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“Language is also a place of struggle”: recognizing and responding to linguistic microaggressions

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Table of contents

Riassunto	5
Introduction	6
CHAPTER 1. WHAT DOES THE WORD “MICROAGGRESSION” MEAN?	9
1.1 The origin of the word <i>microaggression</i>	9
1.2 Forms of microaggressions	13
1.3 Why oppressor and victim	15
1.4 Responsibility vs. blame	15
1.5 The effects of microaggressions	17
CHAPTER 2. MICROAGGRESSIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE	20
2.1 The microaggression process model.....	20
2.2 Racial microaggressions	24
2.3 Gender microaggressions	36
2.4 LGBTQ+ microaggressions	41
2.5 Intersectionality	48
CHAPTER 3. GUIDELINES	54
3.1 Media representation	54
3.2 How to react to microaggressions	61
3.3 People-first language and guidelines – How to avoid microaggressions	62
Conclusion	75

Bibliography and sitography 76

RIASSUNTO

In questa tesi, mi concentrerò principalmente sull'utilizzo di un linguaggio inclusivo. Più specificatamente, ho deciso di concentrarmi sul fenomeno delle microaggressioni. Queste appartengono ad una forma 'moderna' di discriminazione, la quale è spesso sottovalutata e ritenuta un'esperienza poi-non-così-male. Già dal primo capitolo è possibile comprendere quanto veramente dannose siano queste aggressioni. In questo capitolo, darò una definizione del termine *microaggressioni* – e le diverse variabili da tenere in considerazione – e parlerò anche degli effetti che queste hanno sulle persone.

Nel secondo capitolo, darò degli esempi di microaggressioni e li analizzerò. Seppure le microaggressioni possano essere riferite a vari gruppi di minoranze (di razza, di genere, di religione, di persone con disabilità, e così via), io principalmente ho deciso di concentrarmi su microaggressioni di razza, genere, ed LGBTQ+. Inoltre, illustrerò anche il processo delle microaggressioni attraverso un modello preciso. In questo capitolo, ho anche deciso di parlare di tre fenomeni che possono essere ricollegati alle microaggressioni: l'anti-meridionalismo italiano (e come si collega e può essere simile alle microaggressioni di razza), il *male gaze* (cioè il modo in cui lo sguardo maschile influenza da tempo la percezione e la rappresentazione del corpo femminile) e l'intersezionalità (cioè l'insieme, l'intersezione, di più fattori che possono essere considerati discriminanti, in quanto allontanano la persona dal mainstream e da ciò che viene considerato 'normale').

Nel terzo capitolo, tratterò dell'importanza della rappresentazione – soprattutto al giorno d'oggi, nella nostra società dei social media con i quali tutto si diffonde in pochissimo tempo, ma in larghissimi spazi – e darò delle indicazioni generali e degli aiuti per poter imparare a riconoscere, rispondere ed evitare (di commettere) le microaggressioni, offrendo anche delle alternative.

INTRODUCTION

Reading through thousands of pages, hundreds of articles/books, tons of authors, there is one thing I realized. Language is a place of struggle. It is. It is because we use “the oppressor’s language” to talk to each other. A language that enables us to attend school, write, talk; but a language that carries the scent of oppression (hooks 2015, 224). To get a better grasp into what I am trying to express, I think that this small extract from *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*, written by hooks in 2015, might help:

Language is also a place of struggle. We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination—a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you? Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle (hooks 2015, 224).

As the Mexican-American writer Anzaldúa explains, when she was a child she was often told “If you want to be American, speak American [English]”. She was often sent to the corner, when trying to explain how to pronounce her name. She highlights how she was under pressure to get rid of her ‘different’ accent. Accents are a form of self-expression. They tried to obliterate part of who she was because she was deemed not to conform with what was standard: the white Anglo-Saxon voice. “Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?”, said – Ray Gwyn Smith (quoted in Anzaldúa 1987, 53-54). Language is also a place of struggle. Anzaldúa adds that “[e]thnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity - I am my language” (Anzaldúa 1987, 59) and shows how repeated attacks on native languages that are not English, diminish the sense of self (Anzaldúa 1987, 58). Language is the primary and first representation of who we are. The way we talk is an expression of the way we think. The things we say and the way we say them are essential to understand one’s culture, being, and mind. As expression of our culture, it carries all of its biases with it.

As someone who belongs to multiple minorities (I have been living in Northern Italy for almost seven years now, but I am from Sicily – and yes, it might seem crazy, but it kind of means that I belong to a minority; I am a woman; I am not heterosexual) and as someone who is always very attentive to everything that happens, in the last few years I have been thinking more and more about the way language influences our everyday life. I have to admit that, luckily, I haven’t been

the object of hate crimes very often. However, looking back, I now realize all of the microaggressions that I have been subjected to throughout the years. In fact, there have been years during which I was the object of microaggressions almost every day. Small acts. Short sentences. I can still clearly remember when one of my High School classmates told me that all of our teachers were always going to have a problem with me – even if they knew nothing about me – because of my accent, which indicates a different regional origin (the problem, as it turns out, is that my accent indicates that I am from the South, and not from Friuli-Venezia Giulia or anywhere else in Northern Italy). Sometimes microaggressions can even be jokes made by your own friends (which is very hurtful), saying for example – while laughing – that most people from the South are thieves. Sometimes microaggressions can be questions asked by your girlfriend’s sister to reinforce her idea that “Southern Italy is way behind compared to Northern Italy”, in all aspects (i.e., financially, culturally, environmentally, and so on). Sometimes microaggressions can be sexual education in school, during which they only teach you about heterosexual sex, because for the system it is a given fact that all the students are heterosexuals and cisgender¹, leaving all the LGBTQ+ people unprepared and uninformed. Sometimes microaggressions can be your classmates saying that they think that homosexuality is a sin but being *justified* by their religion. Sometimes microaggressions can be your professor repeating what you just said, because they’re trying to be funny mocking your accent. Other people have always made me feel as if I were too sensitive and I was always seeing and creating problems that weren’t there before my arrival. Although sometimes I have had my doubts, I’ve always known that there was something wrong with the things that they said or did. Now, I have clearly profusely used the word “microaggression” without explaining what this word means. I have surely given more than a few examples, but *microaggressions* can be very dynamic. In the first chapter, I will give a definition of this word and I will try to include all the variables that this word carries with it. In the second chapter, I will give various examples and I will analyze them. You will find that, amongst all the different types of microaggressions (anticipating chapter one: microaggressions can be directed also to people with disabilities, or to religious minorities), I chose to focus on and discuss racial, gender and LGBTQ+ microaggressions. As I think that all this work should lead us to somewhat a better understanding and using of the languages we everyday speak, in the third chapter I have decided to include some guidelines. These guidelines can help people learn what they might be doing

¹ of, relating to, or being a person whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth (Merriam-Webster, “cisgender”).

wrong, and they can help the oppressed, the victims of microaggressions, to learn how to respond.

CHAPTER 1. WHAT DOES THE WORD “MICROAGGRESSION” MEAN?

Before getting into the examples of microaggressions, I think it is important to understand why this word was created and what it means. To have a more meaningful understanding of the problems microaggressions carry with them, I will also address the difference between responsibility and blame and the effects that microaggressions have on people.

1.1 THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD “MICROAGGRESSION”

The term *microaggression* was first coined by Chester M. Pierce in 1970 in his work with Black Americans where he defined it as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are ‘put - downs’” (Pierce, Carew, Pierce - Gonzalez, & Willis, 1978, p. 66). Although the prefix *micro* usually indicates something rather small, microaggressions are detrimental, as they harm the recipients and create inequities (Sue 2010, 25).

Even though initially the term *microaggression* was only used to address all the covert² racism faced by people of color (especially African American people), this term has now been expanded to indicate discrimination towards minorities in general (e. g., ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, religious minorities, gender minorities, LGBTQ+ minorities, and so on). Covert racism is what today we would call “modern racism”. It is a type of racism that is not acknowledged. Covert racists are not openly racists and, most times, they don’t perceive themselves as racist people. This type of racism is also displayed by society in all its institutions in different forms (e.g., white privilege³). These displacements of discrimination are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed as being innocent and innocuous (Sue 2010, 25). Thus, it is implicit that racism has become ambiguous. Yet, it’s not only racism that has become covert and ambiguous. Even sexism and heterosexism⁴

² The literal meaning of the word “covert” is the one that follows: not openly shown, engaged in, or avowed (Merriam-Webster, “covert”).

³ The set of social and economic advantages that white people have by virtue of their race [...] in a culture characterized by racial inequality (Merriam-Webster, “white privilege”).

⁴ The word *heterosexism* has many possible manifestations, such as homophobia (the fear of homosexuality/of becoming gay/of being gay/of homosexual contagion) and heterocentricism (assumption that everyone is heterosexual). It also indicates the belief that being heterosexual, and cisgender is preferable. By implication, if you are not heterosexual and/or cisgender, you are considered abnormal (Sue 2010, 190).

have taken part in this transformation into ambiguity. Although sometimes they are not perceived, research suggests that they are still harmful (Friedlander 2018, 9). Racism, sexism, and heterosexism have become invisible, pervasive, and automatic because they are inside of us. They are a reflection of our biases, of the individual's unconscious psyche and of our institutions. As these biases are formed from the early stages of our lives (they are shaped by our schools, by media representation, and by our family and friends), they are difficult to overcome. Every single one of us has no chance but to inherit the racial, gender, and sexual-orientation biases of their society (Sue 2010, 111). Our societies shape our attitudes, beliefs and behaviors making us racist, sexist and heterosexist (Sue 2010, 2). It's clear that we are products of a flawed society and a flawed culture. The problem stands within. These racist, sexist, and heterosexist beliefs – which are linked to a sociopolitical context of oppression and injustice (historical trauma) – have, therefore, become systemic forces that insult, denigrate, mistreat, invalidate, and oppress people of color, women, and the LGBTQ+ community (Sue 2010, 95, 190). Microaggressions reinforce structural relations of oppression, power dynamic of superiority-inferiority and of inclusion-exclusion by harming the oppressed groups psychologically, socially, physiologically, and materially. Being linked to a form of structural oppression makes their harm exists objectively, not subjectively (Sue 2010, 122; Friedlaender 2018, 9).

Sue Derald Wing gave a more comprehensive and complete definition of what a microaggression is

microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level, communicate they are lesser human beings, suggest they do not belong with the majority group, threaten, and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment (Sue 2010, 1).

Some researchers argue that microaggressions sometimes depend on the context in which they are perpetuated. Thus, sometimes the same statement might be acceptable in one circumstance and inappropriate in another (Williams 2019, 7). However, I do not completely agree. I don't think context can determine whether something is or isn't a microaggression. Let's examine, for

example, the n-word: when Black people use it, it's ok; when white people do, it's not. Or the f-word: when gay people use it, it's ok; when straight people use it, it's not. Or, in Italian, the use of the word "terrone": when people from the South use it, it's ok; when people from the North use it, it's not. Or the f-word (both in English and Italian that word starts with the F): when gay people use it, it's ok; when straight people use it, it's not. The n-word and the word "terrone" are used as ethnic/racial insults, whereas the f-words are used as LGBTQ+ insults. When people use these words, they forget why they were invented – or how they were later spread. If we take a look at the epistemology of the n-word, the f-words (English and Italian), and the word "terrone", we can better understand why they should never be considered appropriate words to use.

The n-word:

1786, earlier *neger* (1568, Scottish and northern England dialect), *negar*, *negur*, from French *nègre*, from Spanish *negro*. From the earliest usage it was "the term that carries with it all the obloquy and contempt and rejection which whites have inflicted on Blacks" [cited in Gowers, 1965, probably Harold R. Isaacs] (Online Etymology Dictionary, "nigger").

The f-word (English):

"male homosexual," 1914, American English slang, probably from earlier contemptuous term for "woman" (1590s), especially an old and unpleasant one, in reference to *fagg*t* (n.1). "bundle of sticks," as something awkward that has to be carried (compare *baggage* "worthless woman," 1590s). It may also be reinforced by Yiddish *faygele* "homosexual" (n.), literally "little bird." It also may have roots in British public school slang noun *fag* "a junior who does certain duties for a senior" (1785), with suggestions of "catamite," from *fag* (v.) (Online Etymology Dictionary, "faggot").

The word terrone:

According to GDLI, it originated in the 20th Century in the big urban centers in Northern Italy with the meaning of 'farmer' (as in villain, lout, and boor).and used to refer to the inhabitants of the South in a derogatory or joking way, since the South was a region of the country characterized by backward agriculture (Accademia della Crusca "Da dove arriva questo terrone").

The f-word (Italian):

Hypotheses about the etymology of the word *froc*o*, a term from the Roman dialect, are significant of the way a centuries-old culture has interpreted and represented homosexuality. One hypothesis is that it derives from *français*, French, through the Romanesque mispronunciation *fronscè*, and that it spread as a derogatory term aimed at the foreign invader at the time of the descent of Napoleon's troops into Rome in the early 19th century. The meaning of *froc*o* then began to drift to the more general negative meaning of despicable man, regardless of nationality, and through this to that of homosexual. This term is found in vernacular language use today in two main ways: as a term referring to the lack of attributes typical of the dominant model of masculinity (e.g., lack of courage, aggressiveness, control, sexual energy...), without direct reference to the sexual orientation of the person being appealed to; or as an overtly offensive term, used for denigration and social diminishment purposes against homosexual individuals, especially men (although the term *froc*a*, in the feminine form, also has some diffusion) (Parlare civile, n.d.).

I do not believe there is ever a right time or context to use these words. Nor do I think there will ever be. These words were coined to insult what white(r) and heterosexual people considered different and inferior. It is, therefore, clear that white people, men, heterosexuals and cisgender people (but especially white, heterosexual, cisgender men) decide – or have already decided – what we ought to consider better and normal. And even if people don't notice, everything else is constantly under attack. Whether it is with covert or overt attacks, they are still attacks.

1.2 FORMS OF MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions can take different forms. They can be verbal, nonverbal, or environmental. Environmental microaggressions are “the social, educational, political, or economic cues that are communicated individually, institutionally, or socially to marginalized groups.”. They are conveyed and spread through the use of inaccurate media symbols and wrongful representations of marginalized groups in films, television, radio, print media, and educational programs. Furthermore, even the exclusion of decorations, literature, and ethnic aesthetic - cultural forms like music, art, language, and food can be considered an environmental microaggression (Sue 2010, 24-25, 27).

Additionally, we could divide microaggressions in three major categories: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. All three forms communicate offensive messages to recipients/victims, and they differ on the level of awareness and intentionality of the perpetrator/aggressor.

Microassaults

Microassaults are most similar to what is called “old fashion” racism, sexism, and/or heterosexism. These aggressions’ intent is to threaten, intimidate, and make people who belong to certain groups/minorities feel unwanted and unsafe, because of the biased belief that they are lesser beings, inferior, subhumans that are not on the same levels as others and, therefore, do not deserve the same treatment and respect. Because of strong public condemnation of such behaviors, microassaults are most likely to be expressed under three conditions:

1. Some degree of anonymity, as it gives aggressors the freedom to engage in microassaults however and whenever they want to, without having to be accountable for their actions.
2. Perpetrators engage easily in a microassault if they feel safe to do so – which, again, means that they do not want to take accountability for their own actions. They seek for safety in the sense that they do not want other people to react badly to whatever they are saying/doing, or that there are other people who will protect/help them.
3. Many people only display their biased attitudes when they lose control.

Microinsults

Microinsults are characterized by interpersonal or environmental communications that convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and that demean a person's racial, gender, or sexual orientation, heritage, or identity.

Some of the most common themes:

- Ascription of intelligence: related to aspects of intellect, competence, and capabilities.
- Second-class citizen: belief that certain groups are less worthy, less important, less deserving.
- Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles: belief that the cultural values/communication styles of white, male, and straight groups are normative and those of people of color, females, and LGBTs are abnormal.
- Criminality/assumption of criminal status: belief that a person of color is presumed to be dangerous, potentially a criminal, likely to break the law, or antisocial.
- Sexual objectification: women are transformed into "objects" or property at the sexual disposal or benefit of men.
- Assumption of abnormality: perception that something about the person's race, gender, or sexual orientation is abnormal, deviant, and pathological.

Microinvalidation

Microinvalidations are used to negate, exclude, or nullify feelings, thoughts, or reality of certain groups (such as people of color, women, and LGBTs) through communications or environmental cues. As microinvalidations deny the racial, gender, or sexual-orientation reality of these groups they represent the most damaging form of the three microaggressions.

Some of the most common themes:

- Aliens in one's own land: being perceived as a foreigner in one's own country.
- Color, gender, and sexual-orientation blindness: the unwillingness to acknowledge or admit to seeing race, gender, or sexual orientation.
- Denial of individual racism/sexism/heterosexism.
- Myth of meritocracy: the myth according to which race, gender, and sexual orientation do not play a role in life successes. It assumes that all groups have an equal opportunity to succeed, and that we operate on a level playing field.

(Sue 2010, 28-31, 35-39).

1.3 WHY AGGRESSOR AND VICTIM

The term 'aggressor' can sometimes seem – to the aggressors' eyes – too strong to use in these instances. Most times the perpetrators of microaggressions do not take into account the perspectives of the targets/victims. This lack of prospective leads to the impossibility for them to see their acts as aggressions and to perceive themselves as the aggressors. Freeman and Stewart (2019) argue that the term microaggression is fair and balanced because the term "micro" reflects the perspective of the offender (small offense) and "aggression" reflects the perspective of the victim (aggressive act). Other people object the use of the prefix "micro" as it seems to minimize the experience of harm (Williams 2019, 10).

Another objection for the use of the term *offender/aggressor* is that not all microaggressions are consciously deliberate. However, not all accidents are always intentional. Sometimes something bad can happen, a driver might unintentionally hit someone, for example, but the driver would still be considered culpable and would be convicted, at which point the driver becomes an offender. The same thing happens with microaggressions. They might be unintentional, but they still take place, and, for this reason, the perpetrators are still aggressors. Moreover, the term victim is appropriate because, although the injury is unintended, the pedestrian is still harmed. And the same principle applies for the recipient of a microaggression (Williams 2019, 5-6).

1.4 RESPONSIBILITY VS. BLAME

The harm produced by microaggressions is cumulative. The questions that rise are: is every individual that perpetuates microaggression responsible for this harm? Is every aggressor blameworthy? In cases of cumulative harm, we often start from the presumption that individuals are blameworthy for their particular contributions. However, the cumulative harm of microaggressions presents two challenges: (1) epistemic ignorance violates an ought-implies-can principle; and (2) microaggressive harms relationally intensify in their accumulation. First, it is important to clarify that blame and responsibility are not the same thing. All individuals are responsible for microaggressions, despite the fact that not all individuals are blameworthy

for them – just like when someone does something bad accidentally: they didn't mean to, so no blame, but they still did it, so full responsibility. Second, all people commit microaggressions, not just members of oppressor groups. The first problem for blame-allocation is that microaggressions are often unconscious acts. As unconscious acts, they lack intent, and agents are unable to do otherwise. Additionally, agents might also lack fundamental knowledge to understand the contextual, communicative meaning of their microaggressive acts. An agent/oppressor/offender might not be regarded as blameworthy if their microaggressions are the product of implicit bias and/or the communicative meaning is epistemically inaccessible to them. It is thus helpful to distinguish between two kinds of epistemic ignorance: (1) genuine ignorance; or (2) ought-to-have-known ignorance. Genuine epistemic ignorance arises when there is epistemic limitation that cannot be individually overcome. In this case, there is a correlation between epistemic ignorance and epistemic injustice. This is a nonagential form of injustice because structural oppression produces situated inequality, which affects what individuals are able to articulate about their experience. When genuine epistemic ignorance is present, you are responsible for having contributed to cumulative harm, but are not blameworthy. In order to avoid future microaggressions critical reflection is fundamental, with a goal to increase knowledge and self-awareness.

Furthermore, there are conditions under which you ought to have known because there is no hermeneutical gap that limits your ability to overcome your epistemic ignorance. In this case we are talking about willful ignorance, maybe even because of a position of privilege. If the microaggression is unconscious but it follows from an implicit bias you know you have, then you ought to have known about your potential to contribute to cumulative harm but have simply failed to address it. In this case, you are liable for your epistemic failure and thus blameworthy for the microaggression. Nevertheless, it is important to always point microaggressions out. We should expect other people to take responsibility for their harmful actions, but we are not required to blame them. But remember: lack of blameworthiness should not equal to lack of responsibility. Lastly, we should be aware that we have all committed microaggressions. And even the most informed and self-reflective will continue to engage in microaggressions unknowingly. We need to become more aware of our unconscious behaviors and start calling each other's attention to it (Friedlander 2018, 10-15, 18).

1.5 THE EFFECTS OF MICROAGGRESSIONS

Research has shown that – while seemingly minimal in nature – microaggressions are detrimental not only to the well-being and health of the marginalized groups in our society, but also to their standards of living (Sue 2010, 39). Several diversity researchers have theorized that microaggressions actually may be more harmful than overt discrimination. Everyday discrimination has been shown to be more detrimental than experiences of major discrimination as it significantly contributes to trauma symptoms (Williams 2019, 18). They have been considered to be more harmful also because most times the victims’ responses are treated as unjustified and the cumulative harm as nonexistent. This is a form of gaslighting, which further compounds the cumulative harm by making victims feel as if they are over-reacting and are experiencing something unreal (Friedlander 2018, 16).

Effects on the well-being of victims

The harm produced by microaggressions originates from the fact that they are symbols and reminders of racism, sexism, and heterosexism; they are continual; they impact nearly all aspects of the target’s life — education, employment, social interactions, and so forth; and they are often ambiguous and invisible. Qualitatively, microaggressions are more detrimental for disempowered groups than ordinary life stressors. Thus, marginalized groups are exposed to greater and more powerful stressors (Sue 2010, 51-52, 88). Maya Angelou has likened racial microaggressions or petty humiliations to “small murders,” as their lethal nature of biased acts is not obvious (Sue 2010, 66). Experiencing microaggressions signals a dangerous environment, which means that microaggressions have negative mental-health consequences. Some of these consequences are: depression, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, low self-esteem, obsessive-compulsive disorder, alcohol/drug abuse, psychological distress, reduced self-efficacy, deplete psychic energy, shorten life expectancy, emotional turmoil, anger, and frustration. Furthermore, microaggressions silence, invalidate, and humiliate the identity and/or voices of those who are oppressed (Williams 2019, 15; Sue 2010, 66, 100).

Effects on the standards of living

Microaggressions have the secondary but devastating effect of denying equal access and opportunity in education, employment, and health care. For example, statistics support that

although White American males constitute only 33% of the population, they occupy circa 80% of tenured positions in higher education, 80% of the House of Representatives, 80-85% of the U.S. Senate, 92% of Forbes 400 executive CEO-level positions, 90% of public school superintendents, 99.9% of athletic team owners, 97.7% of U. S. presidents (Sue 2010, 16; Sue 2010, 2).

Other researches show that about 50% of workers experience racist microaggressions at work which negatively affects their work performances and lowers their self-confidence; about 59% is less satisfied of their job because of microaggressions; 33% stays at home because of the microaggressions; about 78% stated that experiencing microaggressions at work has negatively affected their emotional health and 39% states that it has affected their physical health as well; about 88% reports increased stress levels because of microaggressions at work; about 67% has thought about changing their job because of the microaggressions they have experienced (Levchak 2018, 206-208).

These researches and percentages show how truly unfair the job market can be and how much microaggressions can even influence people's abilities, such as proficiency, and life course.

Effects on the perpetrators

Microaggressions have costs for perpetrators as well. There are costs at different levels: cognitive costs, affective costs, behavioral costs, and spiritual and moral costs.

- Cognitive Costs of Oppression:

there are two psychological dynamics related to oppression. First, few oppressors are completely unaware of their roles in the oppression and degradation of others. To continue in their oppressive ways, they must engage in denial and live a false reality that allows them to function in good conscience. Second, those who are most empowered are least likely to have an accurate perception of reality. Their obliviousness to racism, sexism, and heterosexism allows people to misperceive themselves as superior and other groups as inferior.

- Affective Costs of Oppression:

when racism, sexism, or heterosexism is pushed into the consciousness of oppressors, they are likely to experience a mix of strong and powerful disruptive emotions. There are three especially disturbing emotional costs:

- Fear, anxiety, and apprehension. The fear may be directed at members of marginalized groups—that they are dangerous, will do harm, are prone to violence, or contaminate the person (catching AIDS). Thus, avoidance of certain group members and restricting interactions with them may be chosen.
 - Guilt is another strong and powerful emotion that many Whites experience when racism is brought to their awareness. As we have indicated, an attempt to escape guilt and remorse means diminishing one’s own perception.
 - Low empathy and sensitivity toward the oppressed. To continue being oblivious to one’s own complicity in such acts means objectifying and dehumanizing people of color, women, and LGBTs.
- Behavioral Costs of Oppression:
Behaviorally, the psychosocial costs of racism include fearful avoidance of diverse groups and/or diversity activities/experiences in our society; impaired interpersonal relationships; pretense and inauthenticity in dealing with racial, gender, or sexual-orientation topics; and acting in a callous and cold manner toward fellow human beings.
 - Spiritual and Moral Cost of Oppression:
oppression inevitably means losing one’s humanity for the sake of the power, wealth, and status attained from the subjugation of others. It means turning a blind eye to treating marginalized groups like second - class citizens, imprisoning groups on reservations or in concentration camps, inferior schools, or segregated neighborhoods, in prisons, or in lifelong poverty (Sue 2010, 128-132).

CHAPTER 2. MICROAGGRESSIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

As a brief recap of chapter 1: microaggressions are everyday subtle discrimination towards minorities, which have detrimental impact on both the mental-health and the standards of living of the people subjected to them.

In this chapter I will explain the process that brings people to microaggressions, and I will give some examples. At the end of the chapter I will also talk about an approach known as *Intersectionality*, which sheds light on the ways in which different parts of one's identity might face double (or more).types of microaggressions.

2.1 THE MICROAGGRESSIONS PROCESS MODEL

In the book *Microaggressions in Everyday Life*, Sue (2010), with the help of his research team, conducted two studies to identify the phases that seem to occur when a microaggression presents itself. They created *the microaggression process model*, which is composed by five phases: Incident, Perception, Reaction, Interpretation, and Consequence (Sue 2010, 67-69).

Phase one – Incident

Microaggressive incidents can be: the result of interactions between perpetrators and recipients; more distant relationships (overhearing conversations/comments made by someone you are not interacting with); environmental cues that signal a devaluation of group identities (Sue 2010, 69).

Phase two – Perception

In the second phase, the recipients try to determine whether the incident was bias-motivated, and therefore whether the incident was a microaggression. As microaggressions tend to be ambiguous, the overt and the covert message are usually in contrast. In this process, many factors need to be considered: “relationship to the perpetrator, (relative, friend, coworker, or stranger), the racial/cultural identity development of the recipient, the thematic content of the

microaggression, and personal experiences of the target. All are factors in construing meaning to the event” (Sue 2010, 72).

Phase three – Reaction

This phase represents the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional targets’ reactions. Some common reactions are the ones that follow:

- Healthy paranoia: as many disadvantaged groups encounter prejudice and discrimination on a regular basis, they have a healthy distrust of the intentions and actions of those from the majority culture (Sue 2010, 73);
- Sanity check: using one another to check the accuracy of your perceptions (In many cases, the targets are told that they have misinterpreted the incident and are overly sensitive) (Sue 2010, 74);
- Empowering and validating self: trusting your own racial, gender, and sexual-orientation identities. Trusting your thoughts, beliefs, and feelings (Sue 2010, 75-76);
- Rescuing offenders: the urge to consider offenders’ feelings before your own. Your actions are aimed at putting the offender at ease (Sue 2010, 76);

Phase four – Interpretation and meaning

In this phase the target interprets the meaning, significance, intention, and any social patterns related to the microaggression and the offender themselves. Some of the most common themes are the ones that follow: you do not belong (you are undesirable and do not belong in a particular environment, neighborhood, society in general); you are abnormal (you deviate from the accepted standards defined from a white Western-European male perspective); you are intellectually inferior (usually correlated with skin color and gender); you are not trustworthy (association to criminality); you are all the same (there is an assumption that individual differences do not exist) (Sue 2010, 77-79).

Phase five – Consequences and impact

This phase focuses on the impact that microaggressions have on the recipients. There are four consequences that seem to be more relevant: powerlessness (connected to the inability to control the definition of reality); invisibility (when the targets' accomplishments and attributes are overlooked and ignored); forced compliance/loss of integrity (feeling inauthentic and disingenuous after being forced to think and behave in a conventional way, which is antagonistic to your true beliefs and desires); pressure to represent one's group (every minor mistake will be attributed to the respective minority groups, hence the pressure to represent your groups well) (Sue 2010, 80-82).

This process demonstrates how microaggressions are not a simple phenomenon to analyze, nor to live. Microaggressions tend to fall under the following Microaggressive themes: Alien in one's own land, Ascription of intelligence, Color blindness, Criminality/assumption of criminal status, Sexual Objectification, Second-Class Citizenship, Use of Sexist/Heterosexist Language, Assumptions of Inferiority, Denial of individual Racism/Sexism/Heterosexism, Traditional Gender Role Assumptions, Invisibility, Myth of meritocracy, Pathologizing cultural values/communication styles, and Sexist Jokes (Sue 2010, 32-34; Sue 2010, 169). However, if we take into consideration other factors (gender, sexual orientation, multiracialism), we can identify even more themes. For example:

- Six gendered racial microaggression themes have been found, which include: Expectation of a Jezebel (e.g., being sexualized, objectified, and exoticized by males), Expectation of the Angry Black Woman (e.g., being viewed as the stereotypical "angry Black woman"), Struggle for Respect (e.g., messages that cast doubt on one's intelligence and undermine leadership), Invisibility (e.g., being marginalized, silent, or left out in professional settings), Assumptions of Communication Styles (e.g., stereotypes about Black women's communication styles), and Assumptions of Aesthetics (e.g., remarks about the body type, hairstyles, and facial features of Black women). There are four subscales for these six gendered racial themes: (1) assumptions of beauty and sexual objectification (i.e., stereotypes about Black women's beauty, attractiveness, body size, hairstyles, and facial features), (2) Silenced and marginalized (e.g., being silenced in academic settings), (3) Strong Black woman stereotype (being perceived as "too" strong, independent, and assertive), (4) Angry Black woman stereotype (verbal comments or nonverbal behaviors that communicate the stereotype of being an angry Black woman) (Torino et al. 2018, 51).

- Nine different types of sexual orientation microaggressions: Oversexualization (tendency of people to associate one's sexual orientation with sexual activities, behaviors, and promiscuity), Homophobia (irrational anxiety towards non-heterosexual people; fear of becoming homosexual), Heterosexist Language/Terminology (use of language that reflects a heteronormative value system; e.g. husband and wife, rather than spouse or partner; use of the word "gay" as a derogatory term), Sinfulness (belief that non-heterosexual orientation is morally deviant and wrong; therefore, it is sinful and worthy of punishment; this theme is strongly associated with religion), Assumption of Abnormality (belief that any non-heterosexual orientation has its origins in psychological pathology; messages of abnormality are sent whenever individual who are sexual minorities are assumed to need therapy or to be going through a phase), Denial of Individual Heterosexism ("I'm not heterosexist, I have a gay friend"), Endorsement of Heteronormative Culture/Behaviors (standards and norm for society are based on heterosexual standards and norms; e.g. always asking women about boyfriends and men about girlfriends), Undersexualization (acceptance of sexual orientation, as long as the person is not actively in a relationship), and Microaggression as humor (Microaggressive statements delivered in a lighthearted or humorous way) (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1013-1014, 1018, 1024-1025).

- Microaggressions that multiracial people experience; which include: 1. Exclusion or isolation (whenever a multiracial or multiethnic person is made to feel alienated or excluded because of their mixed race), Exoticization and objectification (whenever a multiracial or multiethnic person is made to feel objectified or dehumanized), Assumption of monoracial or mistaken identity (whenever a multiracial or multiethnic person is assumed or mistaken to be monoracial or a different racial group), Denial of multiracial reality (whenever a multiracial or multiethnic person's experiences are invalidated by monoracial people), Pathologizing of identity and experiences (whenever multiracial or multiethnic person's identity or experiences are viewed as psychologically abnormal) (Nadal et al. 2013, 191-192). There also are five microaggression themes that might occur within multiracial families: (a) isolation within the family (because of their multiracial identities), (b) favoritism within the family (favoritism within the family due

to race), (c) questioning of authenticity (feeling as your authenticity as being a family member is questioned by monoracial family members), (d) denial of multiracial identity and experiences by monoracial family members, and (e) feelings about not learning about family heritage or culture. There was also one underdeveloped domain, which consisted of two underdeveloped themes: (1) “recruitment” by monoracial family member (family member trying to influence to favor or engage in the cultural practices of one race over the other), (2) objectification (monoracial relatives being preoccupied with your physical attributes because of your multiracial phenotypes) (Nadal et al. 2013, 195-197).

Furthermore, it is interesting to observe how the gender and the LGBTQ+ barriers are not taken as seriously as the racial one. This happens because sexism and heterosexism are still confused with nature, because anything that affects males and heterosexuals is seen as more serious, and because there is no ‘right’ way to be a woman or a non-heterosexual in public power (Sue 2010, 161).

In the following subchapters I will discuss and differentiate between racial microaggressions, gender microaggressions, and heterosexist microaggressions.

2.2 RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

On July 9, 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to all persons “born or naturalized in the United States” and provided citizens with “equal protection under the laws” (United States Senate, n.d.). In 1964, the Civil Rights Act prohibits “discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Provisions of this civil rights act forbade discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as, race in hiring, promoting, or firing.” (U.S. Department Of Labor, n.d.). However, the equality that was praised by these two acts is not so easily visible to the human eye nowadays. In fact, racial microaggressions are probably the most noticeable, yet unconscious microaggressions, as they are structural and institutional. They are displacements of the ideas of race hierarchy, with which people tend to see the white race as superior to other races. The fact that for the institution the same labor for the same amount of hours is more worthy, and therefore more payable, if a white person does it, it sends a strong message of unworthiness to people of color.

Racial microaggressions tend to fall under the themes of: Alien in one's own land; ascription of intelligence; color blindness; criminality/assumption of criminal status; denial of individual racism; myth of meritocracy; pathologizing cultural values/communication style; second-class citizens (Sue 2010, 32-34); racial stereotyping. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that racial discrimination also happens in Italy, to some Italian people. People from Southern Italy have to face what is called "anti-meridionalismo" (anti-Southernism). After the examples of racial microaggression, I will talk about this phenomenon and the ways in which it is (dis)similar to racial microaggressions.

Alien in one's own land

This type of microaggression deals with the perception of oneself as a permanent outsider or as an alien in one's own country (Sue 2010, 37). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

"I was teased for not using Western utensils" (e.g., fork, knife) (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

Immigrants of color and those racialized as immigrant (regardless of actual nativity) are perceived as non-native and thus not belonging in the U.S (Perez Huber, Cueva 2012, 394).

"But you speak without an accent" (Solorzano 1998, 125).

"Where are you from?" "Where were you born?" (You are not American) (Sue 2010, 32).

A person asking an Asian American to teach them words in their native language (Sue 2010, 32).

Ascription of intelligence

This type of microaggressions has to do with the assigning intelligence to a person of color based on their race (Sue 2010, 32). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

A white assistant city attorney takes the elevator to go up to the ninth floor. At the fifth floor, the door open and a Black woman asks: "Going down?" "Up", says the white assistant city attorney. As soon as the doors close, she also says: "They can't even tell up from down. I'm sorry, but it's true". As in the society in which the attorney lives Black people are commonly regarded as incompetent – following the "traditional" stereotype of inferior mentality, and ignorance -,

the attorney seizes upon the pejorative interpretation, in order to confirm her stereotyped beliefs (Davis 1989, 1561-1562).

Ruth (African American Woman): Ruth feels that at her workplace things have been done to make her look stupid, or to undermine her authority on something, or the way that she handled a situation (Levchak 2018, 131).

Brandon (African American and Filipino Man): Brandon faced some discrimination with his new managers, as they did not realize how experienced he actually was. Whenever he would answer a question, they would double or triple check if what he said was correct (Levchak 2018, 131). He also stated that his opinions and recommendations would get ignored, until a white person endorsed it or said that was a good idea or posed the same idea (Levchak 2018, 141).

“I overheard a conversation about Asians being really good at math or science” (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

“Someone I did not know treated me as if I was stupid and needed things explained to me slowly” (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

“I noticed that Asian characters in American TV shows either speak bad or heavily accented English” (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

“I’m sorry, I asked for the doctor” (Black female attending wearing her white coat) (Overland et al. 2019, 1007).

Lourdes (Latina) started to internalize that English-dominant students are more intelligent than Spanish-dominant students, after being told time and time again “you’re not good enough to be here” (Perez Huber, Cueva 2012, 399).

“He tells you his dean is making him hire a person of color when there are so many great writers out there.” It is implicit in this case that a person of color cannot be a great writer, nor can they ever be as good as a white writer (Rankine 2014, 13).

Asking an Asian person to help with a math or science problem, implying that all Asians are intelligent and good at math/sciences (Sue 2010, 32).

An African American student reported always feeling on the fence and in need to defend her position and the reason why she was at UD. She even started questioning more if she actually

belonged there and earned her sport, or whether she was just filling a diversity quota (Torino et al. 2018, 40).

Often there are cases of verbal disrespect towards Blacks, which most strongly has to do with addressing a community member with informal rather than formal title (e.g. “dude” or “bud” instead of “sir” or “Ms.”) and greater use of negative words (Torino et al. 2018, 23). The same thing happens with faculty members (e.g., “Miss” instead of “Doctor”). Faculty members of color have also reported having their credentials challenged by white students in the classroom. Some professors even got feedback from students of theirs stating that “She was more intelligent than I thought she’d be” (Torino et al. 2018, 165).

Felling an urge to perform impeccable work in order to debunk common misconceptions about African Americans being unmotivated or cognitively inferior (Torino et al. 2018, 167).

“Where did you get your medical degree? I haven’t seen Black doctors around here.” (Torino et al. 2018, 183).

“Wow! You speak English so well.”
– A comment made to a second generation Latino middle school student by his teacher (Torino et al. 2018, 276).

“That’s so great that you got an A on that paper!”
– A comment made to a young Black woman in high school by her White classmate (Torino et al. 2018, 276).

“Why are you stressing? You don’t need to study. Asians are naturally good at math.”
– A statement made laughingly to an Asian American student in math class by a White peer (Torino et al. 2018, 276).

Teachers being surprised by their African American students’ vocabulary and articulation is related to how they perceive other African Americans – unintelligent and inarticulate (Torino et al. 2018, 280).

Asking a person of color how they were able to get their job (Wright, Wegner 2012, 36).

Color blindness:

This type of microaggressions has to do with remarks that show a White person's unwillingness to acknowledge race (Sue 2010, 32). Some examples may be the following sentences:

“When I look at you, I don’t see color”: it denies a person of color’s racial/ethnic experiences (Sue 2010, 32).

“America is a melting pot”: it assimilates everyone to dominant Anglo-Saxon protestant culture (Sue 2010, 32b).

“There is only one race, the human race”: it denies the individual as a racial/cultural being (Sue 2010, 32).

Criminality/assumption of criminal status:

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever a person of color is presumed to be threatening, criminal, or deviant based solely on their race (Sue 2010, 32). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“I have seen friends who are Black be[ing] singled out by police for nothing other than their race” (White man, 19, at a predominantly White school) (Levchak 2018, 92).

“People avoiding eye contact and physical contact due to the fact they think a crime will occur” (Black man, 18, at a racially diverse school) (Levchak 2018, 92).

Brandon (African American and Filipino Man): In the workplace, Brandon has been asked by security time and time again where he was going, because he doesn’t look like he belonged there (Levchak 2018, 136).

“Minority parents just stare at the wall all day ignorant of the whole world and tell their kids, you can get pregnant, no you can go to school, or you can get pregnant and sell drugs—that’s much better. I can’t wait to buy a gold tooth” (Minikel-Lacocque 2013, 453).

Based on researches, it has been observed that African Americans and Latinas/os were: (1) Stopped by the police more than whites; (2) were more likely than whites to be arrested for the same suspected crimes and; (3) were more likely than whites to be ‘subjected to the use of force’ even when whites were more likely to require further enforcement action in a stop (Pérez Huber, Solorzano 2014, 313).

You ask your friend to pick up your child from school. As soon as he gets there, your neighbor calls you because he wants to tell you that he is seeing a Black person casing both your homes. He says that the Black person seems disturbed. You tell your neighbor that the guy walking back and forth is your friend, whom he has met, but he says that it's not him because "this isn't that nice young man" (Rankine 2014, 15) and that he has already called the police. After calling your friend, you understand that there is no-one else walking in front of your home other than him (Rankine 2014, 15-16).

A White man or woman clutches their purse or checks their wallet as a Black or Latino approaches or passes, implying that you are a criminal (Sue 2010, 32).

A store owner following a customer of color around the store, assuming they are going to steal, they are poor, they do not belong (Sue 2010, 32).

A White person waits to ride the next elevator when a person of color is on it, because they feel in danger (Sue 2010, 32).

"I hope you don't have a bomb in your backpack."
– A comment made to a South Asian turban-wearing high schooler by a peer, while laughing (Torino et al. 2018, 276).

A comment made by a teacher to a colleague that was having lunch with her African American students: "Wow, you let THEM eat lunch with you! They don't steal anything do they?" Although it was probably said in a jokingly manner, this comment cannot be understood as a joke, as it reflects and perpetuates criminalization towards people of color (Torino et al. 2018, 283-284).

Denial of individual racism

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever a person makes a statement to deny their bias (Sue 2010, 33). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

People that believe to live under the combined influence of egalitarian ideology and that cultural forces and cognitive proves are the ones promoting prejudice and racism, have anti-Black attitudes that persist in a climate of denial (Davis 1989, 1564-1565).

Saying that "Asians do not experience as much discrimination as other minorities" (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

“I’m not racist. I have several Black friends”, assuming that: I am immune to racism because I have friends of color (Sue 2010, 33).

“As an employer, I always treat men and women equally”, assuming that: I am incapable of sexism (Sue 2010, 33).

Myth of meritocracy:

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever a person makes statements which assert that race does not play a role in life successes (Sue 2010, 33). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“As far as I’m concerned, I say let minorities get into college, but only after all the academically qualified applicants get in first. Then when the minority students who are not prepared for college-level coursework flunk out of school they’ll have no one to blame but themselves. You want a chance for a better life? Earn it!” (Anonymous post to Midwestern University’s website) (Minikel-Lacocque 2013, 451).

“1. [T]he public schools are doing just fine. You’re wrong to assume that public schools are good substitutes for good parents. Ultimately, this isn’t a choice that the rich white suburbs are going to have to make for the poor Black inner city. This is a choice that the inner city is going to have to make to abandon their current culture, sell-out, and join the rest of educated America. This choice starts at home. 2. Yeah, suburban kids are coddled by rich suburban parents and teachers until they are ready to be handed off to White Bread University. The inner city parent, not giving a damn, stares at the wall all day, ignorant to the world around them. They say, “child, I don’t give a damn what you do. Education and learning are fine, but so is drug dealing and making babies. I wish I had gold teeth . . . what was I saying?” C’mon, everyone gets what they earn. Being born on the wrong or right side of the tracks does not PREDETERMINE your life. If you PERSONALLY give a damn, . . . you will find PERSONAL success. The ultimate blame lies with you” (Minikel-Lacocque 2013, 451-452).

“I believe the most qualified person should get the job”. This assumes that people of color are given extra unfair benefits because of their race (Sue 2010, 33).

Pathologizing cultural values/communication style:

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever it is expressed that values and communication styles of the dominant/White culture are ideal (Sue 2010, 33). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

Saying to your Black friend: “You are late, you nappy-headed ho.” This statement signals the stereotype according to which Black people are always late, employing what they think is “Black people language” (Rankine 2014, 32).

Asking a Black person: “Why do you have to be so loud/animated? Just calm down”. It is a subtle request to assimilate to dominant culture (Sue 2010, 33).

The same it’s true when an Asian or a Latino person are asked: “Why are you so quiet? We want to know what you think. Be more verbal.” “Speak up more.” (Sue 2010, 33).

Dismissing an individual who brings up race/culture in work/school setting is a suggestion to leave one’s cultural baggage outside (Sue 2010, 33).

Second-class citizens:

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever a member of the target group is treated differently by the power group (Sue 2010, 33). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

Whenever anyone wants to publish anything, there is a white hierarchy that will determine who will edit your work. More than that, everything is produced in the context of white supremacy (hooks 2015, 34-35). Therefore, the work produced is shaped by a market that reflects white supremacist values and concerns (hooks 2015, 44). Furthermore, if we consider that few nonwhite scholars are being awarded grants to investigate and study all aspects of white culture from a standpoint of “difference”, we notice how this indicates how the colonizer/colonized paradigm continues to frame the discourse on race and the “Other” (hooks 2015, 95). In addition, work by white scholars about nonwhite people receives more attention and acclaim than the work produced by nonwhite scholars – whose work is devalued for being too “angry” (hooks 2015, 95).

The feminist movement used to be centered upon the issues of middle-class, white women and did not validate the diversity of women who faced oppressions (Pratt 2008: 66, 67). However,

much of the feminist writing – even if done by women of color – is still directed towards a white audience (hooks 2015, 159).

While at a restaurant, I noticed that I was ignored, overlooked, or not given the same service as Whites (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

Person of color mistaken for a service worker as if people of color cannot but be servants. They couldn't possibly occupy high status positions (Sue 2010, 33).

Being ignored at a store counter as attention is given to the White customer behind a person of color. The assumption is that Whites are more valued customers than people of color (Sue 2010, 34).

Having a taxi cab pass a person of color and pick up a White passenger. The assumption is that the former is likely to cause trouble and/or travel to a dangerous neighborhood (Sue 2010, 34).

“Are you sure you are in the right class? Auto shop is down the hall.” – A question posed by an AP English teacher to a Mexican American student on the first day of class, while laughing (Torino et al. 2018, 276).

Racial Stereotyping

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever racial stereotypes are conveyed.

“Racial stereotypes and assumptions of white superiority permeate society to create cognitive drifts in the direction of findings of Black culpability and white victimization, Black incompetence and white competence, Black immorality and white virtue, Black indolence and white industriousness, Black lasciviousness and white chastity, Blacks careless and in need of control and whites in control and controlling, Blacks as social problems and whites as valued citizens” (Davis 1989, 1571).

Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“I'm known as being Mexican [...] and there's one guy on my floor, he was drunk, he was like, 'Hey, Antonio, c'mere. This girl doesn't believe anybody is more hairy than me.' He's like, 'You're Mexican, you're hairy.'” (Minikel-Lacocque 2013, 448).

“She said to [my boyfriend], ‘Excuse me, excuse me.’ She’s like, ‘Can you run fast?’ I was like, ‘Just ‘cause you’re Black doesn’t mean you can run fast!’” (Minikel-Lacocque 2013, 450)

“You’re not really Asian” (Overland et al. 2019, 1007).

“I overheard it suggested that many women find Asian men unattractive” (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

“I heard it suggested that Asian women are passive” (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

“I overheard someone saying that all Asians look alike” (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

“I was mistaken for someone else of my same race” (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

“I heard it suggested that all Asian food tastes the same” (Ong et al. 2013, 191).

“Courtney, I never see you as a Black girl” (Overland et al. 2019, 1007).

“She tells you you smell good and have features more like a white person. You assume she thinks she is thanking you for letting her cheat and feels better cheating from an almost white person” (Rankine 2014, 11).

“You people wouldn’t understand, but I am really in a lot of pain, all over” (Torino et al. 2018, 183).

A teacher asking how to pronounce one of his Indian student’s name, saying that he wouldn’t want to call her “Gandhi” by accident. [Her name is “Nirupama”]. What seemed as a joke, was actually a tokenization of her Indian identity, since it equated her first name as a current young woman to the last name of a historic male leader, just because they share a common cultural origin (Torino et al. 2018, 281-282).

As we have seen, there are multiple themes that could be taken into account. These are just some of the most commons ones.

Italian anti-Southernism

Still today, the idea of people from Southern Italy as inferior is at the base of a never accomplished union. This idea of inferiority should have been discussed when the alleged union of Italy took place 150 years ago. However, this was not the case. The hypocrisy and hidden truths at the base of this union are still spread through Geography lessons. The fundamental anti-Southern idea of this union was to “free and civilize” the South. We can maybe understand

better the shared feelings amongst the liberators and civilizers through a letter sent from the marquis Massimo D'Azeglio, in which he declares to be afraid to merge with people from Naples, comparing this margin with bedding with someone who had smallpox. Interestingly enough, these words sound like the ones that Matteo Salvini, an Italian politician in the Lega party, sang at a public event in Milan (Coppola 2012): "Senti che puzza scappano anche i cani, stanno arrivando i napoletani. 'O colerosi, terremotati... Con il sapone non si sono mai lavati"⁵ (@GubbyTube4 2009). Just a little bit over 160 years ago, the South was under open fire from people like Enrico Cialdini and Giuseppe Covone, who had no mercy towards civilians. It was in fact common to think of the South as uncivilized. Vittorio Emanuele II's right hand, Paolo Solaroli, once said: "Southern people are the most horrendous and wild people that I have ever seen in Europe".

In order to justify the invaders' thefts and spoliations, Cesare Lombroso, Alfredo Niceforo, Enrico Ferri, Giuseppe Sergi, Paolo Orano and Raffaele Garofalo created the racial theories of Southern inferiority. These people were advocates of scientific racism and eugenics. They spread anti-Southern prejudices, theorizing the inferiority of the Southern race. They killed innocent people because they wanted to measure their skulls to obtain scientific proof of Southern inferiority. Later on, Antonio Gramsci explained how the union was not based on equality, rather on the control of the South from the North. The North could only get rich by impoverishing the South. The North conquered and colonized it, making it impossible for it to grow. Even before the union, Carlo Bombrini - the chief of the Central Bank of Stati Sardi – stated that he didn't want the South to be able to produce anymore. From that moment onward, every financial reform was to improve the North and the North only. Around the end of the century, Alfredo Niceforo theorized the existence of two Italian races: The Eurasian (Aryan).race, which lived in the North, and the Euro-African (Negroid).race, which lived in the South; and then, he asserted the racial superiority of Northern Italians over Southern Italians. In his book "L'Italia Barbara contemporanea" (1898), Niceforo described the South as a colony that needed civilization. This ideology of superiority of the Northern race was widespread, which led to thinking of the South as a chain that would not let Italy fully develop. Furthermore, according to these beliefs, there were problems in the South because Southern people were incompetent, criminals, barbarians, and lazy. All of these ideas led to the crystallization of biases that saw Southern people as, indeed, just

⁵ They smell so bad that even dogs run away. The Neapolitans are coming. 'O choleros, earthquake victims – they have never used soap.

described. As a consequence of these xenophobic and racist campaigns, Northern people have often negated equal access to Southern people in housing and job opportunities (Coppola 2012).

As a person from the South who has lived in the North for seven years and who had to go to high school in the North, I can confidently confirm that these prejudices still affect people. I have had to face discrimination from the people that should have protected me the most (after my family): my professors. I have faced discrimination from my classmates, from people on the street. I have heard many anti-Southern sentences, and I have also had people telling me to deny my Southern identity, just as much as I have had people making fun of the way I pronounce some words. The worst part is that some people fully and wholeheartedly believe in these ideas. Following there are some examples of anti-Southern things I have heard first hand:

- “People from Sicily are not really Italian” (Alien in one’s own land: They argue that, since Sicily is not geographically attached to the rest of Italy and it is in the deep South, Sicily is more African than Italian. I wouldn’t have any problems identifying as African – if only I were African. The first, or maybe second for some people, language that we learn is Italian. The schools that we go to are Italian. The TV programs that we watch are in Italian. Our laws are Italian. Our street signs are in Italian. And so on. Why should we not be considered Italian? What’s not Italian about us?)
- “I don’t want to go to Naples because I don’t want to die” (Assumption of criminality. The same happens whenever people associate Sicily with mafia.)
- “We should buy something in Naples because it’s cheaper, since it’s stolen” (Assumption of criminality: Everyone in Naples is a criminal.)
- “Be careful with your belongings. Remember that we are in the South and it is very likely that someone will steal them” (Assumption of criminality: everyone in the South is a criminal.)
- A teacher of mine (he is from northern Italy) once said that feminicides only happen in the South. Explaining how it happens because in the South people are not civilized – especially if compared to the North (Double microaggression: assumption of criminality, and stereotyping: just a few months prior to this statement, however, in Udine there was a homicide-suicide – a man killed his wife and then he killed himself.)
- The same teacher once also decided to give me a lesson on how to address people formally. Even though I had never referred to him with the second plural person “Voi”, but only with the third singular person “Lei”, he had decided that I had referred to him

as “Voi” and that it was not proper Italian. He went on to try to explain why it was wrong and telling me that I shouldn’t do it, because it’s weird and something that only people from the South do (Double microaggression: stereotypes – in Sicily we don’t use “Voi” to address one person. There is nothing wrong with it, we just don’t use it anymore. However, since my teacher thought that it was something that everyone in the South did, and although I had never done that in the three years prior to this “incident”, he had decided that I addressed people with “Voi” –, and second-class citizen – from the way he was expressing himself, it was clear that he thought of Southern people as inferior, and more stupid than Northern people).

From these few examples, we can already understand the ways in which Italian anti-Southernism is similar to racial microaggressions: they both find their origin in invented ideologies of one party’s superiority; in both cases discriminatory ideas spread to an institutionalized type of discrimination; both people of color and Italian Southern people suffer from stereotyping, alien in one’s own land, assumption of criminality, and ascription of intelligence.

2.3 GENDER MICROAGGRESSIONS

As earlier stated, gender microaggressions are a less heated topic. This is because sexism is still in today’s society masked by “good manners” and stereotypes that are thought of as general and absolute truths. In fact, to understand how much women – and people’s reality in general – are actually influenced by male chauvinism and its standards, at the end of the examples I will also talk about the phenomenon known as “the male gaze”. Gender microaggressions tend to fall under the themes of: Use of Sexist Language, Denial of Individual Sexism, Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping, Sexual Objectification, Ascription of intelligence (Sue 2010, 32-34).

Use of Sexist Language

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever someone uses terms that exclude or degrade women (Sue 2010, 32). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“Hocicona, repelona, chismosa, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being mal criada. In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women – I’ve never heard them applied to men” (Anzaldúa 1987, 54).

*“The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word “nosotras,” I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* whether we’re male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse”* (Anzaldúa 1987, 54).

Use of the pronoun “he” to refer to all people. Thus, it is assumed that male experience is universal whereas female experience is peculiar or meaningless (Sue 2010, 32).

Two options for relationship status: married or single. LGB partnerships do not matter/are meaningless (Sue 2010, 33).

An assertive woman is labeled a “bitch.” The assumption is that women should be passive (Sue 2010, 33).

Women are less likely than men to be introduced by their titles (Torres, Salles, Cochran 2019, 868).

Denial of individual sexism:

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever a person makes a statement to deny their bias (Sue 2010, 33). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“As an employer, I always treat men and women equally” assuming that: I am incapable of sexism (Sue 2010, 33).

Myth of meritocracy:

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever a person states that gender has no bearing on a person's ability to succeed in life (Sue 2010, 33). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“I believe the most qualified person should get the job” implying that the playing field is even so if women cannot make it, the problem is with them (Sue 2010, 33).

“Men and women have equal opportunities for achievement.” implying that the playing field is even so if women cannot make it, the problem is with them (Sue 2010, 33).

Second-class citizens:

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever a member of the target group is treated differently by the power group (Sue 2010, 33). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

Black males frequently exploited the work of Black women involved in the Black power movement of the 1960s without giving them credit or acknowledgement (hooks 2015, 40).

In the world of work, many women describe a pattern of being overlooked, disrespected, and dismissed by their male colleagues (Sue 2010, 12).

Female doctor mistaken for a nurse. Women occupy nurturing roles (Sue 2010, 33).

In professions where women make up the majority of the workforce, such obstetrics and gynecology and pediatrics, the leadership is still predominately male (Torres, Salles, Cochran 2019, 868).

Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever expectations of traditional roles or stereotypes are conveyed (Sue 2010, 34). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

Freedom and masculinity have frequently been associated and manhood has been defined as men's unrestricted access to women's bodies. Rape is viewed as a legal means of preserving masculine dominance. In her book *The Demon Lover: On The Sexuality of Terrorism*, Robin Morgan examines how common ideas about manhood, which make masculinity synonymous with the capacity to exert authority via acts of violence and terrorism, help men from different social classes, races, and countries bond together. Morgan views the terrorist as the natural embodiment of patriarchal politics since males often perpetrate terrorist activities (hooks 2015, 100).

A person asks a woman her age and, upon hearing she is 31, looks quickly at her ring finger., which implies that women should be married during child-bearing ages because that is their primary purpose (Sue 2010, 34).

When a female student asked a male professor for extra help on a chemistry assignment, he asks "What do you need to work on this for anyway?", suggesting that women are less capable in math and science (Sue 2010, 34).

While men are praised for their aggressiveness, which is a sign of leadership, women who exhibit same qualities are labeled as "bitchy." Ironically, women are also aware that in order to be taken seriously as leaders, they must adopt behaviors or responsibilities that are often associated with men. They are warned not to display their feelings or social sensitivities in front of others lest they be seen as "weak" or "too emotional" to handle the pressure of making rational judgments (Sue 2010, 163).

Even the paternalist notion to "protect the weaker sex," which sees women as objects of "romantic love" and admires them for being "wives and mothers," is founded on an idealized stereotyped conception of the other sex and is as oppressive and damaging, despite its outwardly encouraging images (Sue 2010, 168).

A man refusing to wash dishes because it is "woman's work" (Sue 2010, 169).

The cultural scripts "stand by your man," "be ladylike," "nice girls don't initiate sex," and "don't be bitchy" are founded on ideas and presumptions about proper female role behaviors. These actions are based on stereotypes about women who are: subservient, sensitive to slights, excitable, emotional, and vain about their looks; dependent; less competitive; unaggressive; irrational; passive; afraid; affectionate; preoccupied with household problems; and unobjective. Women are still urged to "stay in their place" and not deviate from sex-role expectations (Sue 2010, 165-166). If shown by a man or a woman, the same attitudes and behaviors are perceived differently: if he is aggressive, she is pushy. She is fussy whether he pays attention to details. If he loses his temper, it's because he's involved in the job; if she loses her temper, it's because she's bitchy. When he's moody, everyone tiptoes past his office; if she's moody it must be her "time of the month". If he follows through, she doesn't know when to quit. If he's confident, she's conceited. If he has judgment, she's prejudiced. If he's a man of the world, she's "been around". If he drinks because of excessive job pressure, she's a lush. If he isn't afraid to speak his mind, she's mouthy. If he exercises authority diligently, she does it "power-mad". If he's

close-mouthed, she's secretive. If he's climbed the ladder to success, she slept her way to the top (Sue 2010, 174).

"A friend tells you he has seen a photograph of you on the Internet and he wants to know why you look so angry. You and the photographer chose the photograph he refers to because you both decided it looked the most relaxed. Do you look angry? You wouldn't have said so. Obviously this unsmiling image of you makes him uncomfortable, and he needs you to account for that. If you were smiling, what would that tell him about your composure in his imagination?" (Rankine 2014, 34).

Sexual objectification

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever women are treated as though they were objects at men's disposal (Sue 2010, 34). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

A male stranger puts his hands on a woman's hips or on the swell of her back to pass by her. It is implying that: women's body is not theirs (Sue 2010, 34).

Whistles and catcalls as a woman walks down the street, which suggests that women body/appearance is for men's enjoyment and pleasure (Sue 2010, 34).

Displaying nude pictures/posters of women at places of employment (Sue 2010, 169).

Ascription of intelligence

This type of microaggressions has to do with the assigning intelligence to women based on their gender (Sue 2010, 32). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

"Wow! How did you become so good in math?": it is unusual for a woman to be smart in math (Sue 2010, 32).

"In class, I have my derivations questioned, lectures critiqued, grading regarded as too harsh or unfair and my expectations dismissed as too high or difficult. I once had a student who would review notes with me that he had taken on my lecture, then offer tips on how I could improve. It seems he thought he was doing me a favor" (Williams 2019, 6).

The male gaze

Mainstream media objectifies women “showing the female body through a heterosexual male lens as a passive non-actor secondary to the active male characters” (Vanbuskirk 2022). This concept extends to any medium in which women are portrayed and their experience in real life. The male gaze controls the narrative, in which women are not seen as equal: their agency is reduced to that of an erotic or supporting object, with their values reduced to how it appeals the male viewer. They are shown as passive, vapid, highly sexualized. Oftentimes the female film characters’ main purpose in the plot is to be attractive, sexy, to feed the sexual interest or agenda of the male characters. They are the helper, eye candy, or romantic interest. Women’s bodies are used to sell and attract (predominantly heterosexual male – which is why, for example, in advertisements for beer there are models in bikini) attention. Therefore, the male gaze discourages female empowerment and self-advocacy while encouraging self-objectification to men and the patriarchy at large. The female body becomes an object at men’s disposal; it becomes something to watch, conquer, and possess. For people in marginalized groups, the male gaze is an added burden. For example, Black women have historically been depicted as being hypersexual; Asian women have been portrayed as exotic, erotic specimens for male enjoyment (as well as lesbian women, as long as men can watch or participate). Underpinning of the male gaze are deeply sexist, patriarchal, and misogynistic. The male gaze maintains a patriarchal structure in which the White, male experiences at the expense of women and other marginalized groups. Seeing women and girls continually portrayed in this way helps perpetuating this vision, whose influence continues to be pervasive. We may not even be aware of its presence or influence in our choices and vision of ourselves and others – the male gaze has been internalized by both men and women (Vanbuskirk 2022).

2.4 LGBTQ+ MICROAGGRESSIONS

In the US, 13% of lesbians and bisexuals and over 40% of homosexual males have been the victims of violent crime or theft because of their sexual orientation. Physical assault, sexual assault, theft, vandalism, verbal abuse, and discrimination in employment and housing were all examples of violence. Anti-LGBTQ+ laws, the threat of physical harm, verbal, nonverbal, and environmental harassment, hate speech, negative portrayals or stereotypes, adoption bans against same-sex couples, and the prohibition of gays from serving in the military are just a few

examples of overt and obvious manifestations of anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes and discrimination. These hardly scratch the surface of heterosexism (Sue 2010, 189-190).

LGBTQ+ microaggressions tend to fall under the themes of: Oversexualization, Use of Heterosexist Language, Denial of Individual Heterosexism, Second-class citizen, Undersexualization, Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping, Sinfulness, Assumption of Abnormality (Sue 2010, 32-34). Furthermore, I think it would also be interesting to take a look at the most common microinvalidations that the LGBTQ+ community has to face.

Oversexualization

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever someone associates one's sexual orientation with sexual activities, behaviors, and promiscuity (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1013). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

"Someone wanted to engage in a sexual act with me only because they view transgender people as exotic" (Nadal 2018, 1412).

"If I talk to a guy and he finds out I'm a lesbian he's like 'Oh my god can I watch you with another girl? That would be so hot'" (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1024).

"People assumed that I have a lot of sex because of my sexual orientation" (Woodford et al. 2015, 1673).

"Someone said or implied that LGBQ people engage in unsafe sex because of their sexual orientation" (Woodford et al. 2015, 1673).

"Strangers/acquaintances asking invasive personal questions about sex life (e.g., "how do you have sex?")" (Woodford et al. 2015, 1673).

"How often have people of the same sex assumed you were attracted to them simply because of your sexual orientation?" (Wright, Wegner 2012, 40).

Use of Heterosexist Language

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever someone uses terms that exclude or degrade LGBTQ+ people (Sue 2010, 32). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

People have made negative comments or jokes about LGBTQ people in my presence without realizing my sexual orientation (Nadal 2018, 1408).

I have heard the term “That’s so gay” when someone was talking about something negative (Nadal 2018, 1409).

People have used terms like “fag/dyke/queer/homo” in front of me (Nadal 2018, 1409).

A heterosexual man who often hangs out with his female friends more than his male friends is labeled a “fagg*t”, suggesting that men who act like women are inferior (women are inferior)/gay men are inferior (Sue 2010, 33).

Students use the term “gay” to describe a fellow student who is socially ostracized at school, which implies that people who are weird and different are “gay.” (Sue 2010, 33).

Denial of Individual Heterosexism

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever a person makes a statement to deny their bias (Sue 2010, 32-34). An example may be the following case:

Someone said they couldn’t be homophobic, biphobic, or queerphobic because they have (a).lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer friend(s) (Woodford et al. 2015, 1672).

Second-class citizen

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever a target group member receives differential treatment from the power group (Sue 2010, 33). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

People calling LGBTQ+ people by the wrong personal pronoun (Nadal 2018, 1412).

A lesbian woman is not invited out with a group of girlfriends because they thought she would be bored if they were talking to men: you don’t belong (Sue 2010, 34).

Receiving information about sexual health limited to heterosexual sex (Woodford et al. 2015, 1674).

Undersexualization

This type of microaggressions has to do with acceptance of sexual orientation, as long as the person is not actively in a relationship (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1024). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“My mom initially responded to my coming out by simply saying, ‘I just want you to be happy.’ However, a couple months after when I brought my first girlfriend home, I overheard her talking to my sister and she sounded disappointed and said, ‘So this really isn’t a phase?’” (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1024).

Using the phrase ‘sexual preference’ instead of ‘sexual orientation’ (Wright, Wegner 2012, 40).

Changing the subject/topic when reference to sexual orientation come up (Wright, Wegner 2012, 40).

Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever expectations of traditional roles or stereotypes are conveyed (Sue 2010, 34). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“I have been criticized about not wearing clothes that are normal for my gender” (Nadal 2018, 1408-1409).

“When I came out to my parents, my dad was against it and he said ‘Well you’re a good girl you, you have your head on straight, and you’re going to school. You don’t do drugs and alcohol and I know you’re going to stay on the right path.’ And I thought to myself ‘I know, and I can also be gay’” (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1020-1021).

People asking if you’re sure to be gay, since you have never slept with the opposite sex. The assumption is that being attracted to the same sex is due to a lack of sexual experience with the opposite sex, and not desire to have a quality emotional and physical relationship with the same sex (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1023-1024).

A woman is assumed to be a lesbian because she does not put a lot of effort into her appearance, implying lesbians do not care about being attractive to others (Sue 2010, 34).

Telling a gay man to “Bring your wife to the party” (Sue 2010, 193).

“Others thought I would not have kids because they knew or assumed I am lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer” (Woodford et al. 2015, 1673).

“I was told I should act ‘less lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer’” (Woodford et al. 2015, 1673).

“I felt pressured by others to look or dress more masculine or more feminine because of my sexual orientation” (Woodford et al. 2015, 167).

Sinfulness

This type of microaggressions has to do with the belief that non-heterosexual orientation is morally deviant and wrong; therefore, it is sinful and worthy of punishment (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1018). This theme is strongly associated with religion. Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“Oh you’re just being tempted by the devil” (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1021).

“Are you sure that’s what God wants you do to?” (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1021).

“Well don’t you believe in absolute truth?” (Platt, Lenzen 2013, 1021).

Saying that being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer is a sin (Woodford et al. 2015, 1673).

“Someone told me they were praying for me because they knew or assumed I am lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer” (Woodford et al. 2015, 1673).

Assumption of Abnormality

This type of microaggressions occurs whenever it is implied that there is something wrong with being LGB (Sue 2010, 34). Some examples may be the following sentences/cases:

“My grandmother, who’s has been taking care of me since I was a kind, found out that I’m gay, but she keeps telling me that I’m just going through a phase” (Burnett, Kantor 2016).

“You were so pretty with your long hair. Did you really need a queer haircut?” (Burnett, Kantor 2016).

(Experienced by a man) “I am seven years old and leaving a play date from Samantha’s house. I give her a kiss on the cheek and both of our mothers swoon. I am seven years old and leaving a

play date from Michael's house. I give him a kiss on the cheek, and his mother says, Now, that's enough of" (Burnett, Kantor 2016).

"Someone has tried to keep their children from coming into physical contact with me because of my sexual orientation" (Nadal 2018, 1408).

"Someone has assumed I have HIV or AIDS because of my sexual orientation" (Nadal 2018, 1408).

"Someone assumed that I would be a child molester or sexual predator because of my sexual orientation" (Nadal 2018, 1408).

"Someone told me that my transgender identity or my gender nonconformity was just a phase" (Nadal 2018, 1412).

"I was told that I made a family member uncomfortable because of my gender nonconformity or transgender identity" (Nadal 2018, 1412).

Some months ago, Tennessee lawmakers passed a law that bans "male and female impersonators", otherwise known as drag performers (Feaser 2023). The new bill was introduced because conservative activist and politicians believe that drag contributes to the sexualization and/or grooming of children (Kruesi, Mcmilla 2023). The bill works as an obscenity statute to prevent "adult cabaret performers like drag queens from performing in public space where children could be present". These performances are seen as sexual and deviant inappropriate for people of all kinds, youth in particular (Feaser 2023). "Male or female impersonators" now fall under adult cabaret, among topless dancers, go-go dancers, exotic dancers, and strippers (Kruesi, Mcmilla 2023). Knoxville Rep. Gloria Johnson has been vocal about her opposition to the drag performer bill: "I'm curious how many drag shows you've been to, and I'm curious, why targeting this? [...]" Because I'm thinking about a place where men wear tights: in WWE wrestling, and one third of the audience, at least, is children. But somehow someone dressing up and dancing is the problem?" (Feaser 2023). Protecting children does not equate with restrictions impinging upon the free expression rights of adults and children whose dress codes defies traditional gender binaries (Nossel 2023).

Two men holding hands in public are stared at by strangers, suggesting that you should keep your displays of affection private because they are offensive (Sue 2010, 32-34).

A lesbian who shares her night out on the town with friends who is asked “ Did you go to a gay bar or a normal one?” is insulted by the unintentional equation of pathology with sexual orientation (Sue 2010, 193).

Viewing bisexuality as a crisis of identity (Sue 2010, 195).

When someone comes out to their parents and they show fear and often reassure them by stating that they will grow out of it and that they’ll have “normal feelings” soon. As a reassurance they say that it’s just a phase that they’re going through (Sue 2010, 195).

“Someone said or implied that my sexual orientation is a result of something that went “wrong” in my past (e.g., ‘your mother was too overbearing.’)” (Woodford et al. 2015, 1672).

People saying or implying that LGBTQ people have mental health problems or need to be “cured” (Woodford et al. 2015, 1673).

LGBTQ+ microinvalidations

“I have been told I was overreacting when I confronted someone about their heterosexist behaviors/ slights” (Nadal 2018, 1408).

“I have been told that I should stop complaining about heterosexism” (Nadal 2018, 1408).

“When I thought something was heterosexist or homophobic, a heterosexual person provided alternative rationales/disagreed with me” (Nadal 2018, 1408).

“Someone told me that I was oversensitive when it came to LGBTQ issues” (Nadal 2018, 1408).

“Someone has responded defensively when I pointed out their homophobic language” (Nadal 2018, 1408).

“I have been told I was being paranoid when I thought someone was being heterosexist” (Nadal 2018, 1408).

“I was told that I complain too much about societal discrimination against gender nonconforming people” (Nadal 2018, 1412).

2.5 INTERSECTIONALITY

In 1981, Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa produced an anthology of writing by women of color. This anthology, called *This Bridge Called My Back*, critiqued other leftist groups and brought to light the specific issues that women faced when their multiple identities (gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, etc.) all intertwined. The introduction states:

We want to express to all women – especially to white middle-class women – the experiences which divide us as feminists; we want to examine incidents of intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the feminist movement. We intend to explore the causes and sources of, and solutions to these divisions. We want to create a definition that expands what “feminist” means to us (Pratt 2008: 66, 67).

From this small extract, we can already perceive how divided the feminist world was (and probably still is). Anzaldúa and Moraga (1981) called attention to the intolerance, prejudice and denial of differences within the community talking to all women, but especially *white middle-class women*. The point is that even inside a minority movement (feminism) in which they should feel protected, they feel hated and discriminated upon – referring to white women wasn’t a coincidence, it hints at the fact that the added discrimination has to do with race, creating space for multi-faced issues that some years later Crenshaw (1989) would call *intersections*.

In 1989, Crenshaw coined the word “intersectionality” in her study *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics*. In this study, she focused on the multidimensionality of Black women’s experiences. With Black women as a start point, it is more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis. In race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class- privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class- privileged women. The focus on the most privileged group members marginalizes those who are multiply-burdened (Crenshaw, 1989, 139-140). Thus, intersectionality is a matter of power rather than identity (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall 2013, 798). In other words, intersectionality simply refers to how some components of your identity will increase your access to or exposure to positive or negative aspects of life. Like many other social-justice ideas, it stands because it is relevant to people's lives, but because it is relevant to people's lives, it’s under attack (Steinmentz 2020).

The discourse on intersectionality began after a few lawsuit cases brought up by Black women, in which they were not allowed to combine statutory remedies and create a new “super-remedy” which would give them a “superior advantage”. In these cases, it was esteemed that they were not actually being discriminated against, as the places they were complaining about both hired women (however, only *white* women) and Black people (however, only Black *men*) (Crenshaw, 1989, 141-142). The cases were dismissed as (apparently) there were neither sex discrimination, nor race discrimination. However, the court’s refusal to acknowledge that Black women encounter combined race and sex discrimination implies that the boundaries of sex and race discrimination doctrine are defined respectively by white women's and Black men's experiences. For white women, there is no need to specify discrimination as *white* women: discrimination as women will be enough – as we said, white female experiences are conceptualized in sex discrimination. Discrimination against white females is the standard sex discrimination (Crenshaw 1989, 142-145). Antidiscrimination law will regulate only the extent to which race or sex interferes with the process of determining outcomes. Notions of what constitutes race and sex discrimination do not include discrimination against Black women, as they receive protection only to the extent that their experiences are similar to those whose experiences are considered in antidiscrimination doctrine. Interestingly enough, even in much of feminist theory and antiracist politics this framework is reflected. As a result, these theories have been organized around the equation of racism with what happens to the Black middle-class or to Black men, and the equation of sexism with what happens to white women (Crenshaw 1989, 151-152). Black women are, therefore, overlooked and their exclusion is reinforced when white women speak for all women and Black men speak for all Black people. Nevertheless, the issue is not only that discourses fail women of color by ignoring patriarchy or the additional factor of race; rather, the discourses are frequently insufficient for the particular task of expressing the entire elements of racism and sexism. The failure of feminism to interrogate race often replicates and reinforces subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy often reproduces the subordination of women (Crenshaw 1991, 1252). These failures shape contemporary politics and incorporate patriarchal components into ideas of feminism and antiracism (Crenshaw 2016). When feminist theory attempts to describe women's experiences through analyzing patriarchy, sexuality, or separate spheres ideology, it often overlooks the role of race. Feminists thus ignore how their own race functions to mitigate some aspects of sexism and, moreover, how it often privileges them over and contributes to the domination of other women (Crenshaw 1989, 154).

Moreover, feminist literature may make the mistake of assuming that since the role of Black women in the family and in other Black institutions does not always resemble the familiar manifestations of patriarchy in the white community, Black women are somehow exempt from patriarchal norms (Crenshaw 1989, 156). Nevertheless, insistence on patriarchal values, on equating Black liberation with Black men gaining access to male privilege that would enable them to assert power over Black women, was one of the most significant forces undermining radical struggle (hooks 2015, 40). An example of how Black women are subjected to patriarchal values is the “Black mother worship”, with which the virtues of self-sacrifice are seen as the perfect embodiment of a woman’s “natural” role, rather than a choice. The assumption then is that the Black woman who works hard to be a responsible caretaker is only doing what she should be doing. The political commitment to racial uplift and eradicating racism, which was the philosophical core of dedication to community and home, is obscured by the failure to acknowledge the realm of choice and the remarkable re-visioning of both woman's role and the concept of "home" that Black women consciously exercised in practice (hooks 2015, 82-83). Additionally, Black mothers often excuse and explain male anger, irritability, and violence by calling attention to the pressures Black men face in a racist society where they are collectively denied full access to economic power. They clearly believed, as do many Black men, that racism is harder on males than females, even though many of these Black women worked for low wages in circumstances where they were daily humiliated and mistreated. Assumptions that racism is more oppressive to Black men than Black women, then and now, are fundamentally based on acceptance of patriarchal notions of masculinity. Many people still believe that Black males are the most hurt by discriminatory policies that prevent many of them from getting high-paying positions, robbing them of the ability to support their families and be household heads. However, social perspectives on labor have changed. Although having a male primary provider is no longer the norm, these presumptions nonetheless have power in both the wider culture and in minority communities (hooks 2015, 124).

Even when addressing crimes against women we have a differentiation between Black women – and women of color in general – and white women. Rape, for example, reflects *white* male regulation of *white* female sexuality. Historically, Black women were presumed not to be chaste; and white women’s chastity was restored whenever the alleged assailant was a Black man. However, no such restoration was available to Black women. Presumed absence of chastity meant no law protection. When Black women were raped by white males, they were being raped not as women generally, but as Black women specifically: their femaleness made them

sexually vulnerable to racist domination, while their Blackness effectively denied them any protection. This white male power was reinforced by a judicial system in which the successful conviction of a white man for raping a Black woman was virtually unthinkable. Rape was then used as a weapon of racial terror (Crenshaw 1989, 157-159). Oftentimes, the struggle against racism seemed to compel the subordination of certain aspects of the Black female experience in order to ensure the security of the larger Black community (Crenshaw 1989, 163). In addition, a study of rape dispositions in Dallas showed that the average prison term for a man convicted of raping a Black woman was two years, as compared to five years for the rape of a Latina and ten years for the rape of a white woman. A related issue is the fact that African-American victims of rape are the least likely to be believed (Crenshaw 1991, 1269). Considering that rape accusations have provided an excuse for white terrorism against the Black community (as they intended to directly attack Black men), the experience of Black men has occupied the dominant conceptions of racism and rape so much so that there is little room for the experiences of Black women. Many people had a perception that all African Americans could easily picture their sons, dads, or brothers being falsely accused of rape. However, data reveal that, since Black women are more likely to be raped than Black males are to be unjustly accused of it, daughters, mothers, sisters, and aunts also need at least a similar concern (Crenshaw 1991, 1273-1274).

On top of that, people felt that even with violence statistics they needed to be careful. The data could reinforce stereotypes of Black and Brown (men) as uncontrollably violent, which could be used to justify oppressive police tactics and disc practices. Some worry that statistics of domestic violence may also undermine efforts to combat negative beliefs towards Black communities. As a result, women of color can be strategically silenced (Crenshaw 1991, 1253).

An episode of CBS news can help us understand how even in this case women of different races are portrayed differently. They presented seven women who were victims of abuse. Six were interviewed at some length along with their family members, friends, supporters, and even detractors. The viewer got to know something about each of these women. These victims were humanized. Yet the seventh woman, the only nonwhite one, never came into focus. She was literally unrecognizable throughout the segment, first introduced by photographs showing her face badly beaten and later shown with her face electronically altered in the videotape of a hearing at which she was forced to testify. Other images associated with her included shots of a bloodstained room and blood-soaked pillows. Her boyfriend was pictured handcuffed while the camera zoomed in for his bloodied sneakers. Of all the presentations in the episode, hers was

the most graphic and impersonal. Unlike the other women, all of whom, again, were white, this woman had no name, no family, no context. The viewer sees her only as victimized and uncooperative. She cries when shown pictures. She to be forced to view the bloodstained room and her disfigured program does not help the viewer to understand her predicament. Unfortunately, she, unlike the other six, has no epilogue. While the fates of the other women are revealed at the end of the episode, we discover nothing about the Black woman. She, like the others she represents, is simply left to herself and soon forgotten (Crenshaw, 1991, 1261).

Discrimination against women of color is seen when they seek help, too. A clear example would be the inaccessibility of domestic violence support services to many non-English-speaking women. For instance, a Latina woman, who was not English-proficient, called the Domestic Violence center seeking for shelter for her and her son after her husband threatened to kill them. As they were two, it was more difficult to find shelter for them. Yet, once they found it, after learning that she was not English-proficient, she was told that they could not take her (Crenshaw 1991, 1262).

Theories and practices that claim to represent the concerns of the Black community must incorporate an analysis of sexism and patriarchy if any serious attempts are to be made to liberate Black people from the restrictions and circumstances that characterize racial servitude. Similar to this, feminism needs to include race if it is to represent the goals of non-white women. The intersecting experiences of individuals who the movements claim as their respective constituency cannot be ignored by either Black liberationist politics or feminist philosophy. In order to include Black women, both movements must distance themselves from earlier approaches in which experiences are relevant only when they are related to certain clearly identifiable causes (for example, the oppression of Blacks is significant when based on race, of women when based on gender). The praxis of both should be centered on the life chances and life situations of people who should be cared about without regard to the source of their difficulties (Crenshaw 1989, 166).

Intersectionality lens can reveal perspectives of both privilege and victimhood on a given issue and between separate identity groups, creating a connection around shared experiences of discrimination, marginalization, and privilege (Carbado et al. 2013, 306). Intersectionality has, since the beginning, been posed more as a nodal point than as a closed system—a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall 2013, 788). The goal of

this activity should be to facilitate the inclusion of marginalized groups for whom it can be said: "When they enter, we all enter" (Crenshaw, 1989, 167). Therefore, intersectionality is not fixed to any particular social position. The theory can and does move, as it is animated by the imperative of social change (Carbado et al. 2013, 306, 312).

Finally, it's imperative to discuss how the state is a facilitator of this violence, namely how police officers are committing the same kind of sexual abuse that we see in private homes. Although sexual assault by police officers is the second most frequent allegation, there is no anti-racist organization that addresses this issue. This is an intersectional failure. In 2015, Daniel Holtzclaw, a former police officer in Oklahoma City, was found to have raped eight women. The complaints actually said 13, but the jury didn't believe some of those women. We are left wondering how someone could have believed they could get away with raping 13 Black women while on duty. Intersectionality's the answer. These women were Black, they were poor, some of them were involved in the criminal justice system, some of them were substance abusers, some of them worked in the sex trade. When you combine all of those variables, you essentially have free reign to prey on these specific women, which is exactly what happened. Individually, each of those qualities makes those ladies less likely to accept what you're telling them.

It's vital that we learn to say their names: Natasha McKenna, Alexia Christian, Shelly Frey, Kayla Moore, Michelle Cusseaux, Tanisha Anderson, Rekia Boyd, Aiyanna Stanley Jones, Shantel Davis, Aura Rosser, Gabriella Nevarez, India Kager, Kendra James, Kyam Livingston, Alesia Thomas, Meagan Hockaday, Miriam Carey, Pearlie Golden, Yvette Smith, Kisha Michael, India Beaty, Symone Marshall, Jessica Williams, Korryn Gaines, Deborah Danner (Crenshaw 2016).

CHAPTER 3. GUIDELINES

In this last chapter, I will talk about the importance of media representation, I will address the – perhaps – best way to respond to microaggression, and I will use some guidelines to better understand how to avoid committing microaggressions in conversation.

3.1 MEDIA REPRESENTATION

- Role models are important because you need to see someone like you in the position that you hope to attain. Otherwise you began to wonder, to doubt, to second guess yourself - (Solorzano 1998, 128).

Today, media play a crucial role in shaping our social identities. It's not just that media messages have a significant impact on individuals; we also use these messages to define and develop our sense of self. It's not merely a matter of people being controlled by images (as in the representation of different people that is presented to us); rather, people actively seek out and derive pleasure from consuming these images. To comprehend contemporary culture, it is essential to examine both the experience of viewing and the cultural significance of images (hooks 2015, 24). Increased visibility can diminish people's fears and perhaps ultimately bring an end to discrimination. It is through visibility that popular opinion can be changed, as marginalized groups are integrated into mainstream culture, thus normalizing them in a world that tends to fear the unknown or unfamiliar experiences (Pratto 2008, 129).

Let's take a look, for example, at one of the first and most famous TV series for lesbian representation: *The L Word*. Before getting into it, it's important to take note of how homosexuality had been depicted thus far. Homosexuality had always been present in films. Although it may not have been openly acknowledged, it was often conveyed through subtle hints and storylines that audiences were able to interpret as implying *aberrant* sexualities. For instance, there were comedic portrayals of effeminate male characters (e.g., *The Dick Van Dyke Show* "1961", *The Munsters* "1964", *Get Smart* "1965", *La cage aux folles* "1978", *The Birdcage* (1996)), storylines revolving around mistaken sexual identities, or the portrayal of villainous, devoid-of-sexuality female characters (e.g. *Rebecca* "1940", *The Children's Hour* "1961", *The Detective* "1968", *The Bold ones* "1969", *The Killing of Sister George* "1969", *Mean Girls* "2004", *The miseducation of Cameron Post* "2018", *Jennifer's Body* "2019", and *Ratched* "2020").

Therefore, while depictions of queerness have existed in film for a long time, they have frequently been concealed or presented in a negative light (Pratt 2008, 71). Portrayals of gay, lesbian, and transgender individuals in media often tend to present them in a sanitized and non-sexualized manner, at best, or as exaggerated stereotypes, at worst. Throughout history, there has always been a profit motive behind the representation of homosexuality in media. Previously, it was more profitable to depict these individuals in a negative light, but now there is a growing realization that catering to this demographic can be highly lucrative for companies seeking their support and spending power (Pratt 2008, 86-87). LGBTQ+ people tend to place significant importance on representation. For those who have been compelled to hide or suppress their existence and identity, visibility and representation become intertwined with the very act of existing. Mainstream culture often dismisses queer performances as merely preaching to an already accepting audience. Nevertheless, in a predominantly homophobic society that continues to discriminate against and marginalize its LGBTQ+ members, these performances can hold great significance, if not being crucial, for the community they represent (Pratt 2008, 123). Yet, the mainstream queer movement has often failed to include a diverse range of identities and experiences within this agenda (Pratt 2008, 198). As a matter of fact, when media industry targets the gay market, they primarily cater to affluent, gay, white men. As a result, working-class individuals, lesbians, people of color, transgender individuals, and other queer-identified individuals are often overlooked and not granted the same level of visibility or economic opportunities. It is not uncommon in the realm of media and communication to prioritize the experiences of white men while disregarding the voices of marginalized communities. However, when it comes to an already marginalized group, this exclusion from economic validation further complicates the notion of achieving liberation. In this context, *The L Word* assumes an important role as one of the first mainstream cultural productions that actively sought to address specifically a queer female audience (Pratt 2008, 102-103).

The L Word can be considered the first mainstream representation of the Lesbian world. Several viewers emphasized the significance of the series due to the historical portrayal of queer women in media. According to one respondent in a survey carried out by Pratt (2008), lesbian characters were often depicted as deeply disturbed murderers, sociopaths, or individuals plagued by extreme depression. Another respondent expressed a similar sentiment, stating their happiness with a show that centers on lesbian characters without presenting their sexuality as deviant or abnormal (Pratt 2008, 129). Numerous users have discussed the show as helping them come to

terms with, accept, or discover their sexuality and/or come out to others (Pratt 2008, 126). Nonetheless, despite having a predominantly queer team of creators and making earnest efforts to promote the series as a catalyst for change, it seems that the creators also felt compelled to tone down radical elements of queer women's culture in order to appeal to a broader audience (Pratt 2008, 150). Hence, while the series did contribute to the representation of an underrepresented segment of society, there were still shortcomings in its portrayal. Specifically, it predominantly depicted femme, middle-class, white lesbians and fell short in its representation of the transgender community. Although the producers attempted to rectify these issues, their efforts did not yield the intended results. To address the representation of butch lesbians, for instance, they introduced the character of Moira as a solution. Moira was the first self-identifying butch character, and rather than allow a space for that identity, the writers decided to make her a transgender character. Some viewers expressed dissatisfaction with the portrayal of Moira's identity, as it alluded to the stereotype that some people hold regarding butch individuals: they aspire to be men (Pratt 2008, 138). Moreover, many viewers thought that the show did not do a great job at handling transgender issues. For instance, Max took street hormones because he had no health insurance; the transition process was not given enough screen presence or explanation (Pratt 2008, 136). During Moira's transition into Max, the series portrays a rapid and uninterrupted progression from point A (womanhood) to point B (manhood), disregarding the complex and nuanced middle ground that encompasses the broader understanding of "gender." Before Moira begins taking testosterone, she is depicted as a gentle, giving soul; after the testosterone begins to kick in, she changes into an aggressive, sexually driven, angry man with absurdly uneven facial hair (AfterEllen.com Staff 2006). Additionally, Max had to face transphobia from the other characters. As an example, one of the main characters, Alice, created a website called "OurChart" in which Max assisted her. During this collaboration, Max realized that both Alice and many of the women using the site were uninformed about transgender issues, or even harbored transphobic views. To address this, he asked Alice to listen to a podcast discussing transgender identity and the related challenges, hoping to share it on the site. However, Alice initially dismissed his suggestion, seemingly lacking the time or willingness to consider his input. Frustrated, Max took matters into his own hands and started a blog on the site, sharing his personal experiences. This blog sparked significant controversy within the OurChart community, leading to the following dialogue between Alice and Max:

Alice: Max, you invaded my space to put out your own agenda and it wasn't cool at all. But here's what I'll do, you can blog once a week. I'll put you in your own little box on the homepage – not with the Guestbiansiv...

Max: Why not with the Guestbians?

Alice: Because it's a lesbian site, Max, and I just don't want to get bombarded with a bunch of dykes, you know, flipping out about this transgender thing.

Max: You can't segregate transgender people out of the lesbian community. I mean...

Alice: I'm not saying that, you know, lesbians and transgender can't share the same spaces. It's just that...

Eventually Alice used OurChart to publicly apologize to Max for her behavior, admitting that transgender individuals deserve inclusion in the lesbian community (Pratt 2008, 176, 177). Another episode of transphobia arose when Max was engaging in a conversation with Kit about his struggles with gender identity and the following dialogue unfolded during their interaction:

Max: I've never felt comfortable in a girl's body.

Kit: So, removing your breasts and changing yourself into a man is going to solve all of your problems? [...] it saddens me to see so many of our strong butch girls giving up their womanhood to be a man. We're losing our warriors, our greatest women, and I don't wanna lose you.

Max: I'm not following some trend.

Kit: What if I live my life feeling white inside, and then the next day I woke up and I could change the color of my skin, the features on my face, to become white? Would you encourage me to do that? [...] Why can't you be the butchiest butch in the world and keep your body?

Max: Because I want to feel whole. I want the outside of me to match the inside of me.

Kit: You'll be giving up the most precious thing in the world.

Max: What? My tits?

Kit: No. Being a woman.

(@Justmeeh223, written by Ilene Chaiken 2006).

This incident served to invalidate and belittle Max's identity. Instead of actively listening to him and attempting to understand his perspective, Kit chose to dismiss and reject his identity. While transphobia is a real issue even within the LGBTQ+ community, it may not have been the best decision to showcase such behaviors in a prominent TV show, particularly because there was no subsequent acknowledgment or apology for these episodes. Furthermore, additional criticism can be raised when examining the issue of race. In the first season, the only characters of color were Bette, who was biracial (played by Jennifer Beals), and her half-sister Kit, who was African American (played by Pam Grier). Perhaps what makes this even more problematic is that Kit is

not a lesbian; she is one of the few heterosexual main characters. Throughout the seasons, the writers introduced other characters of color, such as Carmen (played by Sarah Shahi).in Season Two, Papi (played by Janina Gavankar).in Season Four, and Tasha (played by Rose Rollins).in Season Four (Pratt 2008, 140-1). Problems have also arisen for the show with its casting decision, particularly when actors were chosen to portray characters of different racial or ethnic backgrounds than their own. For example, Carmen and Papi were Latina characters, but Shahi's heritage is Iranian Spanish and Gavankar's heritage is Indian and Dutch. A viewer responds to the Shahi casting decision, "[An] Iranian girl playing Latina? Okay, okay, I love The L Word, but why is a girl from Iran playing a Latina? ...I would have preferred it would be a real Latina playing Carmen" (Pratt 2008, 142-3). Furthermore, in a problematic portrayal, an episode in Season Three features a female performance artist, portrayed by Canadian model Shay Kingston, who is hired as entertainment for an event. The artist is shown naked behind a plexiglass enclosure, writing text with multicolored markers. Shortly after her introduction, Shane, fully dressed, enters the space, and they exchange smiles before Shane proceeds to kiss and touch the artist's nude body. The scene is filmed in a way that highlights the observation of this act by at least one (the character of Dana), if not multiple, predominantly white party attendees. The problems with this type of representation are denounced by Nubian who posted, in 2006, "Fuck The L-Word":

Fuck you Ilene Chaiken. Fuck you for having the audacity to have a Black woman used for sexual pleasure for whites. Fuck you for perpetuating the idea that the Black female body is always ready and available for white sexual domination and consumption. Fuck you for having her in a fucking box—SHE WAS CAGED FOR GOD SAKES while naked for the (dis)pleasure of the white gaze—wasn't Black women on auction blocks during slavery enough? Do you have to reproduce this image, this idea that we have no soul, no mind, only big titties waiting for some stupid white bitch to come and kiss our backs?

(Pratt 2008, 169-170).

This type of representation exploited Black women's bodies in ways that reinforced the already established belief of impurity and oversexualization over their bodies.

Moving on, the show also failed in portraying bisexuality, depicting bisexuals as cheaters and manipulators (Armelli 2020). The only out bisexual character was Alice. She is labeled as a "dirty bisexual," portrayed as someone who is unable to make a choice and is ridiculed by her friends until her identity is nearly erased. The only time she dated a man, it was a man who claimed to identify as a lesbian, effectively turning Alice's identity and the concept of being transgender

into a cruel joke. When Tina briefly explored her bisexuality, initially flirting with a man online and later getting involved with man named Henry, Bette becomes increasingly upset, eventually resorting to attempting a custody battle. It is not just that their bisexuality is frowned upon within the show, but they also seem to be purposely paired with the worst men, almost as if to make a point. Even Tim, the man Jenny is dating when she begins to realize her attraction to women, starts off as decent but ultimately becomes borderline abusive (Eloise 2021). Other shows, even queer-acclaimed ones, such as *Glee*, *Sex and the city*, and *The Real O'Neals* helped reinforce the bisexual stereotypes. In *Glee* "2009-2014" Kurt, one of the protagonists (who identifies as gay), told his boyfriend Blain that "bisexual's a term that gay guys in high school use when they wanna hold hands with girls and feel like a normal person for a change" (Daly, Cleal 2020). In *Sex and the city* "1998-2004" Carrie said that she didn't believe that bisexuality existed as she thought of it as "just a layover on the way to gaytown" (Daly, Cleal 2020). In *The Real O'Neals* "2016-2017" Kenny, one of the protagonists (who identifies as gay), hoped that his boyfriend wasn't bisexual (Daly, Cleal 2020). However, misrepresentation in other TV shows did not stop with bisexuality either. For example, in *Friends* "1994-2004" the protagonist Ross thought that the male nanny was gay - because he had a job that he considered traditionally reserved for women; again in *Friends*, Ross spread a rumor in High School that Rachel was intersex in an attempt to humiliate her, portraying intersex people as freaky and even repulsive (Daly, Cleal 2020). In *How I met your mother* "2005-2014" lesbianism is fetishized to the point that Robin and Lily making out was the only thing that could wake Barney up from a drunken stupor, framing lesbianism as entertainment for straight men; again in *How I met your mother*, Ted invited Barney to play a gross game where they attempt to decipher cis female models from trans female models, claiming that trans women are just "dudes". The last example that I would like to mention is when in *House* "2004-2012" there was an asexual patient, who turned out to be asexual because of a brain tumor. Yet asexuality, meaning one doesn't experience sexual attraction, isn't a medical condition that needs to be fixed (Daly, Cleal 2020). The media is a powerful tool and these images, especially if we consider how famous these shows were (and still are), can only do harm. In today's television things have changed, a little bit. It is still possible to find poor attempt at queer representation – even in reality TV – such as the latest *The ultimatum: queer love* - where producers seem to do the impossible to find the most abusive queer relationships.

Furthermore, the issue of racial representation is also intricate and sensitive. If we delve deeper into the portrayal of Black females, hooks (2015) provides us with an insightful analysis. For

instance, she explains how, in films such as *Do the right thing*, Black women are depicted as reliant on Black men to enlighten them about the sexual objectification and demeaning treatment they experience from white males (see Jade, for example). Frequently, their personal boundaries are violated, and they become susceptible to manipulation by Black men. Through the portrayal of both subtle and overt instances of sexist humiliation inflicted upon Black women by Black men, the filmmaker reinforces these damaging patterns. In the movie, the sole young Black woman who hangs out with the male characters is introduced in a scene where she is deceived, manipulated, and subjected to humiliation. Her passive acceptance of this treatment appears to be a prerequisite for her inclusion in the group. When violence erupts, she suddenly assumes a traditionally defined female role, positioned on a street corner, crying hysterically, and later pleading with the "men" to cease their actions. Perhaps the devaluation of Black womanhood in this film goes unnoticed because it seamlessly aligns with the prevailing sexism ingrained in Western culture. If the occasional meaningful critique of racism that surfaces in the film were to alienate viewers, the presence of sexism seduces them back into the narrative, offering the gratification denied by the other storyline. Tina, Mookie's female companion, initially presents herself as strong, but by the end of the film, she finds herself trapped in the familiar cinematic trope where the woman is "seduced and abandoned," repeatedly subjected to gaslighting. Despite the significance of a Black woman conveying a compelling message in the film, the impact is diminished by the fact that nobody, particularly the heroic male character, pays attention to her voice. Jade, displaying more independence than she has exhibited throughout the movie, proclaims her commitment to being involved in "something positive in the community." However, this notion of "something positive," which implies a genuine resistance against racism and other forms of oppression, never occurs (hooks 2015, 274-275).

As earlier stated, representation is important. It is essential, because it allows individuals from different communities to see and understand each other, fostering a recognition of their unique identities. Representation demonstrates that one's existence is acknowledged. Therefore, I believe that movies, TV series, books, should represent reality. Representing reality is the key to allow people to have a meaningful connection to characters. However, I also believe that they cannot be fully authentic, as they're simply not real. They're fiction. In this fiction, it might be important to represent what we want to see. We could also represent real scenes, with scenarios very similar to reality, but why can they not be incorporated with an explanation of why something might be wrong? The fact that something might not be the truest representation ever does not mean that you cannot enjoy it. Horror movies do not represent actual facts – not

always anyway; animated TV series do not represent actual facts. They might, in some ways, but it is never going to be as really living your reality, and that's what's so great with media: we can create a new world. There is a movie, a book, a TV series that will displace whatever it is that you are looking for.

Consequently, I am a firm believer that media should represent what we want to see, the change that we want in the world, because it works in the same language does: if we want to see changes in the way the sentences' structures are constructed, in the expressions we use, in the words we use, if we want to create new words, we need to apply these changes to reality. We need to demonstrate what we want to change and we need to be persistent with it. I use media as a small escape from reality and since it has so much influence on us, it would be a waste not to use it properly. Hence, media needs to represent the good and the bad – as it already does, what matters is the way it is represented.

Finally, representation is not only vital in the media but also in various other contexts. For instance, diversifying the teaching staff and actively engaging in discussions about equity on campus can contribute to fostering a positive environment (Torino et al. 2018, 286).

3.2 HOW TO REACT TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

Firstly, we need to say “ouch”. Whether we are the hurt person or a witness, saying “ouch” is the first step towards talking about the microaggression. Then, we need to remember that microaggressions are not always malicious, they can also come from unconscious biases, rather than a desire to be hurtful or hateful. Thus, it is important to explain why a comment is a microaggression, not in an accusatory way, but in an educative and assertive one (Torino et al. 2018, 300-301; Nadal 2014, 74). You need to disarm the person who committed a microaggression: ask them to clarify their statement/action to you. Acknowledge that you understand their stated intentions, but shift the focus of the conversation towards the impact of the microaggression. Share how you initially interpreted their words or behavior and explain the reasons behind your interpretation (Washington 2020, 4). Oftentimes the perpetrator will become defensive, which may lead to further microaggressions (particularly microinvalidations). Using "I" statements, such as expressing how you felt personally, can be more effective than resorting to attacking statements when addressing a situation. For instance, saying "I felt hurt when you said that" allows you to convey your emotions without directly accusing the person.

Similarly, it is advisable to focus on addressing the specific behavior rather than labeling the individual as a whole. Instead of calling someone "a racist," it is more constructive to describe the behavior they exhibited as racially charged and offensive. This approach helps to maintain a focus on the actions and encourages a more productive conversation (Nadal 2014, 74).

Above all, it is crucial to seek support once the entire interaction involving a microaggression is over. Seeking support can take various forms, such as practical support. For example, if someone experiences microaggressions in the workplace, they can file a complaint with Human Resources to address the issue formally. Additionally, social support plays a vital role, where individuals can confide in their loved ones or connect with peers who share similar identities, providing validation for their experiences. Processing one's emotions is also essential, as microaggressions have been recognized as contributing factors to mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and trauma. Therefore, individuals who encounter microaggressions may find it helpful and necessary to engage in discussions about their cognitive and emotional reactions with their loved ones or seek assistance from mental health professionals. By doing so, individuals can prevent the accumulation of negative and harmful emotions that might adversely impact their mental well-being (Nadal 2014, 74).

If you find yourself in the role of the aggressor rather than the victim, it is crucial to recognize that you do not have the authority to invalidate the feelings of the person you have targeted. Instead, it is important to prioritize offering a sincere apology, taking steps to rectify the situation, and actively engaging in awareness education and unbiased behavior. By acknowledging the impact of your actions, taking responsibility, and actively working towards personal growth and understanding, you can contribute to fostering a more inclusive and respectful environment (Levchak 2018, 33).

3.3 PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE AND GUIDELINES – HOW TO AVOID MICROAGGRESSIONS

The first step towards avoiding microaggressions is pausing before asking a personal question. One needs to consider how their words could potentially impact the person could take (Alvoid 2019). The discussion of person-first versus identity-first language originated in the context of disabilities, but it has since been extended to encompass other identity groups. When writing about identity-related topics, authors are encouraged to employ terms and descriptions that

both respect and clarify person-first and identity-first perspectives. It is crucial to select language with the understanding that the individual's preference takes precedence over matters of style.

Person-first language emphasizes the person rather than their disability or chronic condition. It highlights the individual's humanity before addressing their specific condition. Identity-first language is often utilized as a way to express cultural pride and reclaim a disability or chronic condition that was once associated with a negative identity. It may also be appropriate in the following scenarios:

TERM TO AVOID	SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVE
victim, survivor	person who has experienced... person who has been impacted by...
mentally ill person	living with a mental health condition person with a mental disorder person with a mental illness
abusive relationship	relationship with a person who is abusive
addict	person with a substance use disorder
prostitute	person who engages in sex work
prisoner, convict	person who is/has been incarcerated
slave	person who is/was enslaved

(Akbar 2021, 6)

There are different *layers of diversity* to take into account when analyzing one’s identity. The first two layers of diversity can be considered one’s personality and communication style. In addition, diversity encompasses the various aspects in which individuals vary in general, including primary characteristics, such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, mental and physical abilities, and sexual orientations. It also includes secondary characteristic, such as education, income, religion, work experience, language skills, geographic location, and family status (Harvard 2020, 3). Lastly, it includes tertiary characteristics, such as union affiliation, 62gmt. status, seniority, work location, school/division/dept/unit/group, work content/field, functional level/classification (Harvard 2020, 24). To put it simply, diversity hints at the entirety of characteristics that distinguish individuals from one another, and at its core, it signifies heterogeneity (Harvard 2020, 3). The following image might help better understanding these different levels.

Key Inclusion and Belonging Factors
The Five Layers of Diversity



(Harvard 2020, 24)

Here are some insights on discrimination based on age, physical ability (disability status), race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender diversity, gender minorities, and socioeconomic status:

- Age: Ageism refers to the act of stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups based on their age. It can manifest in various ways, including prejudiced attitudes, discriminatory practices, and institutional policies. It is advisable to avoid terms like "senior," "elderly," or "the aged" as they contribute to othering and imply a separation from society. Instead, preferred terminology could include "older adults," "older people," or "the older population" (Akbar 2021, 7).
- Disability status: Discrimination against people with disabilities involves stereotyping, prejudiced attitudes, discriminatory behavior, and social oppression, all of which impede their rights and well-being. These actions stem from ableism, which is based on the assumption that being able-bodied is the norm while other states of being require fixing or alteration. This can lead to devaluation or discrimination against individuals with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities. Institutionalized ableism may manifest as intentional or unintentional organizational barriers resulting in differential treatment of people with disabilities. To prevent discrimination, it is essential to use person-first and identity-first language, avoiding condescending terms (e.g., "special needs" to "person with a disability," "mentally ill" to "person with a mental disorder"). Additionally, it is crucial to respect individuals' preferences regarding how they wish to be addressed (e.g., "person with deafness" to "deaf person," "visually challenged person" to "visually impaired person"). It is also important to be mindful of pictorial metaphors, negative terms, and slurs, opting for respectful language choices (e.g., "AIDS victim" to "person with AIDS," "alcoholic" to "person with alcohol use disorder," "wheelchair-bound person" to "wheelchair user") (Akbar 2021, 8-9).
- Race, ethnicity, and culture: It is important to be aware of and respect the various identities and terms used to describe racial and ethnic groups, such as African American/Black, American Arab, Middle Eastern, North African, Asian/Asian American, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color), Hispanic, Latin(a/o), Latinx, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, and people of European origin (white people). When discussing these identities, always use the preferred terms that individuals use to identify themselves (Akbar 2021, 10). Additionally, caution should be exercised to avoid acculturation and cultural appropriation, which involve adjusting social and cultural values and adopting aspects of a minority culture without proper understanding or respect for its context and original meaning. There are different ways in which people

can be harmful towards races/ethnicities, such as cultural appropriation, color-blindness beliefs, ethnic bias, white privilege, racism:

- Cultural appropriation that promotes disrespectful cultural or racial stereotypes is particularly harmful (Harvard 2020, 15-16).
 - Color-blind beliefs refer to the denial or minimization of race or racism in society, often based on the notion of not "seeing" color. Those who endorse color-blind beliefs believe that acknowledging racial and ethnic differences reinforces divisions, and they argue that individual effort is sufficient for success in a meritocracy. However, research shows that holding color-blind beliefs allows racial and ethnic prejudice to persist (Akbar 2021, 11).
 - Ethnic bias refers to differential treatment of individuals based on their ethnic group, leading to inequities in areas such as education, employment, healthcare, and housing. In testing and measurement, it refers to contamination or deficiency in instruments that disproportionately affect scores for different ethnic groups. Researchers aim to create culture-fair tests that are not biased against any specific group (Akbar 2021, 11).
 - White privilege refers to the unearned power and advantages afforded to white people based on their social status rather than their individual merit. It grants them protection from the consequences of racism and benefits from systemic racism. White privilege can manifest as rights, benefits, social comforts, opportunities, or the ability to define what is considered normative or valuable. It is important to note that white privilege is a result of the racial hierarchy in which white people hold dominant positions, and it does not imply that all white individuals actively seek or endorse privilege (Akbar 2021, 13).
 - Racism is a system that structures opportunities and assigns value based on phenotypic properties associated with "race." It ranges from daily interpersonal interactions shaped by race to systemic racialized advantages in areas such as education, housing, and employment. Racism unfairly disadvantages marginalized racial groups, damages their physical and mental health, and advantages individuals from socially and politically dominant racial groups. Ultimately, racism undermines the potential of society as a whole (Akbar 2021, 14).
- Sexual orientation and gender diversity:

- Sexual orientation refers to a person's enduring disposition to experience sexual, affectional, or romantic attractions to individuals of the same or different genders. It encompasses a person's sense of personal and social identity based on these attractions, behaviors expressing them, and membership in a community of others who share similar attractions. It is important to avoid using the term "homosexual" as a substitute for "sexual orientation" (Akbar 2021, 17).
- Gender refers to the socially constructed ideas about the behaviors, actions, and roles associated with a specific sex. Gender identity, on the other hand, is an individual's deeply felt and inherent sense of being a boy, man, male, girl, woman, female, or a nonbinary gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender nonbinary, gender-neutral, agender, gender-fluid). This sense of identity may or may not align with a person's sex assigned at birth, presumed gender based on sex assignment, or primary or secondary sex characteristics (APA, 2015a). Gender identity applies to all individuals and is not limited to transgender or gender-nonbinary individuals. It is important to note that gender identity is distinct from sexual orientation, and the two should not be conflated. For example, a gay transgender man has a masculine gender identity and a gay sexual orientation, while a straight cisgender woman has a feminine gender identity and a straight sexual orientation (Akbar 2021, 15).

The best way to be inclusive towards these 'minorities' is to use gender-inclusive language (everyone or everybody, distinguished guests, folks or folx, friends, humans, individuals, loved ones, person, people, y'all, chair or chairperson, congressperson or member of congress), to respect the person's identified pronouns (Akbar 2021, 16), to avoid outing someone (outing is the deliberate or accidental sharing of another person's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression without their explicit consent).because it is disrespectful and potentially dangerous for LGBTQ+ people, and to avoid referring to their identity as a "lifestyle", as this implies that being LGBTQ+ is a choice (Harvard 2020, 10-11). There also are some expressions that should be avoided (e.g., 'tranny' can be easily replaced with 'transgender person', 'birth sex' can be easily replaced with 'sex assigned at birth', 'transsexual' can be easily replaced with 'trans and gender nonbinary fols or fox') (Akbar 2021, 16).

- Gender minorities: It is important to be cautious of benevolent sexism, which involves the subjective perception of women in positive terms, such as being nurturing, sensible, caring, and morally superior. However, benevolent sexism only applies to women who conform to traditional gender roles and do not challenge men's authority. Benevolent sexism encompasses three components. The first component is Complementary Gender Differentiation, which suggests that women are the better gender but only in ways that align with conventional gender roles. The second component is Heterosexual Intimacy, which assumes that deep affection and personal fulfillment can only be achieved through a romantic relationship (of a man) with a woman. The third component is Protective Paternalism, which pertains to the belief that men should protect, cherish, and provide for women on whom they depend (Harvard 2020, 8).
- Socioeconomic status: Classism refers to the attribution of characteristics of worth and ability based on perceived or actual social class, as well as the attitudes, policies, and practices that perpetuate unequal valuation based on class. Classism can manifest through prejudiced or discriminatory attitudes, language, or behaviors directed toward individuals based on their perceived or actual social class. It can occur in various domains, including interpersonal interactions, education, housing, healthcare, legal assistance, politics, and public policy. It is important to be aware of class privilege, which refers to the unearned advantages, protections, immunities, and access experienced by a select group of individuals who hold special status or power within a society or culture. These advantages are typically conferred based on wealth, occupational prestige, leadership roles, or fame/recognition. Class privilege often contributes to the establishment of perceived and tangible hierarchies within a community, culture, or society, to the detriment of others. When discussing socioeconomic status, it is advisable to avoid terms such as "the poor" or "low-class people" and instead use more neutral and descriptive language, such as "people whose incomes are below the federal poverty threshold" or "people in the lowest income bracket" (Akbar 2021, 17).

Moreover, there also are culturally appropriative, pejorative language, violent language, and language that doesn't say what we mean that should be avoided, for instance:

- **Indian-giver**
The term "Indian-giver" is considered offensive as it originated from misunderstandings about trade customs between Indigenous peoples in the Americas and White settlers.

It is important to avoid using this term. Instead, alternative phrases like "take something back" or "rescind a gift" can be used to convey the intended meaning without perpetuating derogatory stereotypes or promoting cultural insensitivity (Akbar 2021, 18).

- **“Long time no see” or “no can do”**

Expressions and terms that use "broken" English can perpetuate stereotypes and mock nonnative English speakers, particularly targeting Indigenous people and Asians. It is important to be mindful of the impact of such language and choose alternative expressions that are respectful and inclusive. For example, instead of using expressions that mimic "broken" English, consider using alternatives like "It's been a while!" or "Sorry, I can't." These alternatives maintain clear communication without relying on derogatory stereotypes or offensive language (Akbar 2021, 18).

- **Pipeline**

The use of offensive terms that reference historical trauma or socioeconomic conditions related to Indigenous communities should be avoided as it can be triggering and disrespectful. As an alternative, the term "pathway" can be used to convey the concept of transportation or route without perpetuating harmful stereotypes or derogatory language. It is important to be mindful of the impact of our words and to strive for respectful and inclusive language when discussing sensitive topics concerning Indigenous communities (Akbar 2021, 18).

- **Powwow**

Using the term "powwow" inappropriately or out of its cultural context can indeed diminish the significance and cultural roots of the word. To avoid erasure and to show respect for Indigenous cultures, it is recommended to use alternative terms such as "meeting," "party," or "gathering" when referring to a casual gathering or discussion. These alternatives convey the general idea without appropriating or misrepresenting Indigenous traditions and practices. It is important to be mindful of cultural sensitivity and to use language that accurately reflects the intended meaning without perpetuating harmful stereotypes or cultural appropriation (Akbar 2021, 18).

- **Spirit animal**

You are correct that the concept of spirit animals holds significant cultural and spiritual meaning in certain traditions. It is important to respect and honor these beliefs by using alternative language that does not dilute or appropriate the concept. Instead of

equating it with personal preference, suggested alternatives could include phrases such as "favorite animal" or "animal I would most like to be." These alternatives maintain the personal connection to animals while avoiding the misrepresentation or trivialization of the concept of spirit animals. By choosing alternative terms, we can promote cultural understanding and sensitivity while appreciating the diversity of beliefs and practices (Akbar 2021, 18).

- **Tribe**

When possible, it is important to identify Indigenous people by their specific tribes, nations, or communities. This ensures accuracy and respects the diversity and unique identities of different tribal nations. Using catch-all phrases like "Oklahoma Native American Tribe" or "Native American group" can be misleading and erases the individuality of each tribe. Instead, it is recommended to use the actual name of the tribe being referred to.

The term "tribe" historically carried dehumanizing connotations, equating Indigenous people with being "savage" or "primitive." Therefore, it is advised to use alternative terms like "friends," "group," "pals," or "team" depending on the context, to avoid perpetuating racial stereotypes or inadvertently causing offense (Akbar 2021, 18).

- **“Sold down the river”**

This expression has its roots in the historical practice of selling enslaved people as a form of punishment, which involved separating them from their families and loved ones. Using a term like "betrayed" as an alternative can capture the essence of the situation without perpetuating the harm and dehumanization associated with the original expression (Akbar 2021, 18).

- **“To get gypped”**

The term "gypped" is derived from the racial stereotype that unfairly portrays Romani people as swindlers. To avoid perpetuating this harmful stereotype, a suggested alternative could be "to get ripped off," which conveys the idea of being deceived or cheated without relying on derogatory language or stereotypes (Akbar 2021, 19).

- **“To get Jewed”**

The term "Jewed" is deeply offensive and rooted in anti-Semitic stereotypes. It is important to refrain from using language that perpetuates harmful stereotypes or promotes discrimination. A suggested alternative to convey the idea of negotiating or bargaining could be "to get haggled down." This alternative phrase avoids any

association with a specific ethnic or religious group and focuses solely on the act of negotiating (Akbar 2021, 19).

- **Killing it**

There are alternative expressions to acknowledge someone's success without using a phrase that alludes to violence. Consider using positive and encouraging words such as "great job!" or "awesome!" These alternatives effectively convey praise and admiration without invoking harmful or inappropriate imagery (Akbar 2021, 19).

- **Take a shot at, take your best shot pull the trigger take a stab at**

These expressions utilize unnecessary imagery of causing harm to others or something. Instead, a suggested alternative is to encourage someone to "give it a go" or "try." These alternatives emphasize the importance of attempting something without invoking negative or violent connotations (Akbar 2021, 19).

- **Go off the reservation**

This expression carries a troubling past associated with the forceful displacement of Indigenous communities from their lands and the possible repercussions for individuals who chose to leave the reservation. A suggested alternative is to use phrases like "disagree with the group" or "defect from the group" to convey a similar meaning without evoking the historical harm and negative implications associated with the original phrase (Akbar 2021, 19).

- **Committed suicide, failed/successful suicide, completed suicide**

These verbs present suicide in a manner that suggests it as a criminal act (committed), or an accomplishment (fail, successful, completed), which introduces a judgmental tone towards individuals experiencing suicidality. A suggested alternative is to use phrases like "died by suicide" or "suicided" to describe the act, which maintains a more neutral and compassionate approach towards the topic (Akbar 2021, 19).

- **Child prostitute, sex with an underage person, nonconsensual sex**

Engaging in sexual activity with someone without their consent constitutes rape, and it is crucial to address this behavior directly. A suggested alternative is to use terms like "child who has been trafficked," "child who has been raped," or simply "rape" to accurately describe these serious and harmful incidents (Akbar 2021, 19).

What brings me and likeminded people hope are social justice movements. These movements aim for the complete and equal involvement of all groups within a society that is collaboratively designed to fulfill their requirements. Social justice encompasses a vision of a society where the allocation of resources is fair, and every member feels physically and psychologically protected and stable (Harvard 2020, 21). Here are some of the most famous social justice movements:

- **Black Lives Matter**

Black Lives Matter is a human rights movement that was co-founded by Patrisse Khan-Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi. The movement advocates against violence and systemic racism that targets Black individuals. It originated with the introduction of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the tragic shooting death of Trayvon Martin, an African-American teenager, in February 2012 (Harvard 2020, 20).

- **DACA**

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).is a program that was initiated by former President Obama in June 2012. It aimed to provide relief to qualifying undocumented immigrants by deferring any action from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).to remove them, as well as granting them the opportunity to obtain renewable work authorization. However, on September 5, 2017, the DHS issued a memorandum outlining the rescission and gradual phase-out of the DACA program. In early 2018, federal courts in California and New York issued injunctions against the rescission of DACA, leading U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to establish a process for resuming DACA renewals. On November 12, 2019, the Supreme Court deliberated on whether the Trump administration could terminate the DACA program. Finally, on June 18, 2020, the Supreme Court blocked the Trump administration's efforts to end Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Some individuals use terms such as "undocumented" or "dacamented" to describe their immigration status (Harvard 2020, 20).

- **Health at Every Size**

HAES, which stands for Health at Every Size, is a social and health promotion movement that seeks to combat social stigma related to weight, size, and shape. It promotes the idea of body positivity and focuses on health outcomes, as well as promoting healthy eating and physical activity for overall well-being rather than solely focusing on weight management (Harvard 2020, 22).

- **Me Too Movement**

The 'me too' movement, established by Tarana Burke in 2006, aims to provide support and healing for survivors of sexual violence, with a particular focus on Black women, girls, and other young women of color from economically disadvantaged communities. Through the use of the viral #metoo hashtag, the movement quickly sparked a crucial discussion about sexual violence on a national scale in just a few months. Originally rooted in local grassroots efforts, it has now grown to encompass a global community of survivors from diverse backgrounds, helping to reduce the stigma surrounding the experience of surviving by shedding light on the widespread occurrence and profound impact of sexual violence worldwide (Harvard 2020, 20).

Finally, it's important to always remember Language is inherently political as it mirrors and perpetuates social relationships along with their underlying power structures, ideologies, beliefs, and values. Words possess considerable influence and can either uphold or challenge existing inequalities within society (Minikel-Lacocque 2013, 454, 456). Which is why the first thing we need to do to avoid microaggressions is to be aware of the language that we are using. If each of us were to engage in acts of microaffirmations, which encompass small acts of inclusion, compassion, and kindness, such as attentive listening, offering comfort and support, being an ally, and actively appreciating the contributions and presence of everyone, it would likely contribute to reducing various issues. It is especially beneficial for individuals with greater power or seniority to exemplify affirming behavior as a way to lead by example and promote a more positive environment (Harvard 2020, 4). Nevertheless, it may happen that you make a mistake. We all do. Nonetheless, when you do, it is crucial to take responsibility for your mistakes, acknowledge them, and use them as an opportunity for personal growth and learning (Nadal 2014, 75). The choice of continuing to stand in political resistance with the oppressed – ready to offer different perspectives on seeing, theorizing, making culture – towards “that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to the pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible” (hooks 2015, 223) is crucial. Our understanding of cultural practices and our ability to imagine novel, alternative, and oppositional forms of artistic expression are profoundly influenced and guided by it. Moreover, it influences the manner in which we discuss these matters and the specific words and phrases we select to articulate our thoughts. “Language is also a place of struggle” (hooks 2015, 223).

Once again, an example of language awareness involves being mindful of the terms we use that may exclude or overlook certain individuals, such as non-binary people, by relying on masculine language or a strict gender binary. To address this, when referring to a generic or hypothetical person where gender is not relevant, it is important to avoid gendered pronouns like "he" or "she" or gendered pronoun combinations like "he or she," as these assume a specific gender. Instead, the singular "they" can be used as a gender-inclusive pronoun. When referring to a specific person, it is crucial to use their preferred pronouns, which may include "he," "she," "they," "ze," "xe," or others. Rather than making assumptions, it is recommended to ask individuals for their pronouns. Additionally, it is advised to avoid gendered nouns when describing people who can be of any gender. For example, instead of using terms like "you guys," "ladies and gentlemen," "policeman," "chairman," "congressman," or "freshman," gender-inclusive alternatives can be used. Examples include "everyone," "folks," "folx," "friends," "loved ones," or "y'all" as inclusive alternatives. Similarly, gender-neutral terms like "police officer," "chair" or "chairperson," "congressperson" or "member of congress," and "first-year student" can be used to promote inclusivity (Akbar 2021, 15).

The first step that could be taken towards building a more improved society could be instilling lessons of diversity and equality in children from a young age, as we possess the ability to shape them into individuals who embrace open-mindedness as adults. It is crucial to educate children on the importance of respecting one another rather than fostering fear or prejudice (Nadal 2014, 75). Therefore, a good solution could be creating programs at schools/campuses that address microaggression could help in many ways: raising awareness, offering common language to talk about racism/sexism/heterosexism, providing a support system to empower students to contest microaggressions when they occur (Minikel-Lacocque 2013, 461).

CONCLUSION

The main goal of this thesis was to shed some light on microaggressions, mostly so that we can learn how to identify and avoid them and how to respond to them. In the first chapter, I gave a definition of the word *microaggression*, which represents “the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership” (Sue 2010, 1) – and the different ways in which it can be manifested (i.e., microassaults, microinvalidations, microinsults), focusing on some of its variables as well. I discussed the difference between blame and responsibility, assessing that they don’t go hand in hand. One is always responsible for one’s actions, yet it doesn’t automatically mean that one is to blame. Sometimes there are some factors, for example genuine ignorance and unconscious acts, that influence the way one thinks and acts. However, if one is confronted and educated about something that can be considered offensive and doesn’t change the way one acts after this encounter, then one can be considered at fault. Furthermore, I addressed the dichotomy between oppressor and victim, explaining how and why it is appropriate to use such terminology. Last, I talked about the effects that microaggressions have both on the victims (these effects can be seen in their standards of living and their well-being – i.e., they do not have the same opportunity in life as the non-victims and they often develop mental health issues) and on the oppressors (microaggressions have cognitive, affective, behavioral, spiritual and moral costs for the perpetrators).

From the first chapter, it was already clear that microaggressions are, for some people, part of their everyday life. Through the use of concrete examples, in the second chapter I delved into racial, gender, and LGBTQ+ microaggressions. Furthermore, in this chapter, I also included a comparison between Italian anti-Southernism and (American) racism – I explained the phenomenon of Italian anti-Southernism and I gave and analyzed some examples of said form of discrimination – and discussed the ways in which some factors, such as *the male gaze*, might affect and influence our lives and our perceptions of the woman body in particular. Moreover, at the end of this chapter, I talked about the way microaggressions can intertwine with each other, leading to the phenomenon of intersectionality, which is, indeed, the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities (Cho, Crenshaw, McCall 2013, 788)

Finally, in the last chapter I addressed the importance of (media, but also general and broad) representation and the way it impacts everyone. As media is consumed by different people, I would argue that not only is it important to give a close-enough-to-real representation, but it is important to use media to educate. We can use the media to our advantage, because through its exploitation we can see and learn different cultures, different languages, different realities. In addition, I also decided to include some guidance on how to respond to microaggressions (an assertive way will help you establish your position in a less aggressive manner, so that you can explain why something might be offensive without using insulting language, e.g. 'You're a racist/sexist/heterosexist'), some guidelines to learn how to avoid perpetuating them and some of the most mainstream social movements (Black Lives Matter, DACA, Health at Every Size, Me Too Movement).

Although, as stated different times in this thesis, everyone can be subjected to microaggressions, it is important to remember the different power-dynamics that are at play. It's not a coincidence that in the microaggression field research is mostly focused on minorities (whether they are racial, gender, LGBTQ+, religious, or other minorities). The fear of not belonging plus the pressure of everyday slight insults can lead to horrifying conclusions. Thus, it's necessary that we learn to pay attention at all times to the language we use.

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