing with the shooting favored obscuring the shooter as the responsible actor for the shooting. Additionally, the use of nominalizations as a substitute for the actor provided another level of

removing focus from the shooter, framing the responsible actor as the *shooting* (a non-human event).

The lexical choices in labeling *the shooter* varied e.g.*, a racist white man, A white, 21 year old, the shooter.* Notably the material processes in Figure 5.3 also varied. Example (14) in Figure 5.3 showed an instance of the verb *kill* being modified by the adverb *allegedly*, which does not confirm that the actor, *A racist white man* was in fact the perpetrator. Example (15) in Figure 5.3 showed another instance where the verb process was *targeted* which also displaces the agency of explicitly *killing*.

In the sub corpus, I found only one instance during the period of March 16 – April 16 that mentioned Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, and Yong Ae Yue, by name. Xiaojie Tan's name appeared in a second article with an interview with her daughter. In contrast, the name of the killer, Robert Aaron Long, was listed eight times in the sub corpus, but only occurred as a grammatical actor once (26). While this is not necessarily surprising given the press is encouraged not to mention the name of the killer, the use of his name initially seemed to contradict the subtle use of nominalizations or passives that obfuscated or omitted the role of the killer in the shootings. However, as shown in (26) his name did not occur as the actor of a material process, rather his name exclusively occurred as the actor of a *relational* process where the attribute focused on him, *facing murder charges.*

On the other hand, the omission of the victims' names in favor of an ambiguous *six Asian women,* or *victims* contributes to the dehumanization of victims which has been the case in countless news coverage of American mass shootings (Meindl & Ivy, 2017). I speculate that the practice of omitting the victims' names might be a stylistic choice for brevity of online news media. However, there is also a historical pattern of glorifying shooters over the victims. Thus, this purposeful omission of the victim's names whether a stylistic choice or not, still contributes to the continual dehumanization and marginalization of Asian women as objects as has been historically perpetuated in American media and discourse (Meindl & Ivy, 2017).

While misogyny and the fetishization of Asian women appeared to be one of the factors (if not a main factor) that played a role in Robert Aaron Long's motives behind targeting Asian massage parlors, I would like to point out that he was not charged with any hate-crime related charges. According to the Cherokee County Grand Jury indictment, he was charged with 4 counts of malice murder, 4 counts of felony murder, criminal attempt at murder, 11 counts of aggravated assault, aggravated battery, possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony and criminal damage to property in the first degree (Office of District Attorney). Yet, the hyper-sexualization of Asian women has unfortunately been a longstanding trope in Western media, historically representing Asian women in Western media as submissive and hyper-sexual objects (Meindle & Ivy, 2017, Zhang et al., 2019). During the initial investigation into the motives behind the

event, police had speculated that the perpetrator's motives were only driven by hyper-sexuality and not race.

Historically, race has played a role in how perpetrators are portrayed in mass shootings (Meindle & Ivy, 2017; Zhang et al., 2019). In the dataset, there were disparities between racially identifying the shooter versus the victims. The shooter's race was only mentioned four times, while the race of the victims was always mentioned. These findings indicate that news media appeared to have a preference in racializing the victims but not racializing the white shooter when framing the shooting in Atlanta, Georgia.

Framing preferences surrounding race and mass shootings have been examined in previous studies (Dixon, 201; Dixon, Azocar & Cass, 2003; Madriz, 1997; Zhang et al., 2019). Several studies pointed toward the media reliance and legitimization of an ideal and newsworthy victim based on age, gender, race and social status (Madriz, 1997; Zhang et al., 2019). Prior stigmatizing discourse surrounding innocent racialized victims contributes to deeming their stories less newsworthy (Zhang et al., 2019). The dehumanization of Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, and Yong Ae Yue appeared to reflect the ongoing trends in COVID-19 discourse and metaphors attributing the virus to China and other Asians in addition to the resurfacing of historical discourse like the Yellow Peril narrative and other stigmatizing narratives about Asians. Based on the data from my Transitivity analysis there is evidence that the framing of this mass shooting was focused on the race of the

victims, but not the victims as individuals. Rather, race was solely used as identification or contrast to the two other white victims. In fact, contrary to race as a factor in these crimes, Robert Aaron Long was not charged with any hate crimes.

*Who has agency over reporting facts*

An unfortunate and bleak reality to news reports on mass shootings is that the reported facts are biased toward those who have agency in speaking about the event. Because the victims in this case were all deceased, they were obviously given no agency over speaking. On the other hand, both the police and the shooter were given agency as the *sayers*. There were also zero instances in the sub corpus of family members as *sayers.*

In this shooting particularly, as briefly shown in (31) in Figure 5.7, the Georgia police official who spoke to the news media during the summary execution, downplayed the killer's actions by reporting that the killer was experiencing mental illness and was "having a bad day"(Davies). Historically police have been at the forefront of the racial bias debate. Research has backed the fact that police officers in higher crime areas with greater concentration of minorities were more biased toward shooting perceived BIPOC people than white people (Corell et al., 2007). BIPOC suspects are also more likely to die at the hands of police than are white suspects (Corell et al., 2007). In addition, there has been a measurable exponential increase in bias and violence against Asians

since 2019. These facts all suggest that media reliance on police accounts of crimes involving BIPOC victims is inherently biased, even though such accounts are framed as factual evidence in ongoing investigations. Moreover, allowing the killer to have the same agency as a *sayer* as the police also creates a biased toward the perpetrator's verbiage.

*Other observations in the dataset*

In this section I will focus on an observation regarding lexical choices in racially labeling the six Asian women. When racially labeling the victims the two other white victims were labeled *white* three times in the entire corpus, all other times their race was omitted as in (37).

**(37)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Today, a murderous rampage at three spas in the Atlanta area | has killed | eight people, six of them **ASIAN WOMEN.** |

In (37), the discourse mentioned eight total victims but only the race of the Asian women was stated. In context of the full event, the omitted race is *white.* However, this label was omitted in all but three of the instances in the sub corpus. All other times when the victims were racially labeled, only the race of the Asian women were labeled. This appears to highlight the speculation of a racially motivated attack. Figure 5.5 showed some examples of these marked occurrence.

Additionally, there appeared to be five other ways in which the victims, Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, and Yong Ae Yue were racially labeled as shown in Figure 5.9.

**Figure 5. 9 Examples of lexical choices for racial identities of victims**

**(38)** Six of the **victims** were women of Asian descent. The shooter, a white man, claims the attack was not…
**(39)** …believed that because most of the **victims** were of Asian ancestry…
**(40)** …all of the **victims** in Atlanta were Asian
**(41)** Six of the eight **victims** were of Asian origin.
**(42)** Six of the **victims** were identified as Asian American women

The *Asian American* label has often been up for debate for its sweeping monolithic nature which categorizes all Asians in America into one falsely homogenous category (Chun & Zalokar,1992; Mellilo, 2022; Palumbo-Liu, 2001). The Asian American label also presupposes the idea that "American" as a standalone label is synonymous with "white American." However, the five different labels above still perpetuate the homogenous ambiguity of the title of "Asian" as a monolith and that these women were perhaps not "American".

Perhaps the lack of accessible information about Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, and Yong Ae Yue, during the time of publishing the articles might lead someone to use ambiguous racial labels to categorize the victims, but notably, each of their names are also visibly Korean or Chinese. I might speculate that the variation of labels is tied to the idea of xenophobia and uncertainty of who is allowed to have the American

label when names are visibly not Western European(Palumbo-Liu, 2001; Zhang et al., 2019).

I attempted to find the most humanizing article that gave each of the Asian victims a name with personal information. The following information was quoted from the *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* a local paper which had a small entry written about each of the women. This article was released on March 15, 2022, a year after the shooting:

1. Yue, who was born in Korea, moved to Georgia in the 1980s with her husband, a U.S. Army soldier she'd met back home, and Peterson.
2. Daoyou Feng, 44, was born in rural China and had moved to the U.S. to pursue the American Dream. She lived in Kennesaw and had only been working a few weeks at Tan's spa. She was a Chinese citizen, according to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the USA.
3. Xiaojie "Emily" Tan, 49, of Kennesaw, owned and ran the spa in Cherokee County. Longtime customer and friend Greg Hynson, 54, recalled hours spent visiting at the shop with Tan, who loved to brag on her daughter, a recent University of Georgia grad.
4. Soon Chung Park, 74, loved dancing, especially the tango and the cha-cha. She'd raised five kids on her own after she was widowed, and she'd worked all her life — mostly as a cook, though she once owned a jewelry store. She planned to move north to be closer to her grandchildren, but her life was cut short before she got that chance.
   Park had lived in New York before moving to Atlanta and left behind a grieving husband, Gwangho Lee. Lee set up a GoFundMe to help him get by as struggles with the tragedy.
5. Suncha Kim was 69. A mother of two and grandmother of three, she was married and loved by all who knew her, her granddaughter said.
   "She was married to a loving husband who she planned to grow old with," a statement from the family said. "She has two children. A loving son, a loving daughter, and three beautiful grandchildren. Outside of our immediate family, everyone that met my grandmother loved her dearly."
6. Hyun Jung Grant, 51, worked hard to provide for her two sons. She lived in the Duluth area and loved disco and club music, regularly strutting or moonwalking as she did her household chores, her oldest son, Randy Park, said. In the car, she would jam with her sons to tunes blasting over the stereo.

> A single mother of two, both sons said they had no other family in America.
> (Stevens, 2022)

The increase in violence against Asian Americans in the past three years has been a product of the discourse of the COVID-19 pandemic and the longstanding history of associating Asian immigrants with “disease and filth” (Darling-Hammond, et.al, 2020; Li & Nicholson, 2020, p. 4; Ong & Zhang, 2021; Palumbo-Liu, 2001). The American press has also historically played a main role in widely disseminating such notions that (from 19___) “specifically Chinese and Filipino are a threat to health, morals, technology, and well-being of whites” (Li & Nicholson, 2020, p. 4). These notions perpetuated the idea of Yellow Peril and the idea that specifically East Asians are an enigmatic threat to the Western way of life. In the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was measurable evidence that the spike in anti-Asian rhetoric and violent crimes against Asians was directly related to the use of stigmatizing terms such as *Chinese virus* in corporate news and social media. The reproduction of racist discourse to a mass audience caused the resurgence of *Yellow Peril* sentiment that is deeply rooted in US history. The murder of about Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, and Yong Ae Yue occurred within this discourse context of increasing anti-Asian sentiment. At the same time the model minority myth competes against the Yellow Peril narrative, holding Asians as a successful minority likened to white success. The model-minority myth has been weaponized by white Americans as a justification for the denigration of other

minorities (Darling-Hammond, et.al, 2020; Li & Nicholson, 2020; Ong & Zhang, 2021; Palumbo-Liu, 2001). However, due to this perceived success, prior to 2019 *anti-Asian hate* appeared to have been erased from popular discourse.

## Chapter 6: Implications and future actions

There is a growing body of work that now focuses on anti-Asian racism, but prior to 2019 there was a large gap in literature on the topic. This study adds to the currently growing body of work specifically on anti-Asian hate. The critical issue of anti-Asian hate is historically rooted in sentiments that marginalize and stereotype Asians. Therefore, I focused heavily on metaphors, writers' choices with respect to foregrounding information, verb semantics and thematic roles in sentences and how such linguistic devices aided in a specific framing of an event. The purpose of this study was to uncover the patterns that exist within hegemonic news media discourse that influences racial bias towards Asians.

There was clear evidence that news media used specific metaphors that perpetuated ideas of violence against a perceived threat—e.g, "fighting a pandemic," "defeating the Chinese virus," or "war against the Chinese virus." And based on the research showing the cognitive effect of repeated metaphor use (Boroditsky), there is no coincidence that anti-Asian violence and anti-Asian bias has increased after the reproduction of stigmatizing racist rhetoric and war metaphors with COVID-19 and its direct relation to China.

Functional linguistic methods like Theme and Transitivity allowed for multi-level analyses of the linguistic structures to further examine what information was being emphasized (Themes) and who was framed in which roles for actions (Transitivity). It is important to question the motives behind American press and to understand that the frames events in specific ways for specific audiences.

Since I began this thesis, anti-Asian hate crimes have continued to be a topic in press coverage and social media. Moreover, there has been an overwhelming amount of anti-China news coverage, specifically, anti-China sentiment as in the banning of Tik-Tok and hysteria over alleged Chinese spy balloons. There is also the ongoing US bipartisan political discourse surrounding the support of Taiwan while also condemning China. However, evidence from my study and previous studies has shown that anti-China sentiment has been generalized into anti-Asian sentiment. Thus, I foresee additional anti-Asian hate crimes on a continual rise due to misinformation and conflation of political issues being the representative of an entire race of people. Therefore, additional critical analyses of anti-Asian and anti-China discourse would be beneficial to further spread awareness on the factors that continually contribute to racist rhetoric and the marginalization of Asians in the supposed post-Covid world.

One limitation of this study was only using a dataset of online news media as opposed to including social media posts from multiple platforms. With the increasing amount of news spread through Twitter and other social media platforms, a future study might include a more diverse dataset that stems beyond traditional online news stations. Darling-Hammond et al., (2020) and Hswen et al, (2021) had respectively used Twitter API data and Implicit Bias Testing data to measure spikes in anti-Asian hate sentiment. In a future study, it would be important to include more diverse data from multiple sources of news media to gather a better understanding of how different audiences are interreacting with

anti-Asian hate discourse. This study might have also benefitted from comparing news coverage of another mass killing to see if race played a role in how the event was framed.

Another limitation of this study occurred when running into intersections between racism and misogyny. Although this study focused primarily on the racism component associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, the murders of Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, and Yong Ae Yue brought up the historically rooted issue and intersection of racism and misogyny, specifically the hyper sexualization and fetishization of Asian women that has been continually perpetuated in American media. Asian women experience racism much differently than Asian men; thus, there is a need for future studies that focus specifically on the historically rooted intersection between anti-Asian sentiment and misogyny.

Overall, the findings implicated the need for more critical analyses to both fill the previous gaps in literature and to further extrapolate the multiple factors that contribute to anti-Asian hate. Examining discourse and historical contexts that contribute to racism against Asians is one method of pushing back at stereotypes and discrimination in the AAPI community.

# Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study has helped uncover the ways in which hegemonic discourse uses metaphors and the manipulation of linguistic structures to contribute to both subtle and explicit racist discourse. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has allegedly come to an end, the discourse associating Asians with the disease has continued. Explicitly stigmatizing language has proven to be a contributing factor in the marginalization and disenfranchisement of the AAPI community. At the same time, the ways in which news frames shootings and violence against BIPOC also contribute to the continual marginalization of all BIPOC communities.

Critical discourse studies can and should be a method of uncovering the roots of issues and finding equitable solutions. I hope that this study has shed light on a previously non-mainstream critical issue that was obscured by the harmful narrative of the model minority. Prior to 2019, Asian American critical issues in general had been obscured by the model minority myth and there was very little focus on any Asian American issues in the news media. However, this study and previous studies have shown that with the increase in anti-Asian rhetoric there has been an increase in violent crimes targeting Asians. Moreover, as I've observed through corpus data, news media exhibits patterns of subtle racism through language structures that further dehumanize victims in hate crimes while also giving complete agency of specific facts to killers and police. Between social media, news media and other modern mass media, there is quantifiable evidence showing the correlation of the subtle and explicit racist

rhetoric and hate crimes. This thesis has shown that there is empirical evidence that the American press and xenophobic politicians (two very influential hegemonic institutions) have been perpetuating historical racist ideologies to mass audiences in an unknowing way. Moreover, racist history of the U.S regarding people from Asia tied to xenophobic politics and the model minority myth established ground for continued discrimination.

It is important that this study does not end here. Rather I hope this study sparks more questions about mass media discourse that society accepts as *neutral*, when in fact there is a surmounting number of factors that show how media biases itself toward hegemonic powers.

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