

“YOU DON’T BELONG HERE”: EXPLORING HOW ENVIRONMENTAL
MICROAGGRESSIONS SHAPE ROMANTIC EXPECTATIONS THROUGH PHOTOSTORY

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE

TEXAS WOMAN’S UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, FAMILY STUDIES AND COUNSELING

COLLEGE OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

BY

SABRA JOHNSON, M.S.

DENTON, TEXAS

MAY 2022

Copyright © 2022 Sabra Johnson

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my academic and professional colleagues, professors, patients, and clients who helped me discover the importance and existence of this research gap. My dissertation committee: Drs. Norton, Armstrong and most importantly Dr. Dutton who shaped and defended this research by my side. Lastly, I would like to thank the women who made this study possible by their participation, candor, and vulnerability.

ABSTRACT

SABRA JOHNSON

“YOU DON’T BELONG HERE”: EXPLORING HOW ENVIRONMENTAL MICROAGGRESSIONS SHAPE ROMANTIC EXPECTATIONS THROUGH PHOTOSTORY

MAY 2022

This research project engaged student members of the community through the use of PhotoStory. A method of creating qualitative research, PhotoStory includes the participation of research subjects as collectors, analyzers, and creators of data. Sample members delve into the research process as co-researchers through taking pictures of the research phenomena as defined by them and narrating the photo. PhotoStory as a process allows individual sample members and whole communities to tell their own stories and express what is meaningful to them. The interviews allow the principal researcher to see through the eyes of the student sample members and begin to understand the phenomena as it is experienced by the students themselves. Environmental microaggressions are defined in the microaggression literature but claim meaning beyond the scholarly interpretations. This project explored how environmental microaggressions were interpreted and experienced by the student co-researchers through their photo stories. Five major themes were found during the analysis of the interviews and photo stories. Previous research findings in regards to microaggressions and their effects were supported by the themes described in this study. Moreover, this study adds to the current literature surrounding microaggressions and minority stress theories by centering romantic relationship expectations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	ix
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Need for the Study	4
Purpose of the Study	4
Significance of the Study	5
Research Questions	6
Definitions of Terms	7
Research Design.....	8
Assumptions and Limitations	8
Assumptions.....	8
Methodology Assumptions	9
Theoretical Assumptions	9
Delimitations.....	10
Summary	10
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Theoretical Orientation for the Study	12
Microaggression Literature	12

Microaggression Taxonomy	20
Summary	25
III. METHODOLOGY	27
Introduction to Methodology	27
Purpose of the Study	27
Research Questions	28
Research Design.....	29
Target Population and Sample	30
Population	30
Sample.....	30
Procedures	31
Participant Selection	31
Protection of Participants	34
Data Collection	35
Data Analysis	38
Trustworthiness.....	40
Instruments and Data Sources.....	41
Role of Researcher	41
Interview Questions	42
Ethical Considerations	42
Summary	43
IV. RESULTS	44
The Study and the Researcher.....	44

Description of the Sample.....	45
Protection of Sample.....	46
Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis	46
Findings.....	48
First Cycle Coding	48
Second Cycle Coding.....	49
Theme 1	50
Theme 2	54
Theme 3	59
Theme 4	64
Theme 5	70
Summary	74
V. DISCUSSION	76
Discussion of the Results	76
MEES Theory (Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress).....	86
Limitations	87
Strengths	87
Implications.....	88
Clinicians	88
University Administrators.....	89
Local Community Leaders & Organizers	91
Communities of Color.....	92
Recommendations for Further Research.....	92

Conclusions Based on the Results	96
Reflection	96
REFERENCES	98
APPENDICES	
A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	104
B. ETHICAL PHOTO TAKING GUIDELINES	105
C. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE	106
D. HOW TO CREATE A PHOTOSTORY	108
E. RECRUITMENT FLIER.....	105
F. INFORMED CONSENT	110
G. PHOTO RELEASE FORM	116
H. PARTICIPANT PHOTOS	117

LIST OF TABLES

1. Sample descriptions	45
2. Research questions	72

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Data collection timeline	34
2. Lingerie store display	52
3. Store window display.....	53
4. "They all look the same"	55
5. "White Jesus"	56
6. "White male US presidents and Obama"	57
7. "Love isn't for me"	60
8. "It's always the same light skinned girls"	61
9. "Natural style"	62
10. "Nice slave owner"	64
11. White nationalism symbol	65
12. Honoring white nationalism	66
13. "Drug dog"	67
14. "Black girl on Tinder"	69
15. "One size doesn't fit all"	70
16. "No fat people allowed"	71
17. "Black girl on Tinder"	112
18. The only one	113
19. "trump sticker"	114
20. "Mexican AM doll"	115
21. "What's My Blood Pressure?"	116
22. "Bad Hair"	117
23. "Latinos overrepresented in service jobs"	118
24. Blue lives don't exist	119
25. Single story	120
26. "One size doesn't fit all"	121
27. "It's always the same light skinned girls"	122
28. "Drug dog"	123
29. Stereotypes	124
30. "Top nascar drivers"	125
31. "White city hall"	126
32. "Board of trustees"	127
33. "Natural style"	128
34. "Lynchburg drive"	129
35. Historical holiday	130
36. "Christianity is the norm"	131
37. Public park	132
38. "Nice slave owner"	133
39. Slurs	134
40. Honoring white nationalism	135
41. "White male US presidents and Obama"	136

42. “AM girl doll”	137
43. “White Jesus”	138
44. Appropriation	139
45. “They all look the same”	140
46. “No fat people allowed”	141
47. White nationalism symbol	142
48. “White American dolls”	143
49. Triggering humor	144
50. Lingerie store display	145
51. Store display window	146
52. Narrow beauty representations	147
53. “Love isn’t for me”	148
54. “Top news anchors when I was growing up”	149
55. Figure 55 “White tour de France”	150
56. “White soccer”	151
57. Mall store window display	152

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Environmental microaggressions take place in private and public settings including but not limited to universities, neighborhoods, workplaces, shopping centers, television, movies, and literature. Romantic relationship expectations occur psychologically and are held regardless of romantic relationship status, one need not be in a romantic relationship to have expectations of romantic relationships. However, when an individual is within the context of a romantic partnership, expectations are displayed in many ways including relationship maintenance behaviors (Weiser & Weigel, 2016). Environmental microaggressions affect everyone and are detrimental to societies that wish to create equitable systems, rather than hierarchical systems of power (Sue et al., 2007). Individuals and groups can push already marginalized groups farther from the center of their societies through environmental microaggressions. Microaggressions and the societies that create microaggressions prove harmful to the individuals and communities, these aggressions target (Carroll, 1998). Microaggressions take the place of blatant and overtly discriminatory behaviors and systems. Studies highlighting the harm to people of color and societies overall is well documented in the microaggression and everyday discrimination literature; especially in Sue's taxonomy of microaggressions. Many of those microaggression studies use qualitative as well as quantitative methodologies. Romantic relationship expectation studies explore marital attitudes, romantic maintenance behaviors, and how relationship education can affect romantic expectations.

Yet, the literature on romantic relationship expectations and microaggression have yet to cross paths. As a family scientist and MFT (marriage and family therapist), I understand how experiencing microaggressions can result in maladaptive behaviors and coping in my clients. In addition, I understand that healthy romantic relationship expectations can lead to healthy romantic relationships. However, I did not yet understand how experiencing microaggressions regularly could affect those expectations which in turn relate to the health of a romantic relationship. This study used Sue's taxonomy of microaggressions as a theoretical framework to define and understand microaggressions. Also, I engaged the theory of mundane environmental stress (MEES) to explore a possible relationship between environmental microaggressions and romantic relationship expectations. Much of the current microaggression research builds on the taxonomy created by Sue et al. (2007) to classify racial and ethnic microaggressions. Lewis and Neville (2015) modified Sue's taxonomy to address microaggressions often directed at Black women in the United States irrespective of the ethnicities and/or cultures the Black women have membership with. Moreover, researchers have also adapted Sue's updated taxonomy to include more identities into their own microaggression classifications in work regarding microaggressions often directed at professional athletes who are women (Kaskan & Ho, 2016).

Moreover, even when Sue's taxonomy is not directly being used or modified, this taxonomy contributes to future microaggression literature (Salim et al., 2019). Sue's taxonomy narrows microaggressions into three broad categories of microassaults, microinvalidations, and microinsults (Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Later, the classifications narrow to include 13 categories: Alien in One's Own Land, Ascription of Intelligence, Color Blindness, Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status, Use of Sexist/Heterosexist Language, Denial of Individual Racism/Sexism/Heterosexism, Myth of Meritocracy, Pathologizing Cultural

Values/Communication Styles, Second-Class Citizen, Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping, Sexual Objectification, Assumption of Abnormality, and Environmental.

Sue's taxonomy is salient in the essential writings on microaggressions. Also, researchers have used the categories from this taxonomy to develop measures that are reliable and valid through a quantitative lens. Moreover, much of the early microaggression research came out of qualitative interviews with participants as well as literature reviews of aversive racism (Nadal, 2011; Sue et al., 2007). Yet, other ways of framing the harm attributed to microaggressions in the microaggression literature do exist. One such theory is MEES (Carroll, 1998). MEES focuses on Black Americans as the descendants of violent, deeply embedded, and omnipresent white supremacy for centuries in the United States. Carroll (1998) asserted that living in this environment for generations has led to the development of MEES and its subsequent psychological harm.

According to MEES, Black American identity itself is associated with badness, pathology, and criminality (Carroll, 1998). Therefore, individuals with membership within this ethnicity lend themselves to great amounts of stress. Although MEES centers on the racialized and politicized experiences of a single ethnic group, it is a theory of minority stress (Carroll, 1998). The inclusion of more identities may help explain how microaggressions inform the experiences of more identity groups as well. In addition, theories on stress and role strain exist yet fail to capture the unique experiences of POC (people of color). MEES asserts, stress experienced by POC is simultaneously extreme and mundane (Carroll, 1998). The burdens are extreme, and the daily stressors are mundane. Racially motivated incidents may occur at various points and are expected.

Also, MEES theory provides the origin story of many forms of racial and ethnic microaggressions. MEES helps explain that it is not simply the presence of microaggressions alone that causes harm to POC. It is the meaning attributed to those microaggressions by POC. Also, meaning affects the emotional and physical experiences of POC as well. Therefore, a theory that helps explain how the harm of experiencing microaggressions informs romantic expectations may serve as an appropriate tool to explore how they relate to one another. MEES addresses the stress and toll that microaggressions can take on POC. I sought to learn how the weight of microaggressions informed the romantic expectations of POC.

Need for the Study

Romantic relational expectations and various forms of microaggressions are explored separately throughout research literature (Clark et al., 2015; Ong et al., 2013; Riggio et al., 2013; Weiser & Weigel, 2016). However, the point of intersection between romantic expectations and microaggressions has not been explored, especially in relation to environmental microaggressions. The absence of future directions in current research, that suggest exploration of a connection between microaggressions, and romantic relational expectations illustrates the gap of this particular intersection in experience.

Purpose of the Study

The need for this study was addressed through the PhotoStory research project as I learned how environmental microaggressions shape romantic expectations. I explored the meaning sample members made of environmental microaggressions. Also, through collecting photo, interview, and written narrative data, I provided future researchers with snapshots of the phenomena within communities. I shared definitions of the phenomena according to the sample and visual data that allowed the sample to show the study audience what the sample saw.

The real-life examples of environmental microaggressions provided by sample members could help readers examine how environmental microaggressions are experienced by people of color. Moreover, the written narratives and interviews clarify how the environmental microaggressions captured by photo, shape expectations of romantic relationships.

Significance of the Study

Romantic relationship expectations taught to clinicians as a way to buffer the effects of microaggressions and other expressions of dominant cultural supremacy for their clients could increase the number of interventions available to clinicians. Potential clients can find relief from participating in psychotherapy with clinicians who possess an understanding of how microaggressions present themselves. Moreover, this will allow validation and supportive reflection that is much needed for people of color who endure microaggressions as a part of their daily lived experiences (Sue et al., 2007). Researchers in MFT, counseling, psychology, and clinical social work can explore, develop, implement, and test interventions and curricula that increase healthy romantic relationship expectations in this specific population. As mental health professionals develop effective resources, campus mental health clinics, clinicians, and students themselves can implement said resources to improve their romantic relationship expectations. Also, romantic relationship expectations can be taught to clinicians in training (supervisees) as a way to buffer the effects of microaggressions and other expressions of white supremacy with their clients. Clinicians licensed as supervisors can supplement the skillsets of new mental health professionals and ensure that these new professionals are better equipped to address the needs of clients of color.

Moreover, clinicians and researchers can engage in training as instructors and students to learn how to not microaggress their clients. In this way, professionals can avoid adding to the daily indignities experienced by individuals who are members of marginalized communities. Also important is learning how to move forward after microaggressing a client and rebuilding the therapeutic alliance. If the stigma of needing and seeking mental health care is to be reduced in communities of color, it is critical that mental health professionals themselves are prepared to treat and serve clients of color. This includes the ability to meet the unique challenges faced by clients of color. Also, collecting data through PhotoStory provided visual data that could supplement Sue's taxonomy and provide a visual interpretation of how MEES occurs in everyday life for people of color.

Research Questions

1. What meaning do POC (people of color) make of the racial and/or ethnic environmental microaggressions in their school, community, and home environments?
2. How do the perceptions POC have of racial and/or ethnic environmental microaggressions shape their romantic relationship expectations?
3. What meaning do POC make of the gender and sexuality environmental microaggressions in their school, community, and home environments?
4. How do the perceptions POC have of gender and sexuality environmental microaggressions shape their romantic relationship expectations?

Definitions of Terms

Environmental microaggression- macro-level message that includes unwelcoming environments, where people of marginalized communities are absent and unwanted. This includes stores, where products are not sold with images of individuals from marginalized communities at all or when products with representation are available, the images are offensive. Environmental microaggressions also occur when products for members of marginalized communities are not available or carried by many stores, which make said products inaccessible. Environmental microaggressions tell members of marginalized communities that they do not belong and/or do not exist. Predominantly white spaces and media are considered environmental microaggressions. This includes a lack of people of color in professional positions as university administrators, faculty, and staff as well as curriculum that centers dominant epistemologies. The same can be said of government, workplaces, and corporations where Whites are in positions of power, and people of color routinely fill lower-paid, lower-status positions.

Thus, religious and spiritual settings that mainly feature White leadership, cultural traditions, and White male god depictions perpetuate microaggressions on a spiritual level. Environmental microaggressions are systemic, simultaneously privilege, and center whiteness, while treating people of color as outsiders. (Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Person of color- A person who racially defines themselves as Asian, Pacific Islander, First Nation, Indigenous American, Native American, and/or Black (of any ethnicities or combinations). Also, an individual who primarily identifies themselves ethnically (Latinx, Igbo, Kurdish, etc.) but not racially White.

Research Design

I utilized a qualitative methodology, phenomenological approach, and PhotoStory data collection methods. Qualitative methods allow sample members to participate in shaping the research at various levels and allow researchers to reflect throughout the research process. A study on a previously unexplored phenomena requires both researcher reflection, examination of biases and sample participation. Phenomenology insists on seeing the phenomena through the eyes of the population and allowing the sample members to create their own meanings of the phenomena. Also, phenomenology asserts that the sample members have the power to answer the research questions given their lived knowledge of the phenomena. PhotoStory encourages the sample to record their answers to the research questions through the act of taking photos in their communities of the phenomena as they see it (Keremane & McKay, 2011).

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions and worldviews exist in all people, therefore all researchers have them as well. Perhaps what is more important than denying or limiting influence from such sources of knowledge is to acknowledge my assumptions and worldview. Also, qualitative research encourages researchers to regularly bracket their experiences throughout the research process. Moreover, as a doctoral level researcher, I have access to peer-reviewed, published research literature that allows me to continuously develop well-informed views on many subjects. Ultimately, the process of reviewing current and less current scholarly literature enabled me to challenge many of my previously held views. I believe that healthy romantic relationship expectations may buffer some of the harm created by microaggressive experiences.

Thus, I have a desire to facilitate healthy romantic relationship expectations in people of color to increase their overall sense of joy, confidence, and satisfaction within their communities and the larger society.

Methodology Assumptions

Phenomenology assumes that the essential nature of a phenomena can be ascertained from those who live the phenomena (Davidsen, 2013). Such an approach believes in the knowledge of community members and participants. Also, phenomenology allows the participants to provide the descriptions of the phenomena as well as their own interpretations. Moreover, in phenomenology participants establish their own criteria for what makes the phenomena meaningful. Qualitative research assumes that individuals and communities understand their lives in ways that go beyond what can be observed by a researcher (Davidsen, 2013). Therefore, to gain a more in-depth understanding of what participants experience, qualitative researchers may also experience life alongside the members of communities that participate in such research. This in-action study of simultaneously humdrum and complex human interactions and meaning-making occurs in real-time (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015).

Theoretical Assumptions

Sue's taxonomy assumes that microaggressions exist, and there are various types of microaggressions. This theory also assumes that individuals and groups with membership in marginalized groups have experienced microaggressions at some point in their lives, although how many microaggressions and what kinds are not assumed by this taxonomy. Also, this theory asserts that microaggressions are harmful in a myriad of ways and can result in psychological and physical challenges (Sue et al., 2007). MEES describes the deeply embedded and widespread nature of white supremacy in the United States.

Moreover, explained in the theory of MEES is how racial and ethnic microaggressions have continued to be so pervasive and normalized in U.S. society. Thus, MEES assumes the history of microaggressions, how they flourish, and their nature rooted in systems of inequity.

Delimitations

I limited the study to individuals currently residing in the United States who could communicate verbally in English. Also, the sample racially defined themselves as Asian, Pacific Islander, First Nations/Native American, and/or Black (of any ethnicities or combinations). Potential sample members who primarily identified themselves ethnically (Latinx, Igbo, Kurdish, etc.) were also sought out for participation, given that they identified as people of color and not racially White. Many definitions were provided in the demographic questionnaire to encourage the sample to choose how they identified (see Appendix C). Additionally, the sample consisted of adults over the age of 18. Also, some sample members may have worked with clinicians, take medications, and/or use mood-altering substances to manage their experiences (Clark et al., 2015). This is also expected and did not exclude any individuals from possible participation in the study.

Summary

Studies highlighting the harm to people of color and societies overall are well documented in the microaggression and everyday discrimination literature. Yet, romantic relationship expectation literature and microaggression have yet to cross paths. This study used Sue's taxonomy of microaggressions as a theoretical framework to define and understand microaggressions. Also, I engaged the theory of MEES to explore a possible relationship between environmental microaggressions and romantic relationship expectations.

The need for this study was addressed through the PhotoStory research project as I learned how environmental microaggressions shape romantic expectations. Phenomenology assumes that the essential nature of a phenomena can be ascertained from those who live the phenomena (Creswell, 2013). I explored the meanings sample members made of environmental microaggressions by collecting sample photo stories and exploring sample interpretations via interview. I believe that healthy romantic relationship expectations can be taught to clinicians as a way to buffer the effects of microaggressions and other expressions of dominant cultural supremacy.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review details previous literature that delves into the microaggression research. This review highlights the ways in which microaggressions impact the lives of people of color and inform the ways people of color move through the world.

Theoretical Orientation for the Study

I used Sue's taxonomy of microaggressions to define and identify various types of microaggressions. Additionally, I integrated MEES. MEES explains how microaggressions harm people of color, specifically Black Americans. Also, MEES explores how daily exposure to an extremely stressful environment affects individuals in marginalized social positions. This theory explores the widespread and deeply embedded nature of systemic racism operating in the United States, which although normal and mundane, is psychologically and physically burdensome. Moreover, MEES helps us understand how systemic racism is evident in many environmental microaggressions.

Microaggression Literature

Although researchers have not yet begun to study microaggressions in relation to their direct effects on romantic relationship expectations, many researchers have explored the effects of microaggressions on psychological/mental health and physical health (Clark et al., 2015; Keith et al., 2017; Ong et al., 2013; Polanco-Roman et al., 2019), which influence romantic relationship expectations.

Commonly referred to as, “small murders and slow death by one thousand cuts as opposed to grand executions” (Sue, 2010, p. 66) before finally being coined microaggressions by a psychiatrist named Chester Pierce, racial microaggressions are defined as, “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Pierce, 1970; Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Many studies use the term, “racial/ethnic discrimination” instead of microaggressions. Also, many researchers use the terms, “everyday discrimination” and “everyday racism” interchangeably (Clark et al., 2015; Keith et al., 2017). Later, researchers began to include numerous identities in addition to race that are marginalized by the wider U.S. society in the microaggression research field including gender, sexual orientation, and more (Salim et al., 2019). These contributions to the literature acknowledge the existence of multiple marginalized identities and the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1990; Sue 2010; Sue et al., 2007; Willis, 2015). The construct of microaggressions has come a long way. These small cuts can and in many people of color do lead to increased physiological tension, heart problems, sleep disturbances, digestive issues, and other health difficulties (Smith et al., 2011).

Studies exploring microaggressions usually center the experiences of individuals who are members of marginalized communities (Lewis & Neville, 2015; Salim et al., 2019). However, many studies also include people from dominant populations in order to compare their responses with the responses shared by participants from marginalized populations (Clark et al., 2015; Polanco-Roman et al., 2019). One such study explores the connections between racial and/or ethnic discrimination and how this discrimination affects physical and psychological health, especially poor health outcomes in both areas (Polanco-Roman et al., 2019).

Of interest in this study are suicidality, depression, and traumatic stress in two intersecting populations, emerging adults aged 18-29 and individuals who identify as ethnic and/or racial minorities. Previous research shows that suicidality (O’Keefe et al., 2015) depression, and traumatic stress (McLaughlin et al., 2019) are linked to experiences of everyday discrimination in people of color. However, researchers in this study sought to narrow their focus to learn how the regularity of discrimination experienced by each individual respondent related to surges in their frequency of suicidality during the previous 12 months through any traumatic stress and depression they also experienced during that time. In addition, researchers sought to discover what differences if any exist between female and male participants and participants of various racial and ethnic identities. The researchers highlighted the experiences of emerging adults from ages 18-29. Most participants identified as female and ethnically Latina. Each participant completed three scales with questions that measure racial and/or ethnic discrimination, traumatic stress, suicidal ideation, and depressive symptoms (Polanco-Roman et al., 2019).

Female and male respondents both showed statistically significant variations in the degree of depressive symptoms, discrimination, and traumatic stress they each experienced. Women reported experiencing less racial and/or ethnic discrimination than reported by men. However, female participants described higher amounts of depressive symptoms and traumatic stress in comparison to men. Overall, the male respondents reported experiencing greater levels of discrimination, but males shared feeling less traumatic stress and depressive symptomology. Furthermore, individuals who identified racially as Asian or Black indicated significantly greater racial/ethnic discrimination than the participants who identified as White (Polanco-Roman et al., 2019).

The results of this study indicated that when depression and traumatic stress are experienced simultaneously, the combination can assist in explaining the relationship between stress from racial/ethnic discrimination and suicidality, more so for women aged 18-29. Furthermore, the collective occurrences of racial/ethnic discrimination experienced by an individual may lead to a rise in suicidality to the point of escalating the traumatic stress they feel; thus, possibly raising the amount of depression in emerging adults of color, especially women (Polanco-Roman et al., 2019). Also, a study seeking to explore the relationships between experiences of everyday discrimination/microaggressions and physical features/appearance (phenotype) illustrates how microaggressions contribute to compromised mental and physical health (Keith et al., 2017).

Regarding phenotype, special attention is paid to body size and skin tone because of the damaging social messaging surrounding both features in a United States context (Monk, 2014, 2015; Saguy & Gruys, 2010). In particular, this study chose to sample a variety of races and ethnicities; although, African Americans were the sample of greatest interest. The term, “African-American” was not defined in this study. Thus, it may have included individuals who identify as racially Black but come from multiple ethnicities and cultures. A separate label was used to group participants who identified as Black with Caribbean ancestry. The researchers of this study Keith et al. (2017) chose specific measures but a diverse sample to help clarify any possible links between the phenotype one has and the levels of everyday discrimination/microaggressions they experience. Keith et al. (2017) asserted that everyday discrimination contains interactions that occur between individuals that are overt and explicit microassaults as well as subtle microinsults. Overall, characteristics of everyday discrimination include inequitable and disrespectful communications towards another person.

Commonly this behavior is directed towards individuals with membership in minority groups. Although, everyday discrimination can and does occur between individuals with marginalized identities (Sue et al., 2007). These communications are heavily influenced by longstanding and deeply embedded social hierarchies of phenotype such as: body weight/size, gender, skin color, and race (Monk, 2015). Keith et al. (2017) utilized secondary statistical data gathered from the National Survey of American Life: Coping with Stress in the 21st Century but only for participants they categorized as African American. Participants who indicated having Caribbean familial ties were not drawn from this set of data. To collect primary data, the members of this research project asked research participants to complete the 10 item Everyday Discrimination Scale as a method of measuring their daily experiences of discrimination. Participants who were categorized as African American indicated that the shade of their skin highly related to the type and amount of everyday racism others engaged in against them.

This also proved to be true for men with higher body weights but not women. Although much criticism and attention are devoted to the bodies of women in the United States (Kaskan & Ho, 2016). Results from the participants also showed that individuals (categorized as African American) who described themselves as having dark or medium brown skin (out of four shade options provided in the study) experienced more of the interactions in the items labeled as “disrespect or condescension” (Keith et al., 2017). The individuals who described the shade of their skin to be medium or dark brown also reported higher scores on items in the “being treated with less courtesy and respect groups” (Keith et al., 2017). Moreover, participants who considered their skin shade to be dark indicated experiences of all 10 microaggression categories on the 10-item scale. Therefore, respondents with the deepest skin tones shared experiencing the highest degrees of discrimination than any other group in the study.

Furthermore, microaggression research explores the effects of perceived discrimination. Perceived discrimination creates a large degree of elevated stress. The intensity of the elevated stress sourced from perceived discrimination is comparable to other painful life-changing experiences that feature great loss, such as the death of a loved one, losing a job, and divorce (Clark et al., 2015). The primary purpose of this study was to identify the similarities and differences with experiences of everyday discrimination among respondents who identified as Black American and Black Caribbean. Researchers gathered secondary quantitative data from the National Survey of American Life aged 18-65 years. Everyday discrimination was measured by the Everyday discrimination scale (EDS; Williams et al., 1997). Participants who reported more experiences of everyday discrimination also reported higher major depression, generalized anxiety, alcohol, and drug dependencies (Clark et al., 2015). Perceived discrimination had a strong relationship with alcohol and illegal drug use as maladaptive coping strategies to manage the psychological weight of everyday discrimination (Clark, 2014). Moreover, this study showed that the likelihood of a participant qualifying for an illegal substance use or alcohol use disorder was 2 to 2.5 times greater for research participants with experiences that fell under the theme of general discrimination. Out of all participants, regardless of how they ethnically identified, one in six reported mainly experiencing “general discrimination” (Clark et al., 2015).

Moreover, with participants who experienced chronic discrimination, their chances of qualifying for an illegal substance use or alcohol use disorder was four times higher than individuals who did not (Clark et al., 2015). The high occurrence of substance abuse and mood disorders are plausible for individuals who have large amounts of psychological distress to manage. Perceived discrimination is one such psychological stressor. In addition, previous researchers have created and sought to validate other forms of microaggression scales.

Such validation takes place with information gathered from participants who identify as members of communities that are marginalized by oppressive systems of power. The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS) is one such scale (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Based on the taxonomy of racial and ethnic microaggressions developed by Sue et al (2007) the RMAS was designed to measure various aspects of one's microaggression experiences (Torres-Harding, et al., 2012). This includes frequency, how often microaggressions are noticed, experienced, and the psychological distress that a person experiences in connection to the microaggression. Many recruitment methods were included but most important to the current study is the method of briefly attending student group meetings, and especially reaching out to student organizations designed for students of color. Only information coming from individuals who self-identified as people of color was included in this study. The 377 research participants chose from the following researcher created identity categories. One-hundred and fifty (39.8%) participants identified as African American/Black regardless of ethnicity, 149 (39.5%) were Latino regardless of race, 47 (12.5%) identified as multiracial, and 31 (8.2%) identified as Asian American, South Asian, or Middle Eastern.

Most of the participants were women (74.8%) and 24.9% identified as men. One participant did not identify as either female or male. Also, 33 of the 377 participants self-identified as LGBTQ. Furthermore, 48 (12.7%) of the sample were first-generation immigrants (first family generation to move to the U.S.), 110 (29.2%) were second generation, 37 (9.8%) were third generation, eight (2.1%) foreign nationals, and 171 (45.4%) selected none of these. The participant ages were from 18-76 years (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Participants completed survey items online or in person, drawn from Sue's taxonomy (Sue et al., 2007).

Numerous questions on the RMAS are drawn specifically from the microinsult and microinvalidation themes in the taxonomy of microaggressions. Participants completed the Schedule of Racist Events (SRE; Landrine & Klonoff, 1996), which asks questions about recent racist events, lifetime racist events, and appraised life events. The survey responses given by the participants showed differences in experiences and patterns among different racial and ethnic groups. For example, people who identified as Black males said they experienced the criminality theme more than other groups. Similarly, the Foreigner/Not Belonging theme was reported more by individuals ethnically identifying as Latino or racially as Asian (Torres-Harding et al., 2012).

Also, some microaggression themes were selected more often by female participants. For example, women shared that perpetrators of microaggressions sexualized them. Few participants expressed being made subject to ascriptions of intelligence, which is of note specially, from participants who identify racially as Asian or Asian American because of the model minority stereotypes often attributed to them (Ong et al., 2013). Moreover, a study focusing on the physically and psychologically damaging powers of microaggressions on Black American men pointed to MEES to explain the subsequent “racial battle fatigue” (Carroll, 1998; Smith et al., 2011). There were 1,328 Black American men aged 18-29 who participated in this study. Although, many more individuals of various demographic groups participated in a larger telephone interview implemented by the International Communications Research from African American Men Survey (Smith et al., 2011). The purpose of this research was to compare the MEES experiences of Black males with various educational levels and uncover any connections between racial microaggressions and societal problems that increase MEES in Black American males.

The research indicated that racial microaggressions drive up the experience of MEES for Black American men as they obtain higher levels of education. Moreover, societal inequities also greatly affect MEES regardless of education obtained. Lastly, racial microaggressions and societal inequities provide approximately 40% of MEES that is experienced by Black American men who have completed a university degree (Smith et al., 2011). The researchers hypothesized that with higher educational attainment comes more MEES because many workplaces and universities are largely White environments. Thus, there are more opportunities to experience racial microaggressions and social inequity. Also, attempting to cope with high psychological distress can lead to more distress if those attempts to cope are maladaptive (Smith et al., 2011). Moreover, there is a degree of vigilance, psychic energy, and focus that goes along with navigating white supremacy as a person of color.

Microaggression Taxonomy

A rich review of the current literature and personal experiences of real-life individuals led Sue et al. to create a taxonomy of racial microaggressions (Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). The taxonomy created by Sue et al. (2007) started with three large broad themes that encompass 13 smaller categories of racial and ethnic microaggressions. Later, the smaller categories were updated to include more identities such as gender and sexual orientation. The three broad themes are microassaults, microinvalidations, and microinsults. The 13 specific categories are: Alien in One's Own Land, Ascription of Intelligence, Second Class Citizen, Use of Sexist/Heterosexist Language, Criminality Assumption and Assumption of Criminal Status, Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping, Myth of Meritocracy, Color Blindness, Denial of Individual Racism/Sexism/Heterosexism, Sexual Objectification, Pathologizing Cultural Values and Communication Styles, Assumption of Abnormality, and Environmental microaggressions.

Many of these categories share similar messaging from the individuals and groups who perpetuate microaggressions. Also, many of the microaggression categories can be employed simultaneously, just as identities overlap and exist simultaneously. Moreover, this taxonomy is not exhaustive. Yet, it serves as a framework for future microaggression researchers to add their own categories and further the literature in this field. Many microaggressions are subtle. However, microassaults are typically characterized by their explicit nature. This type of microaggression is not hard to detect like the other two broad categories. Microassaults are the intentional and blatant exercises of discrimination. Also known as, “old-fashioned racism” an example is, using racial slurs to describe a person of color (Sue et al., 2007). Expecting blatant and obvious displays of bigotry can contribute to using microinvalidations that invalidate, dismiss, and negate someone’s experience when they share about an experience with a more subtle type of microaggression. Unlike microassaults, microinvalidations are subtle and sometimes hard to describe. However, microinvalidations are dismissive and invalidating of the experiences, perceptions, and perspectives of another person.

For example, “are you sure you weren’t just being too sensitive?” Microinsults, as all other microaggressions can be delivered verbally or non-verbally. They are subtle, insensitive, and demeaning. “How did you get this job?” and “You’re pretty for a Black girl.” These messages contain a scarcity of awareness and sensitivity. Findings by Sue et al. (2007), asserted the insidiousness of subtle, less direct, and obvious forms of microaggressions like microinvalidations and microinsults. These two can be harder to identify; thus, harder to explain to others and ourselves when they occur. Individuals who experience microinvalidations or microinsults may feel unsure over what really happened and lack the confidence to confront it.

To follow is a list definitions and examples of the 13 more specific categories of racial and ethnic microaggressions from Sue et al. (2007) and Sue (2010). Alien in One's Own Land is a message sent often to people of color that assumes they are not from the U.S. or are originally from outside of the United States. "Where are you from?" and "Will you teach me your native language?" Ascription of Intelligence signifies an assumption that people of color are not as smart as White people or that people of color (Asian and Asian American) are effortlessly intelligent. "I bet she's smart because she's Japanese." "I didn't know Black people could be smart. You are a credit to your race." Third on the taxonomy is Color/Gender/Sexual Orientation Blindness. This occurs when people deny someone's phenotype and try to erase their racial and ethnic identities in other ways. The individual engaging in Color/Gender/Sexual Orientation Blindness sees no value in any of those identities, uses it as an excuse not to see systemic oppression; and therefore, do nothing to dismantle it. "I don't see color." "All lives matter." "America is a melting pot."

Criminality/Assumption of Criminal Status implies that people of color are criminals, untrustworthy, and more likely to engage in criminal behavior. Individuals and groups who employ this microaggression may cross the street when they see a person of color, grab their child's hand, or/and follow people of color in stores. They assume people of color do not belong and cannot be trusted. "Denial of Individual Racism," implies that an individual cannot assume racial or ethnicity biases because "My first boyfriend was Asian." "My wife's a woman. I love women!" "Black latinos are the best. My favorite neighbors are Colombian." This denies culpability/claims immunity in systemic and interpersonal white supremacy. Myth of Meritocracy assumes that privileges do not exist for any group, especially not Whites.

Moreover, that people of color are lazy, and looking for special benefits. “Everybody can be successful if they just pull up their bootstraps and work hard.” It ignores systemic inequalities and barriers to opportunities created by those unearned privileges. “The most qualified person will get the job.” Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Styles idealizes White cultural ways of being, values, and communication styles. It desires and pushes for people of color to assimilate into whiteness and not mention their experiences of marginalization or discrimination. “Why are you so loud?” “How come you’re always talking about race?” “Why are you so quiet?” Second-class citizen occurs when Whites are treated better, are given higher quality service, and preferred over people of color. For example, a store associate ignores a customer of color to help a White customer. Also, when an individual denies service to a person of color or assumes a person of color is a service employee instead of a fellow customer. The message conveyed is that people of color are worth less than Whites/in general, do not belong except in subservient roles.

Use of Sexist/Heterosexist Language erases the existence of women and non-masculine genders. This microaggression assumes that male experiences are universal. Additionally, it assumes that female experiences and experiences that are not male are deemed worthless or non-existent. An example is using the pronoun “he” to refer to everyone. Traditional Gender Role Prejudicing and Stereotyping occurs when perpetrators of this microaggression display expectations of traditional (sexist) gender roles and stereotypes. This microaggression holds women to rigid and damaging role expectations based on their gender. “Don’t cut your hair or you’ll look like a lesbian.” “Wow, your husband helps with the kids?!” “Focus more on getting married than your career.”

Sexual Objectification occurs often when microaggressors treat women like objects, commodities to be used and disposed of especially by men. This conveys the message that women's lives and bodies do not belong to them, and sexual consent is unnecessary. It communicates the message that women's values and existences lie in pleasing, satisfying, and otherwise providing pleasure for men. For example, street harassment, when men catcall and yell at a woman as she walks down the street, or when a male stranger grabs a woman by the waist, hips, or back swell to move past her. Assumption of Abnormality assumes a deficit or that people who identify as LGBTQ have something wrong with them. Some examples are referring to something weird or unacceptable as, "gay" or staring at an LGBTQ couple engaged in public displays of affection (kissing, holding hands, etc.). Microaggressors express a belief that individuals who identify or even seem to identify as LGBTQ are weird, abnormal, need to hide their displays of affection, and do not belong.

Environmental microaggressions are macro-level messages that include unwelcoming environments, where people of color are absent and unwanted. Stores, where products are not sold with images of people of color, and/or products sold for people of color, are not available. Environmental microaggressions tell people of color that they do not belong and/or do not exist. Predominantly White spaces and media are considered environmental microaggressions. This includes university administrators, faculty, and staff as well as curriculum that centers White epistemologies. The same can be said of government, workplaces, and corporations where Whites are in positions of power, and people of color routinely fill lower-paid lower status positions. Thus, religious, and spiritual settings that mainly feature White leadership, cultural traditions, and White male god depictions perpetuate microaggressions on a spiritual level.

Environmental microaggressions are systemic, simultaneously privilege, and center whiteness, while treating people of color as outsiders (Sue, Sue et al., 2007).

Summary

The findings of many microaggression researchers point to the existence and severity of the psychological and physical harm people of color experience due to microaggressions (Clark et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2011; Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007; Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Current research also points to the need for more microaggression-focused research that explores how racial microaggressions affect mental health symptoms and disorders as well as psychological constructs like self-esteem (Nadal, 2011; Polanco-Roman et al., 2019). Moreover, the literature also will benefit from learning how microaggressions inform self-worth, self-esteem, mental stability, racial identity, and racial identity development of communities of color and individuals of color (Sue et al., 2007). Also, research with a concentration on how romantic relationship expectations connect to how microaggressions are coped with, addressed, and managed psychologically and behaviorally is a gap in the literature. If healthier romantic relationship expectations in members of marginalized communities buffer the intensity of microaggressions, further research could expand on how those healthy expectations are developed.

Moreover, researchers can begin to create interventions, curricula, and programs that help people of color and members of various marginalized communities to implement healthy romantic relationship expectation building strategies. Such strategies may buffer the harm caused by microaggressions psychologically and physically in their thinking patterns, bodies, workplaces, classrooms, houses of worship and relationships. Furthermore, research can use what is already known about microaggressions to create research projects that seek to predict individual outcomes and responses (Torres-Harding et al., 2012).

Thereby engaging with communities who microaggressors target the most as well as communities that experience the blow of microaggressions most profoundly, researchers can observe what pre-existing factors worsen the influence of microaggressions. Such factors could include multiple contexts at varying levels such as: neighborhood, workplace, community resources, healthy romantic relationships, familial support, individual coping skills, cultural sources of support, and beyond.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction to Methodology

The following study was conducted qualitatively. It focused on generating findings surrounding the experiences of a small sample of individuals, selected from a larger population. As I utilized a qualitative methodology, I spent more time with a smaller number of sample members. This is common in studies that create qualitative results. A small group of people is unlikely to be representative of the population; however, this deep concentration on the lived experiences of people of color allowed me to gather deeper and richer data about the sample. I relied on qualitative methods to develop this study, collect data, and analyze results because I wanted to learn how the sample interpreted and interacted with the phenomena.

The qualitative methodology discussed in the following chapter utilized PhotoStory (Keremane & McKay, 2011) as a data collection method. The sample members took photographs of the phenomena in their communities. Then, sample members created photo stories capturing their distinctive perspectives of the phenomena by writing descriptions of each photo and creating captions. During the interviews, the sample members shared their perceptions of each photo, and their narrative of each photo during interviews with the researcher.

The following section describes the research sample and the larger population that the final sample was selected from.

Purpose of the Study

Authors of microaggression research define and categorize microaggressions, list their consequences for the individuals whom microaggressions are directed toward, and address solutions to reducing how often these aggressions go on unnoticed.

Yet undefined is how these highly influential experiences, that are indicative of greater systems of inequity, affect the romantic relationship expectations of individuals living along the margins of their societies. Many questions connecting these two phenomena have yet to be asked by researchers. I included the sample as participant photographers and allowed them to answer the research questions through their photos and narratives. As a methodology, PhotoStory asks the individuals in the sample to engage in sample led research by photographing the phenomena as they see, live, and understand it. The sample member photographers wrote brief narratives about their pictures, explored what the photos meant to them and what influenced them to take these snapshots. The sample members shared their photo stories, interpretations, and meanings behind each photo story in interviews with me. I sought to understand how environmental microaggressions interacted with romantic relationship expectations in people of color. Also, I strove to focus on possible clinical implications of the findings, and how the research findings could contribute to culturally appropriate and effective treatment for individuals with marginalized racial and/or ethnic identities.

I assert that the research findings can contribute to therapeutic and clinical fields that address racial and gender trauma. Furthermore, relationship education and educators can include guidance from this research that specifically relates to the interaction of environmental microaggressions and romantic relational expectations.

Research Questions

1. What meaning do POC make of the racial and/or ethnic environmental microaggressions in their school, community, and home environments?
2. How do POC perceive how racial and/or ethnic environmental microaggressions shape their romantic relationship expectations?

3. What meaning do POC make of the gender and sexuality environmental microaggressions in their school, community, and home environments?
4. How do POC perceive how these gender and sexuality environmental microaggressions shape their romantic relationship expectations?

Research Design

In this study, I applied a qualitative data collection method that is used often with visual data. As a phenomenological study, the unique meanings and lived experiences of the sample are paramount. Phenomenology views the perspectives of sample members as sources of lived knowledge, held by the sample members (Davidsen, 2013). I asked the sample members to collect raw data in photo form and to create brief narratives about the photos. Then, within interviews with the researcher, each sample member shared their photos and interpretations of each.

PhotoStory allows the sample to interpret the phenomena as they see it and then share these interpretations with the researcher. I provided all possible sample members with a definition of the term environmental microaggression but also encouraged the sample members to identify the phenomena for themselves and take pictures of the phenomena. The use of cameras in qualitative studies allows sample members to express ideas through pictures that they may struggle to express verbally. Also, this innovative approach was an appropriate fit for a student population who had access to camera phones and other digital photo-taking devices. Moreover, because of the importance of individual meaning in phenomenological studies, I assert that the sample members were the most qualified to observe the phenomena inside of their own communities. The individuals in the sample were the experts on the environmental microaggressions present in their daily lives.

Target Population and Sample

Population

Recruitment literature stated that individuals who identify as people of color were desired as the sample for a research project about romantic relationship expectations and environmental microaggressions. Yet, people of color themselves come from varied backgrounds and represent distinctive sub-populations. Therefore, I kept the definition broad to allow greater participation from the numerous demographics of people reflected in the term, “person of color.”

Moreover, individuals of color represent many identities unrelated to race and ethnicity such as gender identity and sexual orientation. Also, individuals who microaggress do so because of their views on one’s gender identity and race or nationality and race. Therefore, it is understood that like human identity, microaggressions can be complex. So, rather than narrowing my focus to a particular group of people located within the population “people of color,” I asserted that sample diversity could lead to the exploration of future research questions. Such research questions may not come up in a more homogenous sample. Also, as an introductory study, my inclusion of a diverse sample could create a foundation of data for future research with a focus on less varied samples of people of color.

Sample

As a purposive criterion sample, my population focused on people of color who had lived in the U.S. for at least 5 years. The sample currently resided in the United States and racially defined themselves as Asian, Pacific Islander, First Nations/Native American, and/or Black (of any ethnicities or combinations). Potential sample members who primarily identified themselves ethnically (Latina/o/x, Igbo, Kurdish, etc.) were also sought out for participation, given that they identified as people of color and not racially White.

I provided many definitions to encourage the sample to choose how they identified. I screened individuals who identified themselves as potential sample members to ensure that they identified as a person of color, could communicate verbally in English, had lived in the United States for a minimum of 5 years, and were above the age of 18. I anticipated that including all adults over the age of 18 would add a richness of perspectives to the sample. Moreover, using a criterion included sample members who had a 5-year minimum of experience with the phenomena in the United States. Also, it was reasonable to expect some amount of mental illness such as depression, and anxiety in the sample, as experiencing microaggressions contributes to such mental health outcomes (Polanco-Roman et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2011). Moreover, some sample members may have been working with clinicians, taking medications, and/or using mood-altering substances to manage their experiences (Clark et al., 2015). This was also expected and did not exclude any individuals from possible participation in the study. A total of seven participants contributed to this research study by creating photo stories and engaging in recorded interviews with the principal researcher. All final participants were currently enrolled students at a university, located in north Texas; each participant was recruited via a student email listserv, accessible only to current students. Student names have been changed to protect their identities.

Procedures

Participant Selection

I was most interested in the experiences and interpretations of microaggressions held by people of color. Therefore, I reached out to organizations that support people of color in some capacity by phone or e-mail.

I searched online for publicly available contact information of such organizations. Also, organizations specifically designed to meet some of the needs that people of color were appropriate sources of recruitment. Moreover, gatekeepers of the organizations may have acted as sources of information. As gatekeepers and possibly members of racially and/or ethnically marginalized groups, individuals who serve in this capacity could have led me towards sample members. Also, individuals acting as gatekeepers could have pointed me towards community resources that may have benefitted the research sample and guided the project where it needed to go. Specifically, I recruited from university campuses. Additionally, I contacted and attempted to remain in communication with the leaders/presidents of student organizations that center around students of color. As gatekeepers, it was appropriate and necessary to work through the presidents and leadership of campus organizations for people of color. For example, I contacted the presidents of Black Student union, Asian Student union, and so forth. Furthermore, I contacted the leadership of multiple student of color organizations at selected universities to forward my information to individuals of multiple cultural, ethnic, and racial identities for participation.

Research samples were recruited from universities in Texas with high numbers of students from racial and/or ethnic minority backgrounds. The universities also had organizations specific to serving students of color. Also, the selected universities were not primarily attended by students of color (for example historically Black institutions) but had a larger variety of races, ethnicities, and cultures. There is great variety and diversity in the experiences of people of color. Therefore, I sought universities that together provided students of color from varying races, ethnicities, and cultures. Also, I utilized the student listserv at my university to reach out to currently enrolled self-identifying people of color.

Initially, I recruited sample members through the selected student organizations weekly. I sent emails to the student leadership of student organizations for a few months with little success or feedback, before opening my recruitment strategy to include social media and the e-mail listserv of my own university. I sent out recruitment e-mails through the university listserv several times before receiving a sufficient amount of possible participants from the university. All seven of the resulting research participants were recruited from my university listserv. Although, I received a level of interest from possible participants who learned of my research via social media, word of mouth and my previous student of color organization recruitment efforts. I created a digital flyer, posted it on group social media pages with permission, and created my own Facebook page to advertise the study (see Appendix E).

This study-specific page included an introductory video of myself (the principal researcher), describing the study, defining the terms and encouraging students of color to participate. The webpage also included an example of what a photo story looks like and the process of completing a story. Lastly, this page provided examples of environmental microaggressions with its definition to clarify the concept. This allowed possible sample members to better understand the PhotoStory methodology and what the process may have been like for them as sample members. Also, I created a Google-generated telephone number and provided my contact information on the digital flyer as well as the study's Facebook page. I engaged in active participant recruitment for 4 months. Many people showed interest in the study and were sent study materials. However, only seven people completed the study from start to finish. Everyone who completed the study materials, sent them to me by e-mail and scheduled an interview, followed through with complete study participation.

Possible sample members who were interested in responding to the study could learn about the research purpose, questions, and sample criteria by visiting the study social media page. Individuals interested in participating in the study could also contact me through the Facebook site or by calling the Google number. This allowed me to answer their questions and screen them for participation. Although telephone screenings were an option, all possible participants engaged in screening via e-mail. Sample member screenings typically included providing details about the research purpose, how to create a photo story, confirmation that the potential sample member had access to a device that allowed them to take digital photographs, explaining consent to participate or withdraw, and asking delimiting identity questions. After determining the suitability for participation through e-mail, I set up a time to interview each sample member. When potential sample members did not fit my desired sample characteristics, I told them and thanked them for their interest.

Protection of Participants

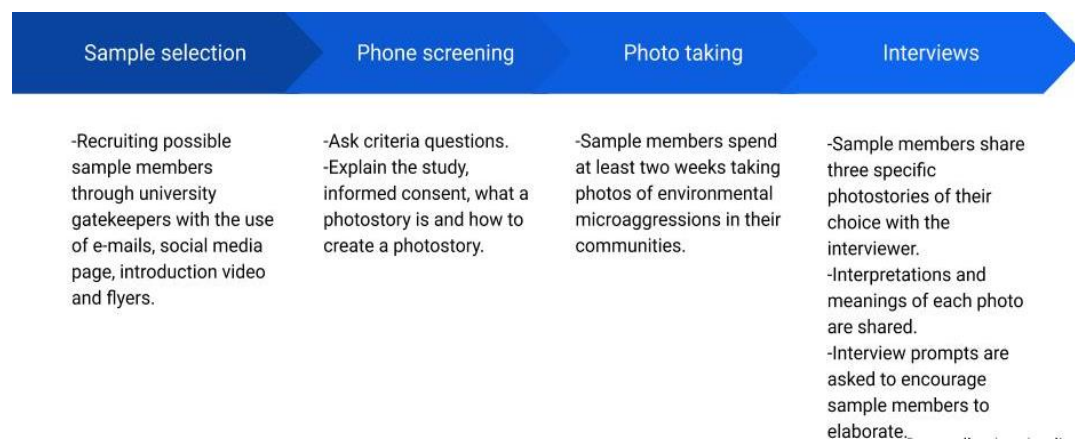
To maintain confidentiality, I engaged in several practices designed to protect the identities of the sample. The names of sample members were be changed in interview transcriptions and documents containing photo stories to maintain their confidentiality. Sample members were required to sign informed consent forms, photo release forms and had opportunities to ask questions about pre-study paperwork during the screening process. Informed consent forms notified sample members that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Consent forms informed sample members that photo stories would be displayed in the pages of this dissertation and during future research presentations. Furthermore, I informed participants of how to ethically take photos for the PhotoStory project, which included only taking photos of other people with their full consent and permission (see Appendix B).

Data Collection

During the screenings of potential sample members, I provided study details including the research purpose, how to create a photo story, explained consent to participate or withdraw, and asked if they met the sample criteria. At the time of the screenings, potential sample members were asked if they have access to a device that allowed them to take digital photos to use during the study. After determining suitability for the sample, I scheduled an interview set to ideally take place at least 2 weeks after the screening, through a video conferencing program (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Data Collection Timeline



Moreover, PhotoStory packets including the interview date, a sample photo story, instructions on how to create photo stories, a photo release form, a google form to upload photo stories, and guidelines on ethical photo taking were sent to the sample members via email. As a qualitative research project, the lenses and experiences of sample members guided the research.

In PhotoStory, the sample members take photos of the phenomena as they see it and write short narratives of each photo. At the end of the photo-taking period, I engaged in video interviews with each sample member through zoom, where the sample shared the meanings behind each of their photos and interpreted their meanings. I reviewed each photo story and did not use 24 photo stories that were inappropriate for the study because they did not display an environmental microaggression or they featured identifying information of a person who did not consent for their photo to be used. I randomly selected two sample members for later member checking at the conclusion of the interviews. This level of member checking allowed the sample members to correct possible misinterpretations by the researcher and clarify sample meanings.

After completing the interviews, transcribing the data, coding the data, and creating themes, I shared the themes with two sample members. Both sample members confirmed the validity of the research themes. Through the use of sample guided research, I uplifted the voices and lived knowledge of the student sample members as well as advocated for solutions to the complex problems the students presented. During the data collection process, I bracketed myself after each interview. Bracketing includes writing reflexively throughout the research process, noticing what biases and assumptions about the research are coming up, and keeping these biases out of the data analysis process (Creswell, 2016). Writing weekly reflections in a reflection journal helped to maintain ongoing bracketing. I engaged student sample members in the research project by asking them to photograph environmental microaggressions that affected their romantic relationship expectations. As members of on and off-campus communities, the photography of students captured a variety of social environments. I defined the terms for sample member photographers and then encouraged these sample members to visually capture their perceptions of the terms.

This allowed the students to share their experiential interpretations and observed messaging about romantic relationships within a world of environmental microaggressions. The physical environments of the student photographers were another source of data from which information about the lives of sample members was gathered. After all, the participants created their photo stories from environmental microaggressions present within their physical environments. As a researcher, identifying and co-experiencing the environmental microaggressions through interviews with sample members provided me with opportunities to reflect and create themes during data analysis. Sample member interviews took place for a total of 45 minutes per interview including follow-up questions. Each interview only included the sample members and researcher. Interviews with the research sample members consisted of photo sharing, exploration, and unique prompting relative to the photos and the knowledge provided by the sample member photographers. I began each interview with photo sharing and allowed sample members to share what they found relevant without structured researcher led questions.

This initial openness of the interview allowed the sample members to guide the researcher towards what the sample viewed as meaningful, instead of relying on researcher bias about what aspects of the phenomena were most essential to explore. A maximum of three photo stories were explored in the interviews. When sample members expressed minimally about the photos and brief narratives created during the project, I continued the interview with five prepared questions. In addition, each of the five researcher created questions included a follow-up question for each initial prompt. Each question was created to encourage elaboration and rich details from sample members, rather than a simple yes or no reply.

Also, adherence to open-ended questions encouraged the research sample members to fully describe their experiences with microaggressions and romantic relationship expectations. PhotoStory encourages sample members to highlight what they find meaningful, harmful and/or important to share with researchers (Skrzypiec et al., 2013). This empowering approach gives sample members the tools (cameras) to capture images that can lead to community and/or societal shifts. Previous research has employed this technique and received richer data as a result of beginning interviews with less structure and employing prompts as needed (Skrzypiec et al., 2013). Sample member photographers added their photos and short narratives about each photo in a Google Form that was sent to the researcher electronically before the interviews. In the informed consent forms, I asked sample members if I could follow up with them at a later date for member checking of the created themes. The photo stories of sample members were sent to a secure university e-mail account, stored on an external hard drive, and sample names were removed for confidentiality. The purpose of the interview process as a data collection tool was to explore how environmental microaggressions shape romantic expectations in people of color.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded electronically and automatically transcribed into text by the videoconferencing software. At the completion of one interview, raw electronically transcribed data was reviewed by the principal researcher. Corrections to the electronic transcription occurred during this review. Then, after another re-reading of the raw interview data, first cycle coding began. Transcribed codes were pulled from the interview transcripts and listed. Also, photographs were similarly reviewed, re-reviewed, and descriptions of the phenomena were selected as possible codes.

During first cycle coding, I followed recommended qualitative practices by identifying no more than 80 individual codes from the data according to three types of coding, namely descriptive, thematic, and in vivo. In vivo and descriptive coding processes are common and foundational, especially in first cycle coding because large chunks of data will be narrowed into single codes (Miles et al., 2019). Descriptive and in vivo codes can be created more readily with large amounts of data than some other forms of coding. I began with descriptive coding, as it allowed me to create a summary or general idea of a data chunk. Then, I coded thematically by searching for repetitive themes and ideas that came up within a passage. Lastly, I chose an in vivo code from the sample members that described the chunk of data. In vivo coding uses the direct words of participants and can later be used in the findings section when sharing findings according to theme. Any number and variation of coding types can be utilized to analyze data (Miles et al., 2019).

I chose descriptive coding in order to create summaries, in vivo to highlight direct sample quotes, and thematic to create cohesive theme passages later in the analysis process. I then reviewed the initial codes in a second coding cycle and narrowed them into a smaller group of 20-30 code categories by the process of lean coding. Lean coding reduced the redundancies in the codes I selected. After pulling out phrases/codes through descriptive, in vivo, and thematic coding, I grouped the codes into five meaningful themes. Later, I developed theme passages that display the major findings from the data collected during the observations and interviews (Creswell, 2016). I engaged in multiple methods of collecting and utilizing the visual data. Sample members were encouraged to take photos of the phenomena (environmental microaggressions) in their communities. Also, I used the sample's photos during the interviews to elicit conversation (data) about the photos and the photo taking experience.

Photographs and pictures are open ended sources of visual data that were coded and analyzed according to visual elicitation photo analysis (Creswell, 2016). This study continued in the vein of previous PhotoStory, Photovoice, and other forms of participant guided research involving visual data by using photographs to prompt critical dialogues. Visual elicitation photo analysis includes transcribing the critical dialogues that take place between the sample members and the researchers during the interview. Coding the transcribed interviews resulted in the uncovering of themes that came up within the discussion of the sample member's photographs (Creswell, 2016).

Trustworthiness

I used triangulation, which included engaging multiple approaches to answering the research questions and using data from multiple sources. This helped to ensure the trustworthiness of the research process. The sources where I brought evidence from included sample member photographer interviews, photographs taken by the sample, written narratives about each photo, and member checking. After each interview, I recorded thoughts and impressions in a reflection journal. This bracketing helped to reduce my influence on the data collected in the interviews. Other forms of ensuring trustworthiness are creating thick rich descriptions, disconfirming evidence, and researcher reflexivity. Member checking for accuracy of sample member interpretations helped me develop credible results. At the conclusion of the initial interview process, I asked two randomly selected sample members if I could follow up with them for member checking of the created themes. Regularly engaging in reflection throughout the research process allowed me as the principal investigator to provide credible interpretations of the photo stories and interviews with sample member photographers.

Also, adherence to open-ended questions encouraged the research sample members to detail their perceptions of microaggressions and romantic expectations. The purpose of the interview process as a data collection tool was to explore how perceptions of environmental microaggressions affect romantic relationship expectations in people of color. Interviews are a common method of data collection in phenomenology. Although other forms of data collection such as observations can be utilized as well. Interviewees were members of specific communities and/or individuals with lived experience knowledge of the phenomena that the researcher could only gain from these interviewees. In addition, the use of PhotoStory as a data collection method allowed the sample members to contribute to the creation and analysis of raw data. Sample members photographed their perceptions of the phenomena in their own communities and briefly wrote their experiences with the phenomena beneath their photographs. Through the use of PhotoStory, sample members became photographers, and the research project became a participatory action research project.

Instruments and Data Sources

Role of Researcher

As a researcher, I believe in acting as an instrument that explores and amplifies the voices of the sample members. This amplification is especially important when conducting studies with members of communities who larger society pushes to the margins and are not often included in studies (Creswell, 2016). Moreover, seeking access to the perspectives of the sample by allowing and encouraging the sample to guide the research, can change the direction of a research project towards new questions and areas. Also, perhaps the new direction is where the research project needs to go at the particular time of the project. As a qualitative researcher, I assert that sample members' beliefs and constructed meanings about the phenomena help to develop the study.

Also, encouraging sample members to share their perspectives on the research topic and questions can shape the questions, making them more relevant and recognizable to the individuals and groups who participate in research by engaging. This open way of exploring the data is part of acting as an instrument in qualitative research (Creswell, 2016). The sample members actively contributed to the collection of data by creating photo stories. Each photo story provided rich visual and text data.

Interview Questions

Interviews with the sample members began with a greeting, gratitude for participation, re-statement of the study purpose and research terms. I had the photo stories created by the sample members on the video screen during the interviews. This allowed me to more easily screen-share the member's photos and facilitate a discussion surrounding the photo stories. After this initial opening, I started the interviews by displaying a photo created by the sample member in the interview. I asked a broad open-ended question about the photo to elicit a response from the sample member. When the sample members seemed to no longer have anything to share about this photo, I moved on to the next picture. A maximum of three photos were explored in each interview. The following interview prompts were not asked in each interview but were asked when the sample member no longer had anything to add to the original interview question (see Appendix A).

Ethical Considerations

As a study that utilized sample taken photos, narratives, and video interviews, it was important that I protected the identities of sample members. I changed the names of the sample members in the interview transcriptions.

Also, sample members sent their photo stories to a secure password protected email account. Interviews, transcriptions, and photo stories were saved on a secure external hard drive. I included ethical photo taking guidelines in the initial study paperwork to ensure sample members showed respect to the privacy of their fellow community members during the photo taking period (see Appendix B).

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the qualitative methods I employed in this study and who I selected as research sample members. Also, I explored how inviting sample members to participate in the study as photographers provided me with rich data about the phenomena occurring in their communities. Next, I will share the research findings and the data collected from sample members in the interviews.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter, I share the data collected through PhotoStory, how the sample members perceived environmental microaggressions, and what themes emerged. I also explain how I analyzed the data qualitatively.

The Study and the Researcher

As a researcher, I have developed research from secondary datasets to explore the romantic relational experiences and expectations of emerging adults. Several factors were included in the questionnaire completed by emerging adults with concerning romantic expectations. I have completed several unpublished academic papers with a focus on microaggressions, romantic expectations, and misogynoir. Misogynoir is located in the center of the intersection where misogyny, white supremacy, and anti-Black sentiment come together to oppress Black women of various ethnicities and cultures (Bailey, 2016).

My original interest in systems of oppression developed as an adolescent. I was finally able to make sense of previous experiences that caused lasting harm but were mysterious to me as a young child. This interest led me to pursue an undergraduate education in the social sciences. It was then that I really began to hear the word microaggression and understand the concept. Throughout my doctoral experience, I have studied qualitative research methods and learned about the creation of PhotoStory as a data collection method. Qualitative coursework allowed me to practice interviews, develop study methodologies, and transcribe data.

Description of the Sample

A total of seven participants contributed to this research study by creating photo stories and engaging in recorded interviews with the principal researcher. All final participants were currently enrolled students at a university, located in north Texas; each participant was recruited via a student email listserv, accessible only to current students. Student names have been changed to protect their identities.

Table 1

Sample Description

Name	Age	Sexual Orientation	Racial Identity
Hanai	22	Heterosexual	west African, Black woman from Sierra Leone
Machi	28	Heterosexual	mixed-race, Indigenous American Woman from the United States
Sariah	43	Heterosexual	Indigenous, Latina woman from the United States more specifically with parents from Puerto Rico
Sorayah	27	Pansexual/Queer	mixed-race Black American Latina, cis-gendered woman from the United States

Taylor	23	Questioning	Black American woman from the United States
Kadee	27	Straight	Black American woman from the United States
Jude	52	Heterosexual	Latina woman from the United States

Protection of Sample

To maintain confidentiality, I engaged in several practices designed to protect the identities of the sample. The names of participants were changed in interview transcriptions and documents containing photo stories to maintain confidentiality. Participants were required to sign informed consent forms, photo release forms, and they had opportunities to ask questions about pre-study paperwork during the screening. Informed consent forms reminded participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Also, consent forms informed sample members that their photo stories would be displayed in the pages of a dissertation and during future research presentations. Furthermore, I created guidelines for participants for ethical photo-taking during the PhotoStory project (see Appendix B).

Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

As a qualitative genre, phenomenology tends to look towards the creation of themes that can be found in the experiences of research sample members. Researchers who approach topics qualitatively through a phenomenological lens study the experiences of sample members as they are lived. This attention to lived experience acknowledges the subjectivity present in human experiences (Davidsen, 2013).

Throughout the interviews, each sample member shared different photo stories, lived experiences, and social identities. However, all of the sample members used many of the same words to describe their photo stories and experienced similar reactions to the phenomena. Many truths exist simultaneously, as individuals live multi-faceted lives from unique social positions. This affords them with varying perspectives of the same issue. Phenomenology encompasses the concepts of, “the truth as I see it,” “life as I know it,” and “the world as I see it.” Moreover, this idea makes the photo stories of the sample members so rich in meaning, as the sample members captured images from their perspectives, within their individual lives and unique settings. Each sample member photographed their lives, wrote a brief narrative, and participated in an interview, all with a profound focus on their perceptions of the phenomena.

Phenomenological research as a general qualitative approach emphasizes purposive sampling of participants. Phenomenological approaches narrow on a particular group, selected for their knowledge acquired via life experiences (Creswell, 2016). Research collected while looking through this lens is an effort to draw out unfiltered, raw data directly from the sample members. Moreover, how will researchers know what questions to ask the respondents of a research project? In qualitative research, the sample members lead the research to some degree (Creswell, 2016). Many of the sample members answered my questions before I had a chance to ask and added to my previously determined questions. The sample members let me know which research questions captured the phenomena and which did not. The areas that the sample members focused on told me what was most important about the topic under investigation according to them. This reflexive process can alert researchers as to which areas to delve into and which may not be as profound as they previously assumed.

Phenomenological research assumes that the stories and meanings created by the sample are subjective. Also, the samples' interpretations of experiences are influenced by the worlds around them. No experience occurs in isolation but reflects the context in which it takes place (Davidsen, 2013). Phenomenological research processes can involve interviews to explore the lived experiences of the sample and the significance applied to certain experiences. Membership in a certain community is required for the research sample because community members are the ones who can describe the essential nature of the phenomena under exploration (Creswell, 2013). I identified five themes from the data collected in this study and used in vivo coding directly from the sample to label each theme. It is within these themes that sample member meanings were found (Miles et al., 2019).

Findings

First Cycle Coding

I began to engage in the first cycle of coding after re-reading the raw interview data and transcribing the interviews. Descriptive coding came first as it allowed me to create a single code by looking at a large chunk of data. At first glance, interviews are filled with large chunks of data, but the creation of descriptive codes can turn these chunks into manageable summaries of information. I went through each interview and created single codes from large sections such as “not for me” and “don’t belong.” After I labeled each chunk of the interview transcriptions with a code, I went through each interview again to pull out in vivo quotations. Each in vivo quotation I took out of the interviews stood out and spoke strongly to the phenomena. Some examples of in vivo quotations I pulled out from the interviews are “I just felt so out of place” and “I don't wanna feel so self-conscious about myself.” The photo stories themselves were described within the interviews and therefore were also coded along with the rest of the transcriptions.

In the spirit of lean coding, I created no more than 80 codes for each type of code (descriptive, in vivo, and thematic) originally (Creswell, 2016). Then, I reviewed the codes and interview data. Then, I eliminated the redundant codes. Since the sample members took photos of the phenomena in their communities, I used the sample's photos during the interviews to elicit conversation about the photos and the photo-taking experience. Photographs and pictures were used as prompts to answer the interview questions and were coded and analyzed according to visual elicitation photo analysis.

Second Cycle Coding

After analyzing the transcriptions via descriptive, thematic, and in vivo coding, I went through the interviews to look for repetitive themes throughout each of the interviews. I found themes such as “And the entire time I just felt sick” and “Is this why I don't have a love story of my own?” In total, I identified five distinct themes from the following participants' photographs. Each theme label comes from an in vivo code.

1. “If that's what men expect from me, I'm not even close to that:” Failing to meet the impossible.
2. “It makes *me* feel like... I don't know, I'm different, I don't even imagine myself in these situations:” The power of representation.
3. “I know, I keep talking about my race, but that's my life. No, it's not a thing that comes and goes, it's in *every* part of my life:” The importance of identity and safety.
4. “And the entire time I just felt sick:” Physical and emotional responses to environmental microaggressions.
5. “Is this why I don't have a love story of my own?”

Theme 1

“If that's what men expect from me, I'm not even close to that.” Failing to meet the impossible

Sample members explored their experiences with environmental microaggressions (see Figures 2 and 3). Concerning societal beauty standards, the sample members shared their early experiences of receiving messages about beauty, acceptance, and what is required to ascertain each. Jude explained, “influencing so young a person, as a little girl in this way, starts to really show them how they have to be or how they have to look to be accepted.” Sariah expressed,

when you look at the advertising and what I saw on TV (growing up), it didn't look like me, didn't look like anybody I knew, and so I never thought I was beautiful. I never thought any of my friends were beautiful because we weren't tall and white and slender with long blond hair.

This was a common sentiment shared among the sample members. Each sample member expressed learning about these societal expectations and what it feels like to not live up to such standards of beauty. Hanai remarked, “I feel kinda sad and disquieted.”

Participants also shared a sense of not being welcome or wanted in social spaces generally. Sorayah described, “there's a feeling that goes along with being excluded and being in an environment that feels unsafe.” Jude stated, “it makes me feel small, even though I initially felt full-sized like it's almost like this physical shrinking even though it's not happening. It's like a subtle spiritual degradation of a person.” Many indicators of environmental microaggressions are subtle, and some other signals are more obvious. Experiencing a sense of being unwanted and undesirable in the face of environmental microaggression is something that many participants related to. Taylor explained their experience on a popular dating app stating, “they literally say they don't want Black women in their profiles.”

To Taylor, the messaging expressed “girls like you don't deserve love.” Another common experience shared by sample members is noting the ways in which the sample fails to live up to the exclusive and unrealistic expectations of society’s deeply rooted European beauty standards. When comparing herself to a Victoria’s Secret model, Hanai said,

Looking at her, she's literally perfect. She has a long thin neck and she's just got no blemishes anywhere. And in my head, I'm like, Yeah, I know that's not a real image and she probably doesn't look like that in real life... Photoshop but at the same time, it's like, I just... I like, I feel envious of her. *I wish* my skin was that unblemished. You know, *I wish* my shoulders arched like that...I'm looking at her and that's not me and *I wish* I looked like her...I don't wanna feel so conscious, self-conscious about myself.

Figure 2

Lingerie Store Display



Figure 3

Store Window Display



Theme 2

“It makes me feel like... I don't know, I'm different, I don't even imagine myself in these situations:” The power of representation.

Most of the photo stories created by sample members in this study reflected macro-level societal messages (see Figures 4-6). However, sample members expressed a desire to continue engaging with media that carries harmful messages because of a desire to escape, fantasize, and participate in public events with their families. Although the statue of a genocidal figure may be memorialized nearby, as shared by Sorayah, “it's in the middle of the...square...they describe (the city's founder), As an Indian fighter...it made me feel...at first disjointed... this place that I live, this place that I enjoy spending time in the square.” She continued “it just felt really, abrasive, to stand there and read that.” Hanai detailed the process she goes through in order to engage in her love of romance novels.

When I go into (reading) a romance, I have to accept that this book is not meant for me and to accept that this book not only is not meant for me but that love is not meant for me in this book period. And if I can accept that, then I can enjoy the book just as a book.

Sariah shared how her experiences as an assumed criminal affected her as she spent time in a shopping mall. “You're just consistently walking through life trying to, prove to everybody that you're good and you're safe and you can belong.” Public spaces can be rich in environmental microaggressions as described in another interview by Kadee, “I was in the airport...We were just sitting there... And then the guy (airport police officer) took the dogs out but I felt a little uneasy about it because I felt like they didn't do that until we sat down.”

I don't feel like I was a bad person because I didn't do anything wrong but I think it kind of makes me like second guess things a little bit...it almost makes me feel like just a little less confident in myself.

Figure 4

“They all look the same”



Figure 5

“White Jesus”

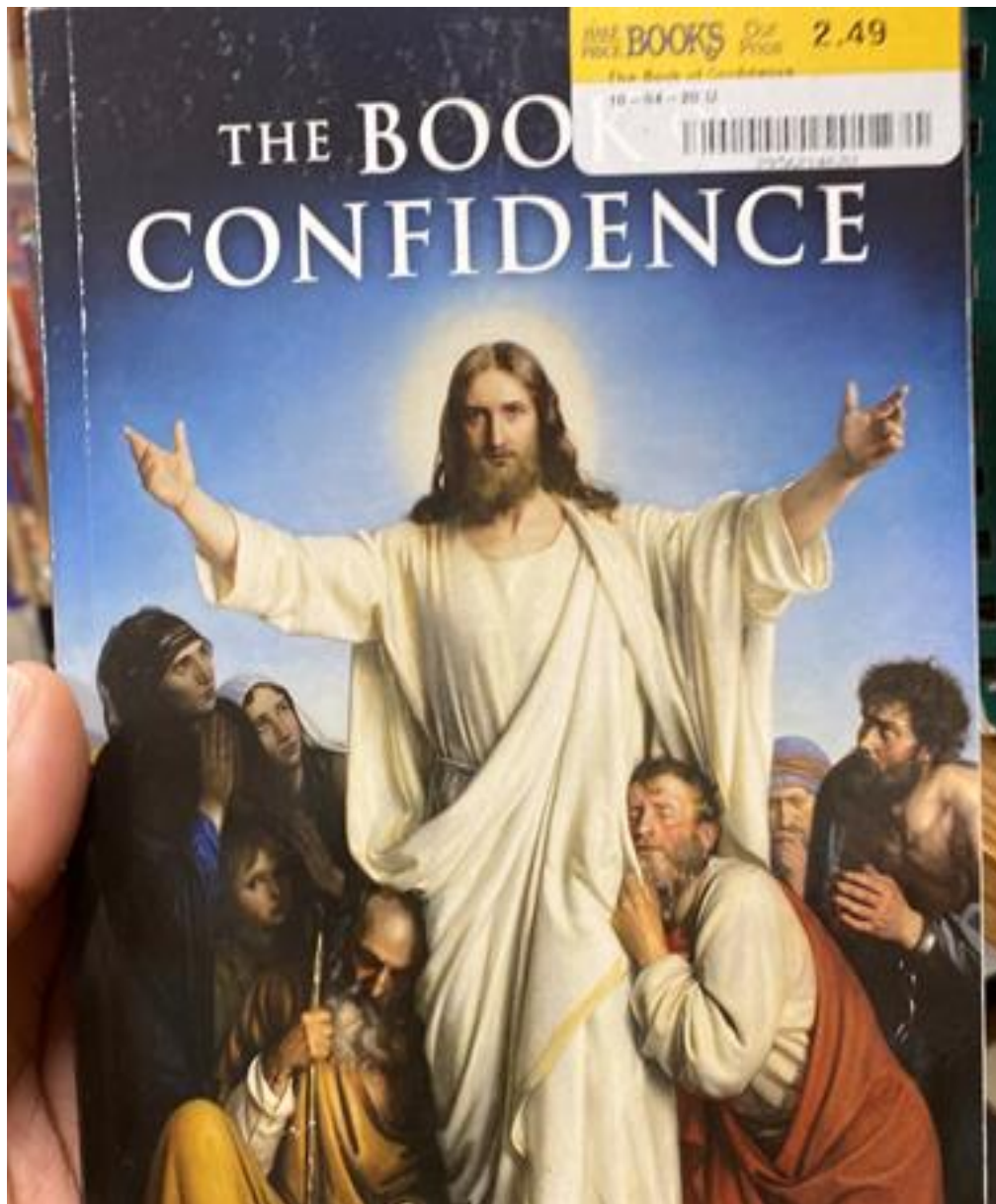
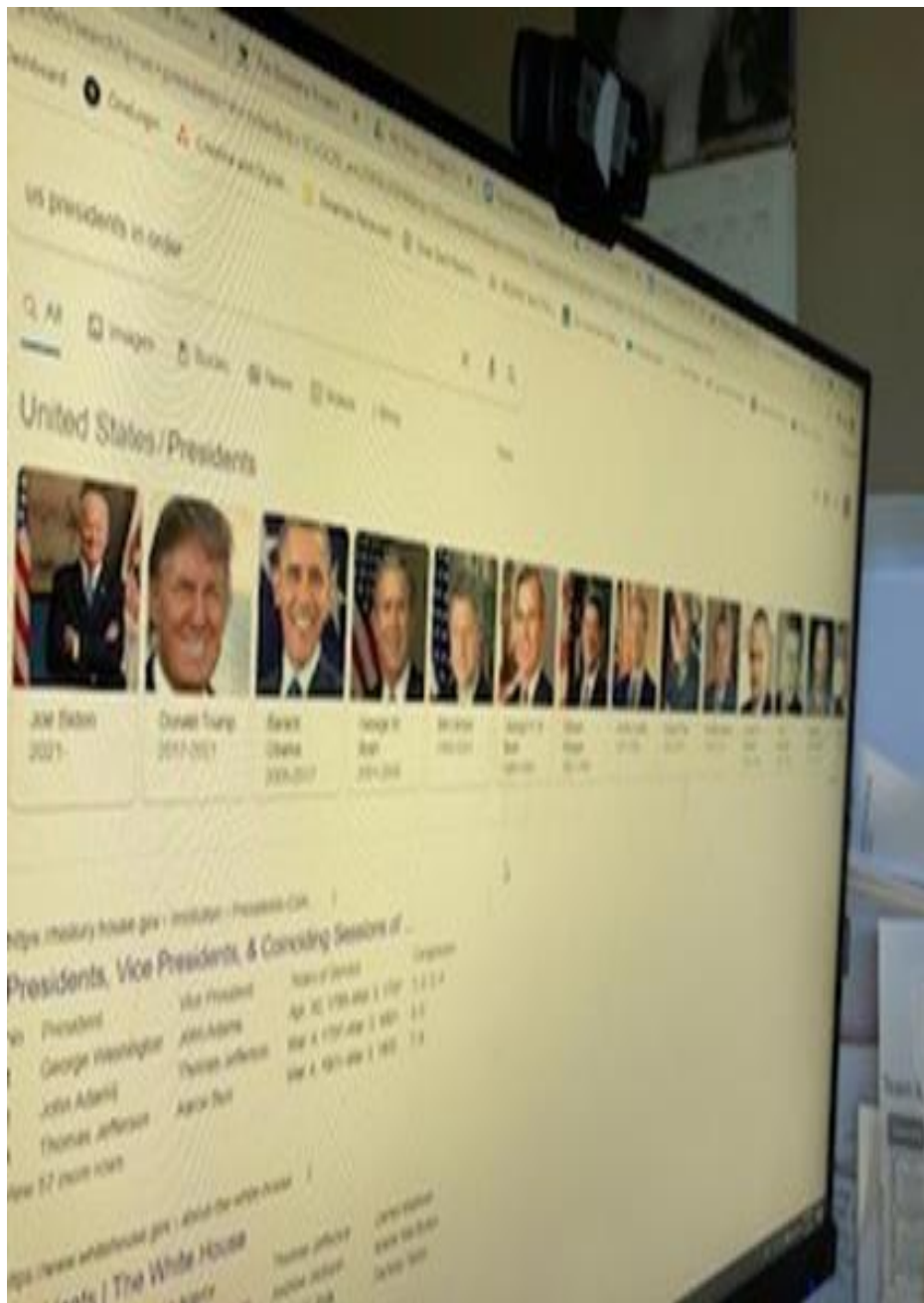


Figure 6

“White male US presidents and Obama”



Theme 3

“I know, I keep talking about my race, but that's my life. No, it's not a thing that comes and goes, it's in every part of my life.” The importance of identity and safety.

All participants highlighted the importance of either their identified race, ethnicity, or both (see Figures 7-9). Additionally, each individual emphasized how these identities affected their experiences of belonging and acceptance in their communities and in the wider society. As self-identifying people of color, each sample member shared specific environmental microaggressions that seemed to be aimed directly at them. Hanai expressed, “I always see this image, and I mean, it's always the same light-skinned girls (in media advertising) ...and I actually have really dark skin....” Furthermore, on the topic of skin color, Jude described,

who is sought after in a romantic relationship... it would be a certain light-skinned person..little girls learn that...my daughter came out (of a doll store) with a doll many shades lighter than she was...and she just lightened her skin a little while ago.

More environmental microaggressions with a focus on race stressed a sense of uneasiness and lack of safety. Sorayah defined an environmental microaggression as, “experiencing something that makes you *uncomfortable*, but more than discomfort, like for me sometimes it's like, maybe, fear is like wrapped around that.” Sorayah later expressed how the race of one's romantic partner can affect how a person is impacted by such a microaggression. She recounted,

We were coming back from a camping trip and just like needed to stop for gas, and I told my partner that I wanted to *not* go to that gas station...and we were in the middle of nowhere Texas.

She continued, “I could see a car (truck) door...that was all decorated with American flags and Trump flags...and then this *truck* pulls up and like backs up behind or in front of us...”

Sorayah shared, “I was really *angry*, I was angry with my partner because I like specifically asked, like us not to stop there.” After the experience, she told her husband, “If I’m asking for this, it’s for a reason and it was because I felt *unsafe*.” A few participants spoke about their experiences with white male partners, their ideas about future male romantic partners, and how this relates to emotional and physical safety. Sariah shared,

My husband, he’s such an example of how racism is perpetuated through the white culture... some of the things they (he and his family) say and the behavior they exhibit...I’ll point stuff out to him and he’s like, no, and I’m like, do you realize how racist that is, what you just said, what you just did?...He is not a malicious person at all, but he still is perpetuating a lot of it.

Additionally, participants with white male partners talked about “disruptions” and “clashes” that they needed to work through as a couple to better navigate and feel supported in the face of systemic racial oppression. Yet, a few participants expressed a desire to avoid white male romantic partners altogether stating, “they may think I’m overreacting (to issues of race) ...they like to avoid talking about and dealing with racial issues anyway but with me, they couldn’t...a white person wouldn’t even see me as desirable anyway just for that.”

Figure 7

“Love isn’t for me”



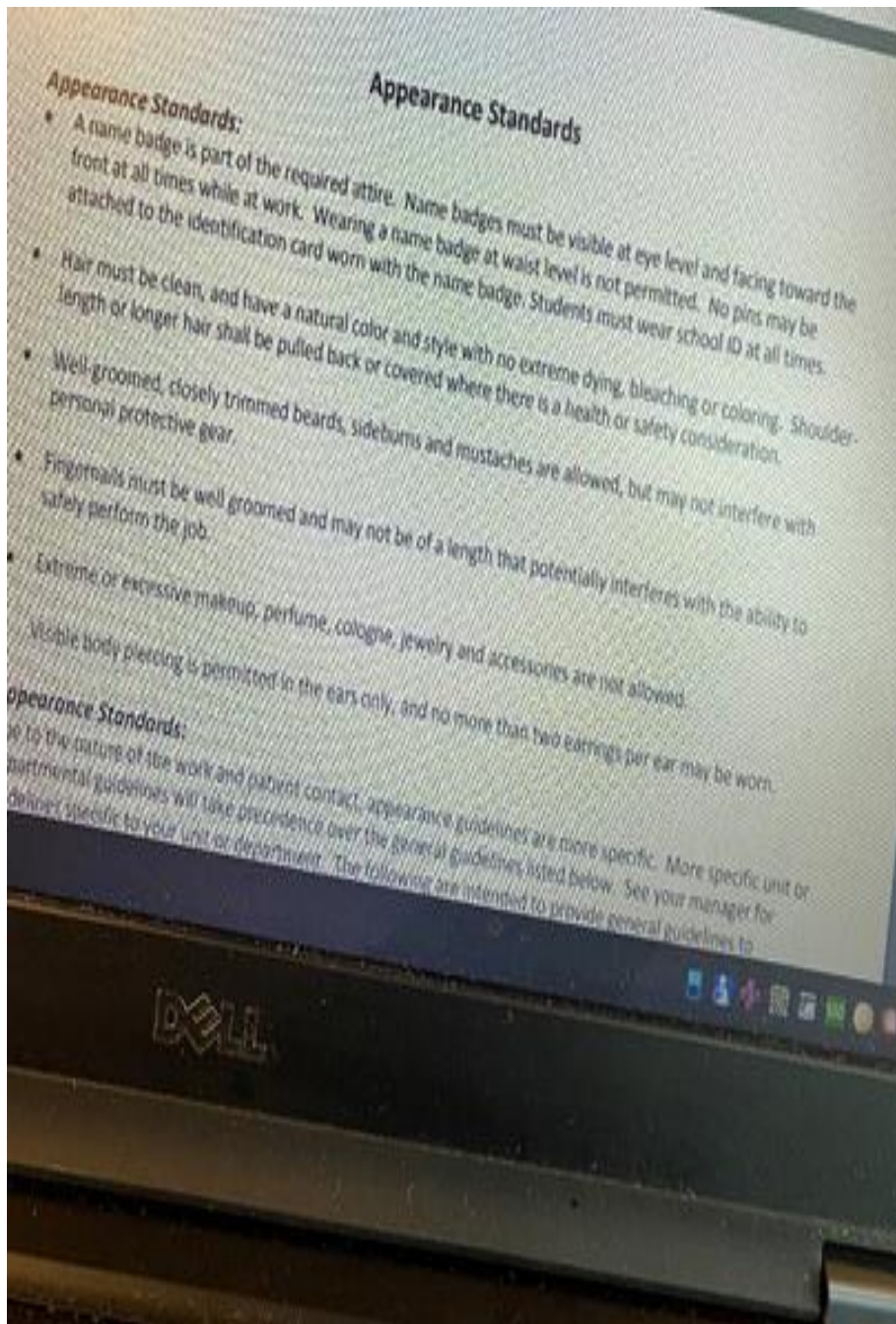
Figure 8

“It’s always the same light skinned girls”



Figure 9

“Natural style”



Theme 4

“And the entire time I just felt sick:” Physical and emotional responses to environmental microaggressions (see Figures 10-13).

Many of the emotions shared by participants can be difficult to acknowledge, identify, sit with, and express in healthy ways. This is especially true when these difficult emotions are felt daily, as sample members come into contact with and/or feel the influence of harmful messaging in their environments. When noticing a microaggression in her neighborhood, Jude expressed, “It's like, let me clear my eyes, this can't be happening.” Taylor described,

Sometimes microaggressions make me feel crazy because it's like I have a feeling that they're there, but I can't even put them into words all the time like it was just a feeling that I didn't belong, but I couldn't explain it.

Participants indicated that environmental microaggressions, “feel very suffocating” and “slam you in the face.” Taylor shared multiple environmental microaggressions in her workplace. “When I sit in the chair, I literally feel suffocated...Because I don't fit. I don't fit. And you know, I see about 60 patients a week.” Taylor expressed, “This is not even just at work...doctors' offices...have the same chairs, and I'm so uncomfortable. It would be very nice to have a chair with no sides or a bigger chair.” She continues,

I asked about the chairs on my first day, and I was told that exercise is medicine. I still am sitting in that same every day in pain... it's very uncomfortable...at the end of the day, I have indents on my thighs...it's very frustrating.

Jude shared, "it's very oppressive, it feels heavy." "You can have the best day and then you see an environmental microaggression like this and you're boxed in and the walls are coming in on you." She continued, "and something you always have to be aware of is danger because if you're not paying attention... so I would be on defense, you know."

Figure 10

“Nice slave owner”



Figure 11

White Nationalism Symbol



Figure 12

Honoring White Nationalism



Figure 13

“Drug dog”



Theme 5

“Is this why I don’t have a love story of my own? (see Figures 14-16)”

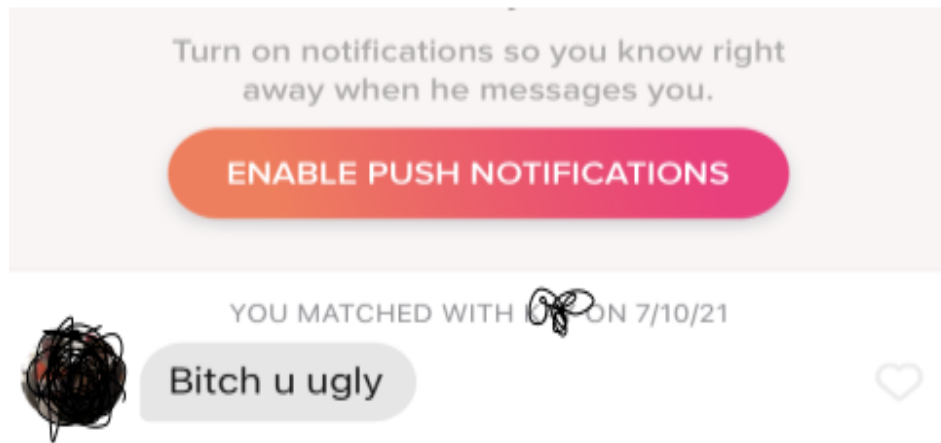
Sariah shared, “as a woman, we see all these images and the ones that are lifted up are rarely ones that look like me.” Hanai stated, “it’s the same look or the same girl, or similar girl that looks almost the same...not like me.” Moreover, Machi expressed “I don’t match what people think I’m supposed to look like, and I wonder if people think I’m attractive or attractive enough.” Sample members shared many ways in which they could sense that they did not belong and were not welcome. Machi said, “they just stare at you most of the time...they just stare at you because they’re like yeah, you’re... You look different.” This was evident during a shopping experience detailed by Sorayah, “I was shopping with a friend who has a larger body...and quickly we realized that that was not going to be a possibility (buying matching outfits) because they did not have any sizes that fit her.” Most of the sample members in this study shared photographs taken in stores, shopping malls, and other locations where standards of beauty are put on display.

Sariah expressed, “When I go into stores like this I go, oh these are white girl sizes. I wear this size but, in this store, the pants barely go over my knees...and it’s not what I think men are looking for.” Taylor shared an example of physically not fitting, not being wanted, or welcome in a space. She said “It’s very uncomfortable *literally* at the end of the day, I have indents on my thighs from sitting down” as she describes being required to sit in a narrow chair with arms each day at work. “It’s like they are saying, if you don’t fit, you stand and if you don’t fit, you don’t get another chair.” Even in stores that do not seem to directly enforce certain beauty standards, rules of attraction, and expectations, Hanai shared the messages she received from a local bookstore chain.

She said “(love), it’s not for me because I’m Black, because I don’t have long hair...Maybe that's why I'm single, maybe because I'm not desirable.” In the same vein, Taylor expressed, “I feel guilty for even having desires or wanting to be coupled.”

Figure 14

“Black girl on Tinder”



We've detected potentially inappropriate language.
Do any of the messages above bother you?

Figure 15

“One size doesn’t all”



Figure 16

“No fat people allowed”



Summary

The previously described four research questions were explored and answered through the photo stories themselves and the photo-elicitation process in the interviews (see Table 2). These research findings will be discussed and interpreted in greater detail throughout the following chapter.

Table 2*Research Question Alignment to Themes*

Research Question	Theme
(1) What meaning do POC make of the racial and/or ethnic environmental microaggressions in their school, community, and home environments?	“I don’t belong.” “They don’t value me as a person.”
(2) How do the perceptions POC have of racial and/or ethnic environmental microaggressions shape their romantic relationship expectations?	“Is this why I don't have a love story of my own?” “Girls like me don't deserve love.”
(3) What meaning do POC make of the gender and sexuality environmental microaggressions in their school, community, and home environments?	“If that's what men expect from me, I'm not even close to that.” “It makes <i>me</i> feel like... I don't know, I'm different, I don't even imagine myself in these situations.”
(4) How do the perceptions POC have of gender and sexuality environmental microaggressions shape their romantic relationship expectations?	“I feel guilty for even having desires or wanting to be coupled.” “I’m not what I think men are looking for.”

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Romantic relational expectations and various forms of microaggressions are explored separately throughout research literature (Clark et al., 2015; Ong et al., 2013; Riggio et al., 2013; Weiser & Weigel, 2016). However, the point of intersection between romantic expectations and microaggressions has not been explored, especially concerning environmental microaggressions. If the stigma of needing and seeking mental health care is to be reduced in communities of color, it is critical that mental health professionals themselves are prepared to treat and serve clients of color. This includes the ability to meet the unique challenges faced by clients of color. Throughout this research, I learned how POC's experiences with environmental microaggressions shape their romantic expectations. The participants shared "I just felt so out of place." "Where do I fit in?" "Where do I belong?" "Girls like you don't deserve love." Also, collecting data through PhotoStory has provided visual data that can supplement Sue's taxonomy of microaggressions and provide a visual interpretation of how MEES occurs in everyday life for POC.

Discussion of the Results

Theme (1) "If that's what men expect from me, I'm not even close to that." The existing literature explores many of the ways in which microaggressions affect members of communities that are marginalized by the wider dominant culture. However, romantic relationships have not typically been researched in this area of study. Yet, this theme fits well into pre-existing literature that confirms how harmful microaggressions are to the psychological well-being of people in groups that have been marginalized.

Microaggressions, also sometimes referred to as everyday racism and/or everyday discrimination have been linked to an increase in suicidal ideation, depression, and drinking alcohol to cope with discrimination (Clark et al., 2015; Polanco-Roman et al., 2019). This theme specifically points to the existence of societal beauty standards, expectations and the experiences of those people who do not fit within such narrow parameters. The beauty standard literature explores the relationships between body satisfaction, race, ethnicity, and societal messages (Awad et al., 2015). Moreover, the microaggression literature and the beauty standard literature make mention of one another within existing research (Awad et al., 2015; Capodilupo & Kim, 2014; Lewis & Neville, 2015). Although, the term environmental microaggression is typically not used. Instead, the beauty standard and body image literature use the phrase societal messages to describe what I know to be environmental microaggressions. Perhaps, recognizing environmental microaggressions as macro-level societal messages in the body image and beauty standard literature will encourage researchers to acknowledge the gendered nature of microaggressions more fully. Also, missing from the current literature is how beauty related environmental microaggressions affect romantic relationships, expectations, and efficacy.

However, body image and beauty standard literature is exploring how themes such as skin color, colorism, hair, body shape and body size come up in studies with samples featuring Black women (Awad et al., 2015). Many of these concepts came up throughout the course of this study. Although only one of the previously mentioned concepts (race) was mentioned in my research questions and none were mentioned in my interview questions. Yet, as we discussed environmental microaggressions, hair, skin color and other phenotypic features were brought up repeatedly by most of the participants, and all of the Black identified participants.

This speaks to how powerful hair, skin color, colorism, hair, body shape and body size are to the lived experiences of the self-identified Black women regardless of ethnicity in this photo study. These are essential aspects of living in an overtly racialized body within the context of societal messages, institutions and interactions that seek to devalue Black women especially (Awad et al., 2015). Phenotype/physical appearance greatly affect one's treatment and experiences in the world (Awad et al., 2015; Keith et al, 2017; Monk, 2014). Ultimately, this theme highlights the gendered nature of microaggressions and specifically, the experience of knowing what the beauty standards are and simultaneously reckoning with not living up to said standards.

Theme (2) "It makes *me* feel like... I don't know, I'm different, I don't even imagine myself in these situations:" The power of representation. Environmental microaggressions focus heavily on macro-level microaggressions (Sue, 2010). Representation in certain areas and a lack of or no representation in other areas creates a powerful message. Many people of color find themselves represented as domestic workers, criminals, and in other socially undesirable roles in media depictions (Keith et al., 2017). Most U.S. media is dominated by wealthy, white men who decide who to represent, how to represent them and this invariably shapes our global society (DiAngelo, 2018). These creators of media shape the public's views on beauty, attractiveness, desirability and worthiness to be on screen. Frequently, beauty is defined very narrowly and leaves out most of the population (Kite, 2013). The participants share how not seeing themselves reflected as beautiful, romance worthy, viable romantic partners leads them to believe it must be true. The participants also expressed beliefs that media messages affect possible romantic partners, who may not see the participants as beautiful either, thanks to constant environmental microaggression exposure.

People who move through the world in marginalized bodies, as well as people who move through the world in centered bodies, understand their social value based on how the larger society represents them on the macro-level. The literature already points to the increased experiences of microaggressions in individuals with any or all of the following phenotypic features: darker skin and/or fat body (Keith et al., 2017). Lack of complex representation of people of color and the absence of people of color confirms harmful beliefs about whether or not people of color deserve more than second class citizenship (Castañeda, 2018). Also, people of color are over-represented when they perpetuate a crime or engage in violence (Pepin, 2016).

Media messaging has the power to shape societies (Castañeda, 2018; DiAngelo, 2018) and as U.S. created media is global in its reach; U.S. media has the power to shape our collective global society as well as societies all over the world (DiAngelo, 2018; Ibibi, 2013; Maisuwong, 2012). The media includes various methods of communicating ideas, beliefs, and messages. Therefore, the creators of U.S. media design environmental microaggressions and spread these harmful messages throughout the globe. Rarely, if ever are people in marginalized communities depicted without the inclusion of a one-sided stereotype in lieu of a multi-faceted human (Castañeda, 2018). The participants share how their experiences actively (watching movies, reading books, etc.) and passively (driving by a billboard, etc.) engaging with media affect their sense of worth. Sariah expressed, “they (white people) have that image of us... low life degenerates, and (of) our culture.” U.S. media deepens harmful political rhetoric, reinforces offensive images of people of color and thus reinforces the status quo systems of oppression; often through violence (Castañeda, 2018). The participants reflected on how a lack of representation and media misrepresentation affected their beliefs about love, romance, and desirability to a potential romantic/sexual partner.

Sariah shared,

The guy I'm attracted to is going to be looking for a girl like that. He's not looking for me, he's trying to look over my head around me to see that girl...what's beautiful and attractive is... The Princess Bride...Daisy Duke... Charlie's Angels... beautiful, is not what I see in the mirror and it's not what I think men are looking for.

Theme (3) "I know, I keep talking about my race, but that's my life. No, it's not a thing that comes and goes, it's in *every* part of my life:" The importance of identity and safety. Racial identity is a large part of the current microaggression literature, as members of the dominant racial group frequently target people of color to microaggress in obvious and less obvious ways (Lewis & Neville, 2015). This includes environmental microaggressions, which although displayed for all, are received by those people, who the messages are meant for. Hanai shared,

All these little piling up things that tell you or give you the message and the message, you only receive the message if it's meant for you...I think that's what a lot of microaggressions are like, the people they are meant for, they receive it.

Racial microaggressions have been linked to decreased physical and psychological health (Clark et al., 2015) including the creation of the race-based traumatic stress theory, which explains the relationship between systemic racial discrimination and trauma (Comas-Díaz et al., 2019). Microaggression researchers have also developed many categories based on the experiences of specific racial groups which highlight the differences in the racialized experiences between groups (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Asian and Asian American people face microaggressions that whites typically do not direct towards different people of color. Several categories such as: denial of racial reality, exoticization of Asian American women, invalidation of interethnic differences, invisibility, immasculinity of Asian American men (Ong et al., 2013).

This highlights the importance of race and racial identity because the race(s) a person identifies as and is identified as by others, will strongly affect their experiences within the world. Also affected greatly by racial identity is the intrapersonal. Throughout the literature people of color express their resentment, sadness, frustration, hurt and sense of alienation at racism via microaggressions (Ong et al., 2013).

Physical safety is also a factor in racial identity for people of color. Racial inequity among treatment by law enforcement is well-known (Desmond, Papachristos, Kirk, 2016). Also, well-known in many Black communities is that calling the police is an undesirable option because law enforcement may escalate a situation. This in turn may lead to the death of another unarmed Black person at the hands of a police officer (Desmond et al., 2016). Moreover, whites as a group are very powerful and have received increasing support following the 2016 U.S. presidential election to harass and assault people in marginalized groups (Giroux, 2017). When driving behind a truck with a symbol of white nationalism, Kadee shared,

Obviously, it made me really upset...just really uneasy. I don't think I really wanted to even be behind that truck ... because I feel like if there's someone who has a trump sticker, they don't really want me around. I don't think they like black people... because of what you know that past president stood for anybody who is for him or supports him doesn't really want me around or a person of color. So...I shouldn't interact with this person is driving. I should just speed by them because I don't know like what they can do if they see me or how they feel, you know...

Kadee continues to describe her fear of not knowing what a white supporter of white nationalism may do, but the knowledge of what they have already done without legal or social consequences.

It's very unpredictable. And I think that's what makes it kind of scary because I don't know what they will do. I've just heard a lot of things about like trump supporters like running people off the road, and stuff like that. That's a big fear to me... And the fact that it's a big truck, I have a small car. I'm not about to put myself in that situation...It makes me feel a little small, insignificant...because it is pretty powerful...There was a time where I really felt like Trump supporters could get away with a lot...I had to be on alert and aware because ... I don't think that there will be much repercussions for that...So, I have to watch out for myself... I don't think that they are held at the same standard when it comes to punishment or justice for things...So many people stormed the capital building and we haven't really heard much about, most of them getting in trouble. They can get away with a lot.

Sorayah also saw a symbol of white nationalism on the back of a truck during an unagreed upon stop at a rural gas station and explained,

This made me feel like horrible. It made me want to not be in Texas and then simultaneously made me know that I don't need to like experience these things and knowing that I am worthy of like people's respect, and simultaneously feeling like yeah but this person doesn't think that you are. So, what, what does that really mean for you like just holding that, it's so much more difficult to navigate the world.

When sharing her reactions to a local environmental microaggression, Jude stated,

I think it's a reminder, of the reality that if I'm dating, an African American man and we are out in public that I can only be kept so safe, and I can only protect him to a certain degree. So, the level of safety is not the same. I'm very conscious and aware in Texas, I'm not going to just drive across Texas, that is a luxury. I can't just travel. I can't just drive into the east or west. It's a reminder that depending on how I look, and my partner looks, we will be treated a certain way.

Theme (4) "And the entire time I just felt sick." Physical and emotional responses to environmental microaggressions. The harm of microaggressions is well-documented throughout the literature. Yet, the harm microaggressions can do to romantic relationships and expectations is not well-documented. Microaggressions are linked to reduced self-esteem, increased substance use, suicidal ideation, general stress, psychiatric disorders, racial trauma, increased vulnerability to future stressors, eating disorders, sleep difficulties, increased risk of heart disease, diabetes, racial and cultural isolation, and many more damaging symptoms that negatively affect life expectancy and satisfaction (Assari et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2015; Comas-Díaz et al., 2019; Lewis & Neville, 2017; Nadal, 2011; Torres-Harding et al., 2012). The effects of microaggressions build up over time and this can result in greater vulnerability for developing the conditions, symptoms and unhealthy coping strategies listed above. Participants shared some of their physical and psychological responses that connected to the shaping and validation of their romantic relationship expectations.

Taylor expressed the following about her experience on an online dating platform, It was really disheartening. I was very sad about it even cried about it. I deleted my Tinder. It made me feel like I didn't belong on the platform. I literally felt like it was saying, girls like you don't deserve love. And that's the message that I got, even before I got on.

Theme (5) “Is this why I don't have a love story of my own?” This is the research gap that this study was designed to partially fill. However, previous research points to reduced psychological and physical health which could certainly affect one’s sense of desirability to a potential romantic partner in and outside of a romantic relationship. Also, body image literature fails to acknowledge many of the factors that strongly affect the body images of Black women in particular. Phenotypic features such as skin tone/shade, hair are left out of most body image literature. This means, body image literature has many gaps to fill in this area and researchers are pushing the experiences of Black women to the margins. Specifically, the bodies of Black women are not their own. Socially constructed ideas about Black women are projected onto them by the world (Awad et al., 2015). Also significant to this theme are the alarmingly common and deep-rooted societal messages directed at Black American women specifically. Many of these erroneous archetypes were constructed during the early years of white American nationalism in what would later become the United States (Harris-Perry, 2011). Whites labeled Black enslaved women as self-sacrificing Mammys, sex-crazed Jezebels and/or angry Sapphires (Harris-Perry, 2011). These archetypes captured the American and later global imagination, as it painted Black American women into one-sided caricatures for the world to see, believe and treat as such (Harris-Perry, 2011).

Following the Moynihan report, many media outlets, self-proclaimed relationship experts and government agencies have bought into and spread these devastating myths (Wanzo, 2011). Thus, vilifying Black American women has become a national pastime that Black American women themselves cannot help but internalize. Taylor expressed,

I have never online dated. I've always been too scared to do it because I was like no one's gonna like me. I feel like I hear Black women just being seen or talked about as being undesirable by black men and non-black men. Why would I set myself up for failure? ... It was really disheartening. I was very sad. I even cried about it. I deleted my Tinder. It made me feel like I didn't belong on the platform.

Hanai shared,

I think it just makes me sad, that that's what's considered beautiful and that I'm not considered beautiful. Maybe that's why I'm single, maybe because I'm not desirable...Like I'm not white enough? I don't have long enough hair because long hair is considered desirable.

Machi said,

I don't match what people think I'm supposed to look like, and I wonder if people think I'm attractive or attractive enough...they just stare at you most of the time...Most of the time it makes me feel lonely and isolated...maybe that's the whole reason why I'm not married yet.

MEES Theory (Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress)

Previous literature featuring MEES builds upon early microaggression research by explaining how microaggressions are widespread and common for Black Americans in particular (Smith, Yosso, Solórzano, 2006). Moreover, MEES details how this constant exposure to microaggressions results in extreme levels of accumulated stress (Carroll, 1998). The findings of this current study add to previous MEES literature by asserting that the psychological toll of environmental microaggressions affects romantic relationship expectations. Environmental microaggressions are omnipresent as they are featured widely in modern day media, institutions, and systems (Sue et al., 2007). POC create romantic relationships and develop expectations of romantic relationships whilst being surrounded by environmental microaggressions. The inescapability of environment microaggressions keeps POC from being able to create relationships or develop psychologically outside of racial discrimination. Media follows us into our homes, our bedrooms and permeates our relationships with others, as well as ourselves. Systems and institutions strongly influence where, how, and when people in marginalized communities can live, work and study (Sue et al., 2007). Environmental microaggressions occur on the macro-level, yet these microaggressions affected the participants on every level (psychologically/intrapersonally, interpersonally and systemically). Yet, this extreme stress is normalized, expected, and sometimes dismissed.

Hanai shared,

I never realized about all these microaggressions, for me it's just a regular thing. I just go along with it, and I fight it in my own way, but... It just becomes a regular part of life.

You don't really think about it past that... I think that's what's sad. The saddest part is that it is normal and has become normal. It's sad that it's normal and I accept that it's normal and I come up with these coping mechanisms.

Limitations

This research study had several limitations. First, some participants struggled in their ability to identify environmental microaggressions. This is not because these phenomena are uncommon but rather, because environmental microaggressions are very common (Sue, 2010). The normalization and un-named nature of environmental microaggressions can prevent participants from identifying the phenomena, and instead view it in the words of the sample members as “normal” and “the way it is.” Future studies can include information sessions where the researcher shows many environmental microaggressions and possible sample members have the opportunity to ask questions. Last, ideally, a researcher would have a team of well-qualified trained intercoders and professional transcription. This would allow for multiple perspectives on data analysis, creating a more robust analysis of the data.

Strengths

This study had several notable strengths, helping to give this study a unique and important contribution to the literature on microaggressions. First, this study used PhotoStory in its methodology, which allowed for participants to not only voice their experiences but show these experiences through photos.

One sample member even shared how empowering the experience of capturing environmental microaggressions was for them, as they were acknowledging what is so often unacknowledged. Second, the primary researcher is a POC, which increases the trustworthiness of the data analysis.

Implications

Clinicians

Each of the sample members shared how environmental microaggressions have enabled them to develop destructive romantic relationship expectations. If clinicians have an understanding of the effects of environmental microaggressions on romantic relationship expectations, perhaps they will be able to better buffer such effects in the romantic relationships of their clients. Greater research in this area can increase the number of interventions available to clinicians who desire to reduce the harmful power of environmental microaggressions. Potential clients can find relief from participating in psychotherapy with clinicians who possess an understanding of how microaggressions present themselves (Nadal, 2011). Moreover, this will allow validation and supportive reflection that is much needed for POC who endure microaggressions as a part of their daily lived experiences (Sue et al., 2007).

Researchers in MFT, counseling, psychology, and clinical social work can explore, develop, implement, and test interventions and curricula that increase romantic relationship expectations in this specific population. As mental health professionals develop effective resources, campus mental health clinics, clinicians, and students themselves can implement said resources to improve their romantic relationship expectations. Also, romantic relationship expectations can be taught to clinicians in training (supervisees) as a way to buffer the effects of microaggressions and other expressions of white supremacy with their clients.

Clinicians licensed as supervisors will supplement the skillsets of new mental health professionals as these new professionals are better equipped to address the needs of clients of color. Moreover, clinicians and researchers can engage in trainings as instructors and students to learn how to not microaggress their clients. In this way, professionals can avoid adding to the daily indignities experienced by individuals who are members of marginalized communities. Also important is learning how to move forward after microaggressing a client and rebuilding the therapeutic alliance.

If the stigma of needing and seeking mental health care is to be reduced in communities of color, it is critical that mental health professionals themselves are prepared to treat and serve clients of color. This includes the ability to meet the unique challenges faced by clients of color.

University Administrators

University administrators have the ability to challenge and reduce environmental microaggressions unlike any other entity on campus. University administrators share a responsibility to acknowledge, address and meet some of the needs of university students. Moreover, administrators have the power to hire professors, more administrators and create a team of campus professionals who are well trained in the art of beginning and respectfully engaging in hard conversations. When campus professionals understand what microaggressions are, how damaging they can be, and are held to account for creating a campus environment that includes students of color without requiring students to face everyday discrimination; administrators are effectively leading. Administrators can begin to communicate that microaggressions are not welcome on campus through the university website and in the staff and professors they hire (Sue, 2010). New university employee interviews can include questions about addressing and reducing personal bias as well as discrimination in the classroom.

Also, university leadership can seek out professionals of color as professors. Moreover, administrators can offer these professionals appropriate benefits packages that acknowledge the value and knowledge gained by lived experience that only professionals who are members of marginalized communities can bring. Furthermore, recruiting students of color and creating campus activities that provide spaces for students of color to engage with one another are within the role of university administrators.

Also, pushing to provide on-campus mental health resources with clinicians of color and clinicians in general who are well trained in treating racial trauma and serving communities of color. Environmental microaggressions can be reduced by employing the methods outlined above and maintaining such an environment by holding professors and staff accountable who engage in microaggressions and bias towards students and university employees. Also, all campus resources can represent students of color in their print media, narratives published, and staff hired. This can include the doctors in the health center, mental health clinicians in the counseling center, on-campus police, professors, and university leadership. Thus, decreasing microaggressions on campus can occur in all existing buildings, organizations, and services offered. Mentor programs for students of color can also be implemented as methods by which students can share their frustrations, get practical guidance, and learn how to move forward with reporting their experiences of microaggressions if desired. Lastly, on-campus mental health providers can provide relationship education outreach to students and community members. Relationship education is not just for couples who are engaged to be wed or already wed. The time to prepare for a healthy, happy, and stable partnership comes long before both. Relationship education seminars and workshops can be held online and in person.

Also, each workshop will need to address the challenges experienced by students of color in relation to their romantic relationship expectations in order to serve students of color.

Romantic relationship expectations taught in seminars related to coping with microaggressions can provide another resource for students who may not acknowledge the connection between romantic efficacy and microaggressions. This ability to design and implement programs that benefit POC could result in greater program participation and better romantic relational outcomes for participants.

Local Community Leaders & Organizers

Community organizers may not know much about mental health processes and outcomes in general or specifically in relation to POC. However, mental health professionals can partner with community organizers, community centers, and organizations designed to advocate for POC. Organizers can gather and recruit participants for seminars and workshops on coping with microaggressions and protecting their romantic relationship expectations. Prior to offering community workshops, mental health professionals can teach community leadership how microaggressions and romantic efficacy inform one another. Thus, expanding the awareness of community organizers and recruiting them in the work of addressing mental health in communities of color. Moreover, policymakers and other large-scale decision-makers can support the implementation of programs that seek to improve mental health, social and relational outcomes for POC in their communities and in the wider society.

They can increase funding, increase public awareness of how romantic relationship expectations can improve the lives of individuals and groups with racially oppressed identities, and get this issue on legislative agendas.

Communities of Color

Perhaps POC can benefit from this study the most. The results can equip them with the information they need to find validation of their romantic relationship expectations and acknowledge how microaggressions affect their efficacy. Also, when researchers and mental health practitioners develop the findings from this study into therapeutic interventions, POC can receive treatments that address their experiences with microaggressions and how these incidents inform romantic relationship expectations.

Moreover, POC can be the recipients of community outreach that helps them understand the relationship between these two concepts as well. Also, when university leadership implements the findings from this study into their approaches of campus community building; on campus microaggressions can decrease due to education, accountability, and outreach of campus organizations. As participants, the POC recruited had an opportunity to share their experiences and explore how microaggressions have informed their lives, specifically their romantic relationship expectations. Also, participants are part of a collective research project that amplifies the voices of more POC.

Recommendations for Further Research

Several researchers point to future directions with the belief that more research can lead to better outcomes for individuals and groups who struggle with the adverse influences of microaggressions (Clark, 2014; Keith et al., 2017; Nadal, 2011; Polanco-Roman et al., 2019; Willis, 2015). A researcher suggested exploring how racial microaggressions affect mental health symptoms and disorders as well as psychological constructs like self-esteem (Nadal, 2011). Also, microaggressions are not experienced at the same rate or intensity for every group or individual.

Phenotype plays an important role in what microaggressions are employed, who employs them, and how harm is experienced (Keith, 2017). More research in the role of phenotype and microaggressions between POC can contribute to this specific area and microaggression research on the whole. Moreover, previous research hints at existing links between microaggressions, and the resiliency and coping strategies one may develop or use to manage the effects of microaggressions. Others suggest that therapists work with emerging adult women of color to reduce their levels of suicidality, as emerging adult women of color may experience greater levels of stress as a result of racial and/or ethnic everyday discrimination.

Depression and traumatic stress deserve clinical attention and may be more common in this population of women aged 18-29 (Polanco-Roman et al., 2019). Therefore therapeutic interventions and culturally sensitive approaches are essential to improving mental health outcomes and stability for female emerging adults of color, who may be at a greater risk of suicidality, depression, and traumatic stress (Polanco-Roman et al., 2019). Additionally, the concepts of hope and coping appear in research articles under their future research and implication sections. Researchers acknowledge that microaggressions exist and cause great physical and psychological harm to individuals and groups with membership in minority groups (Clark, 2014; Smith et al., 2011). Also, that large systemic processes are behind microaggressions and will take time to address (Smith et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2007).

However, individuals who struggle under the weight of microaggressions need adaptive coping skills to manage their experiences now. Another recommended research aim is to develop more research projects that center on the connections between how microaggressions are appraised or interpreted and how those interpretations of events affect emotional and behavioral responses from POC.

Also, how romantic relationship expectations connect to how those experiences are coped with, addressed, and managed psychologically and behaviorally (Clark, 2014). If higher romantic relationship expectations in members of marginalized communities buffer the intensity of microaggressions, further research could expand on how those high expectations are developed. Moreover, researchers can begin to create interventions, curricula, and programs that help POC and members of various marginalized communities to implement romantic relationship expectation-building strategies. Such strategies may buffer the harm caused by microaggressions psychologically and physically in their thoughts, bodies, workplaces, classrooms, houses of worship, and relationships.

Furthermore, research can use what is already known about microaggressions to create research projects that seek to predict individual outcomes and responses (Torres-Harding et al., 2012). Thereby engaging with communities who microaggressors target the most as well as communities that experience the blow of microaggressions most profoundly, researchers can observe what pre-existing factors worsen the influence of microaggressions. Such factors could include multiple contexts at varying levels such as: neighborhood, workplace, community resources, familial support, individual coping skills, cultural sources of support, etc.

The possibility of factors that can be included to help predict possible responses in future research projects is great. Moreover, responses themselves are another potential area for study because of the numerous ways that individuals and communities can respond behaviorally, politically, and psychologically (Sue et al., 2007). POC have shown great resilience despite enduring microaggressions regularly (Sue et al., 2007). Also, of future interest is studies of individuals and groups who have multiple identities that are marginalized in the environments where they live, work, travel, study, and/or worship (Willis, 2015).

How do individuals and groups who have multiple identities that are marginalized cope with microaggressions? How does their coping change depending on the environment itself and what differences can be seen in each setting? How do individuals with multiple marginalized identities experience microaggressions generally (Torres-Harding et al., 2012)? How does the setting change their general experiences as well as responses to microaggressions and the people who microaggress them (Willis, 2015)? Aims for mental health care providers especially, highlight the importance of exploring what healthy coping skills POC may employ that reduces the mental and emotional damage caused by microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007).

Also, exploring the differences found in coping mechanisms used by POC with short-term versus longer-term discrimination. Moreover, which can be employed by children of color, who also experience microaggressions. Also, as children of color grow up, they will face more microaggressions and benefit from early preparation on how to cope with and address them (Sue et al., 2007). Researchers of childhood, child therapies, and play therapies can further develop this area of microaggression research. This research helps to validate and document the harm of microaggressions as well as how they inform the way POC engage with the world around them (Sue et al., 2007). Also, responses to microaggression can be explored as well as how these responses affect health, behaviors, and relationships. Furthermore, the literature will benefit from learning how microaggressions inform self-worth, self-esteem, mental stability, racial identity, and racial identity development of communities of color and individuals of color (Sue et al., 2007).

Conclusions Based on the Results

The findings of this study contribute to the filling of a previously unacknowledged gap in the microaggression literature. It is clear that environmental microaggressions shape romantic expectations. Most participants shared that their experiences with environmental microaggressions lowered their sense of desirability. The belief in reduced worth generally and to a potential romantic and/or sexual partner was common throughout most interviews. However, the findings confirm previous literature that points to the great impact and harm experienced by POC in social spaces where environmental microaggressions are present or hold influence. The sample members expressed that environmental microaggressions are so commonplace, they are normalized. Yet, the levels of extreme stress each participant shared, took place throughout the course of their otherwise mundane experiences such as: shopping at a mall, stopping for gas, driving down the road, and spending a day in their workplaces. The sample members confirmed that the stress of environmental microaggressions may be mundane but that it is indeed extreme.

Reflection

I saw myself reflected in the faces of the sample during our face-to-face interviews. I responded emotionally and physically to their words, to pictures, and as I re-read the transcripts. This work hit home, as I too have experienced more environmental microaggressions than years of life (in one day, most days). Intimate is my knowledge of the individual and accumulative heaviness pushed onto and constantly forced down upon women like me. The weight is unrelenting, and many people willfully misunderstand its pressure, size, impact, and depth.

As a therapist, maintaining an interviewer stance throughout the interviews felt somewhat suffocating. At least half a dozen therapeutic interventions crossed my mind each time a sample member detailed their pain. However, I could only nod, soften my voice and reflect their words back to them. As much I wanted to ease their collective senses of social and emotional isolation, I could not, not as a therapist. Instead, I created a space for them to share stories that many of the participants told for the first time ever. The interviews focused on one participant at a time and acknowledged both the importance of their words and the participants themselves. Creating a study focusing on environmental microaggressions and only recruiting people of color also acknowledged the wisdom, power and value that each sample member could bring to such a study. This research sent a very different and much-needed message to participants. “You are wanted.” “You belong.” “You exist.”

REFERENCES

- Assari, S., Moghani Lankarani, M., & Caldwell, C. H. (2017). Discrimination increases suicidal ideation in black adolescents regardless of ethnicity and gender. *Behavioral Sciences*, 7(4), 75.
- Awad, G. H., Norwood, C., Taylor, D. S., Martinez, M., McClain, S., Jones, B., Holman, A., & Chapman-Hilliard, C. (2015). Beauty and body image concerns among African American college women. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 41(6), 540-564.
- Bailey, M. (2016). Misogynoir in medical media: On Caster Semenya and R. Kelly. *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, 2(2), 1-31.
- Capodilupo, C. M., & Kim, S. (2014). Gender and race matter: The importance of considering intersections in Black women's body image. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 61(1), 37.
- Carroll, G. (1998). Mundane extreme environmental stress and African American families: A case for recognizing different realities. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 29(2), 271-284.
- Castañeda, M. (2018). The power of (mis) representation: Why racial and ethnic stereotypes in the media matter. *Challenging Inequalities: Readings in Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration*, 60.
https://scholarworks.umass.edu/communication_faculty_pubs/60
- Clark, T. T. (2014). Perceived discrimination, depressive symptoms, and substance use in young adulthood. *Addictive Behaviors*, 39, 1021–1025.

- Clark, T. T., Salas-Wright, C. P., Vaughn, M. G., & Whitfield, K. E. (2015). Everyday discrimination and mood and substance use disorders: A latent profile analysis with African Americans and Caribbean Blacks. *Addictive Behaviors*, 40, 119-125.
- Comas-Díaz, L., Hall, G. N., & Neville, H. A. (2019). Racial trauma: Theory, research, and healing: Introduction to the special issue. *American Psychologist*, 74(1), 1-5.
- Crenshaw, K. (1990). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 1241.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Creswell, J.W. (2016). *30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative researcher*. Sage publications.
- Davidson, A. S. (2013). Phenomenological approaches in psychology and health sciences. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 10(3), 318-339.
- Desmond, M., Papachristos, A. V., & Kirk, D. S. (2016). Police violence and citizen crime reporting in the black community. *American sociological review*, 81(5), 857-876.
- DiAngelo, R. (2018). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (2017). White nationalism, armed culture and state violence in the age of Donald Trump. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 43(9), 887-910.
- Harris-Perry, M. V. (2011). *Sister citizen: Shame, stereotypes, and Black women in America*. Yale University Press.
- Ibbi, A. A. (2013). Hollywood, the American image and the global film industry. *CINEJ Cinema Journal*, 3(1), 93-106.

- Kaskan, E. R., & Ho, I. K. (2016). Microaggressions and female athletes. *Sex Roles*, 74(7-8), 275-287.
- Keith, V. M., Nguyen, A. W., Taylor, R. J., Mouzon, D. M., & Chatters, L. M. (2017). Microaggressions, discrimination, and phenotype among African Americans: A latent class analysis of the impact of skin tone and BMI. *Sociological inquiry*, 87(2), 233-255.
- Keremane, G. B., & McKay, J. (2011). Using PhotoStory to capture irrigators' emotions about water policy and sustainable development objectives: A case study in rural Australia. *Action Research*, 9(4), 405-425.
- Kite, L. D. (2013). *Healthy media literacy: Bridging critical media literacy and health literacy to promote positive body image and health*. The University of Utah.
- Landrine, H., & Klonoff, E. A. (1996). The schedule of racist events: A measure of racial discrimination and a study of its negative physical and mental health consequences. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22(2), 144-168.
- Lewis, J. A., & Neville, H. A. (2015). Construction and initial validation of the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale for Black women. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 62(2), 289.
- McLaughlin, K. A., Alvarez, K., Fillbrunn, M., Green, J. G., Jackson, J. S., Kessler, R. C. & Alegría, M. (2019). Racial/ethnic variation in trauma-related psychopathology in the United States: A population-based study. *Psychological medicine*, 49(13), 2215-2226.
- Maisu Wong, W. (2012). The promotion of American culture through Hollywood movies to the world. *International Journal of Engineering Research & Technology*, 4(1).

- Miles, M., Huberman, M.A. & Saldana, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Sage Publications.
- Monk Jr, E. P. (2014). Skin tone stratification among black Americans, 2001–2003. *Social Forces*, 92(4), 1313-1337.
- Monk Jr, E. P. (2015). The cost of color: Skin color, discrimination, and health among African-Americans. *American Journal of Sociology*, 121(2), 396-444.
- Nadal, K. L. (2011). The Racial and Ethnic Microaggressions Scale (REMS): construction, reliability, and validity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(4), 470.
- O'Keefe, V. M., Wingate, L. R., Cole, A. B., Hollingsworth, D. W., & Tucker, R. P. (2015). Seemingly harmless racial communications are not so harmless: Racial microaggressions lead to suicidal ideation by way of depression symptoms. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 45(5), 567-576.
- Ong, A. D., Burrow, A. L., Fuller-Rowell, T. E., Ja, N. M., & Sue, D. W. (2013). Racial microaggressions and daily well-being among Asian Americans. *Journal of counseling psychology*, 60(2), 188.
- Pepin, J. R. (2016). Nobody's business? White male privilege in media coverage of intimate partner violence. *Sociological Spectrum*, 36(3), 123-141.
- Pierce, C. (1970). Offensive mechanisms. In F.B. Barbour (Ed.), *The black seventies* (pp. 265-282). Porter Sargent.

- Polanco-Roman, L., Anglin, D. M., Miranda, R., & Jeglic, E. L. (2019). Racial/Ethnic discrimination and suicidal ideation in emerging adults: The role of traumatic stress and depressive symptoms varies by gender not Race/Ethnicity. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 48(10), 2023-2037.
- Riggio, H. R., Weiser, D. A., Valenzuela, A. M., Lui, P. P., Montes, R., & Heuer, J. (2013). Self-efficacy in romantic relationships: Prediction of relationship attitudes and outcomes. *The Journal of social psychology*, 153(6), 629-650.
- Salim, S., Robinson, M., & Flanders, C. E. (2019). Bisexual women's experiences of microaggressions and microaffirmations and their relation to mental health. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 6(3), 336–346.
- Saguy, A. C., & Gruys, K. (2010). Morality and health: News media constructions of overweight and eating disorders. *Social Problems*, 57(2), 231-250.
- Skrzypiec, G., Harvey-Murray, R., & Krieg, S. (2013). The PhotoStory method as a legitimate research tool in evaluations: More than a nice story. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 38(3), 25-35.
- Smith, W. A., Hung, M., & Franklin, J. D., (2011). Racial battle fatigue and the "mis"education of black men: Racial microaggressions, societal problems, and environmental stress. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 80(1), 63-82.
- Suárez-Orozco, C., Casanova, S., Martin, M., Katsiaficas, D., Cuellar, V., Smith, N. A., & Dias, S. I. (2015). Toxic rain in class: Classroom interpersonal microaggressions. *Educational Researcher*, 44(3), 151-160.
- Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M., Nadal, K. N., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Clinical implications. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271-286.
- Torres-Harding, S. R., Andrade Jr, A. L., Diaz, R., & Crist, E. (2012). The Racial Microaggressions Scale (RMAS): A new scale to measure experiences of racial microaggressions in people of color. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18(2), 153.
- Wanzo, R. (2011). Black love is not a fairytale. *Poroi*, 7(2), 5.
- Weiser, D. A., & Weigel, D. J. (2016). Self-efficacy in romantic relationships: direct and indirect effects on relationship maintenance and satisfaction. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 89, 152-156.
- Willis, T. Y. (2015). "And Still We Rise...": Microaggressions and intersectionality in the Study Abroad Experiences of Black Women. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 26, 209-230.
- Williams, D. R., Yu, Y., Jackson, J. S., & Anderson, N. B. (1997). Racial differences in physical and mental health: Socio-economic status, stress and discrimination. *Journal of health psychology*, 2(3), 335-351.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviewer: Hello, my name is (name). How are you today?

Interviewer: Thank you for participating in this study. I appreciate the time you have taken to create your photo stories and the time you are taking today to share them with me.

Interviewer: Do you have any questions about the interview before we get started?

Interviewer: Will you tell me about your picture?

*How would you describe an environmental microaggression?

How can you tell when you're not wanted in a social environment or space?

*What was it like to experience the environmental microaggression in the photo?

What do you think that microaggression is trying to say about who you are?

*How has (insert environmental microaggression example from their photos) affected the way you view yourself?

How has experiencing microaggressions affected your sense of value?

*How do you think (insert environmental microaggression example from their photos) has affected how date-able you see yourself?

How has experiencing microaggressions affected your ideas about romantic relationships?

APPENDIX B

ETHICAL PHOTO TAKING GUIDELINES

Please do not include pictures of people's faces, homes or other private spaces without the person's written permission. You can take photos of people and/or private spaces without written permission if they are not the main focus of the photo.

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Please answer the following questions the best you can and select at least one response per question. Please write in your response if no provided answers fit for you.

1. What is your age (as of your last birthday): _____
2. What year were you born?
3. What was your biological sex at birth?
4. What gender do you identify as?
5. What race do you identify as?
 - ☐ I do not identify myself racially at all.
 - ☐ I identify with my ethnicity, not a race.
 - ☐ Black (not mixed race)
 - ☐ Black (mixed race)
 - ☐ Black (Latinx, not mixed race)
 - ☐ Black (Latinx, mixed race)
 - ☐ Asian (not mixed race)
 - ☐ Asian (mixed race)
 - ☐ Pacific Islander (not mixed race)
 - ☐ Pacific Islander (mixed race)
 - ☐ Indigenous/Native/First Nations (Latinx, not mixed race)
 - ☐ Indigenous/Native/First Nations (Latinx, mixed race)
 - ☐ Indigenous/Native/First Nations (not mixed race)
 - ☐ Indigenous/Native/First Nations (mixed race)
 - ☐ Race (s) not identified above: _____
6. What ethnicity (ies) do you identify with?
 - ☐ I do not identify with an ethnicity.
 - ☐ I identify with my race only.
 - ☐ Latinx
 - ☐ Black American (U.S. descendant of enslaved persons from Africa and Europeans and/or Indigenous Americans)
 - ☐ Creole (United States)
 - ☐ Creole (Caribbean)
 - ☐ Indigenous/Native/First Nations tribe (ex. Mayan, Inuit, Lakota, etc.)
 - ☐ Pacific Islander tribe or ethnic group (ex. Hawaiian, Tongan, Fijian, etc)
 - ☐ East Asian ethnic group (ex. Hmong, Han, Mongol, etc).
 - ☐ South Asian ethnic group (ex. Punjabi, Kashmiri, Rohingya, etc.)

- () Central Asian ethnic group (ex. Arab, Hasara, Ashkenazi, Persian, Kurd, etc.)
- () North African tribe (ex. Afar, Berber, Maghrebis, etc.)
- () West African tribe (ex. Anlo-ewe, Asanti, Yoruba, etc.)
- () South African tribe (ex. San, Zulu, etc.)
- () Central African tribe (ex. Tutsi, Chewa, Nilotes, etc)
- () East African tribe (ex. Amhara, Shona, Somali, etc.)
- () Write in response

7. How long have you lived in the United States?:

_____ years _____ months

8. What country were you born in?

9. What is your nationality or nationalities?

10. What country do you currently live in?

11. What sexual orientation(s) do you identify with?

APPENDIX D

HOW TO CREATE A PHOTOSTORY

1. Take up to 10 pictures of environmental microaggressions in your community.
2. Upload your photos, write a caption and brief explanation of why you chose to take each picture and what each picture represents to you to the google form (I will e-mail you a link to this google form) before the scheduled interview day.
3. Choose 3 specific pictures that you would like to share and talk about during the interview with the researcher.

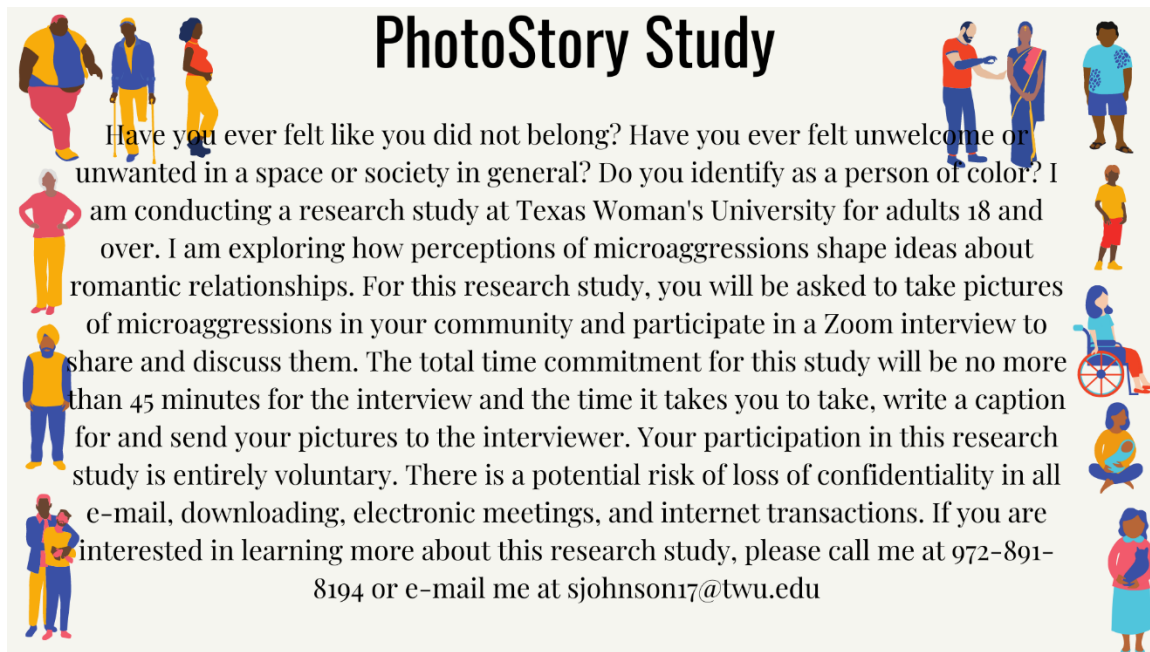
Example PhotoStory

Black Pete. My skin was crawling when I saw this postcard of Santa Claus and Black Pete while visiting a gift shop in a Dutch living history museum. I took this picture to show to my family at home, so they could understand how it might feel to be Black in the Netherlands. This was the first and only time that I saw a drawing or picture of a Black person during my whole trip and it was of a mythological character who steals little children at Christmas time.



APPENDIX E

RECRUITMENT FLIER



PhotoStory Study

Have you ever felt like you did not belong? Have you ever felt unwelcome or unwanted in a space or society in general? Do you identify as a person of color? I am conducting a research study at Texas Woman's University for adults 18 and over. I am exploring how perceptions of microaggressions shape ideas about romantic relationships. For this research study, you will be asked to take pictures of microaggressions in your community and participate in a Zoom interview to share and discuss them. The total time commitment for this study will be no more than 45 minutes for the interview and the time it takes you to take, write a caption for and send your pictures to the interviewer. Your participation in this research study is entirely voluntary. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all e-mail, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions. If you are interested in learning more about this research study, please call me at 972-891-8194 or e-mail me at sjohnson17@twu.edu

The flyer features a central text block surrounded by various colorful illustrations of diverse people. On the left side, there are four illustrations: a group of three people (two men and one woman) in the top left, a woman in a pink shirt and yellow pants in the middle left, a man in a yellow shirt and blue pants in the bottom left, and a man in a blue shirt and yellow pants in the bottom left. On the right side, there are five illustrations: a man in a red shirt and blue pants in the top right, a woman in a blue shirt and blue pants in the top right, a man in a blue shirt and blue pants in the top right, a woman in a yellow shirt and red pants in the middle right, a woman in a blue shirt and red pants in a wheelchair in the bottom right, and a woman in a blue shirt and blue pants in the bottom right.

APPENDIX F
INFORMED CONSENT



CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN
RESEARCH

Title: “You don’t belong here”: Exploring how environmental microaggressions shape romantic expectations through PhotoStory.

Principal Investigator: Sabra Johnson M.S sjohnson17@twu.edu 972-891-8194

Faculty Adviser: Aaron Norton PhD anorton@twu.edu 940-898-2677

Summary and Key Information about the Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Sabra Johnson, a Ph.D. student in the department of Human Development, Family Studies, and Counseling at Texas Woman’s University. The purpose of this study is to explore how the environmental microaggressions people of color experience shape their ideas about romantic relationships. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a self-identified person of color who is at least 18 years of age and has experienced environmental microaggressions. As a participant, you will be asked to take 10 digital photos of environmental microaggressions in your community, write a brief narrative about, and caption each photo. A google form will be provided to you for uploading the photos, captions, and narratives. Also, you will complete a

demographic questionnaire on a google form and submit it online.

Lastly, you will engage in an interview on zoom with the principal investigator about 3 photo stories of your choice. You will be committing up to 4 hours of your time for participation in this study. The greatest risks of this study include the potential loss of confidentiality and emotional discomfort. We will discuss these risks and the rest of the study procedures in greater detail below.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you are interested in learning more about this research study, please review this consent form carefully and take your time deciding whether or not you want to participate. Please feel free to ask the principal investigator any questions you have about the research study at any time.

Description of Procedures

As a participant, you will be asked to take 10 digital photos of environmental microaggressions in your community, write a brief narrative about, and caption each photo. A google form will be provided to you for uploading the photos, captions, and narratives. Also, you will complete a google form demographic questionnaire and submit it online before the zoom interview. Lastly, you will engage in an interview on zoom with the principal investigator about 3 photo stories of your choice. Audio and video from the zoom interviews will be recorded to allow analysis from the principal investigator, dissertation committee faculty, and a trained graduate assistant coder.

Also, you will be committing up to 4 hours of your time for participation in this study. Two participants will be randomly selected to participate in follow-up phone calls about the

research material within 1-5 months after their interviews. Follow-up telephone calls will last for no longer than 20 minutes.

Potential Risks

The principal investigator will ask you questions about your experiences with environmental microaggressions and your ideas about romantic relationships. A possible risk in this study is discomfort with these questions you are asked. If you become tired or upset, you may take breaks as needed during the interview. If you would like to talk to a professional about your experiences during the interview, the researcher has provided you with a list of resources in this document.

Another risk in this study is the loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions. There is an increased risk of loss of confidentiality because the primary investigator will use their private computer to interview, record, and analyze study data. Your name will be replaced with numbers to protect your confidentiality. Texas Woman's University has business licenses with google and zoom programs which provide greater security and encryption of information. Both zoom and google accounts are password protected and secure. Identifiable private information will be stored on an external hard drive that is kept inside a locked room, only accessible to the principal investigator. Only the principal investigator, dissertation committee faculty, trained graduate assistant coder, and professional transcription service will have access to the research data.

Documents including identifiable private information will be destroyed after a period of 5 years. Data will be destroyed by deleting it from the external hard drive and deleting the

googlefolders containing demographic questionnaires and google photo upload forms.

Another risk is loss of time. You may withdraw from this study at any time.

The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. All participants may experience validation, comfort, and a sense of connection when they share their experiences.

Identifiable private information

The audio and video from interviews will be recorded on zoom. Audio and video recordings will be destroyed after a period of 5 years. Personal identifiers will be removed from the identifiable private information. After the removal of personal identifiers, the information will not be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the participant or their legally authorized representative. Photo stories will be displayed on the pages of the current PhotoStory dissertation, future publications, and during future research presentations of the principal investigator.

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their contact

information is at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the Texas Woman's University Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

Please electronically sign and date this form in the space

below. Thank you.

Mental health resources:

University of North Texas Psychology Clinic

<https://psychology.unt.edu/clinics-and-centers/psychology-clinic/>

Counseling and psychological services at UTA in Arlington

<https://www.uta.edu/student-affairs/caps/services>

TWU Counseling and psychological services

<https://twu.edu/counseling/services-for-students/>

SMU Counseling services

<https://www.smu.edu/StudentAffairs/DrBobSmithHealthCenter/Counseling-Services>

American Psychological Association Psychologist

Locator <http://locator.apa.org/>

National Register of Health Service

Psychologists

<http://www.findapsychologist.org/>

Mental Health of America Referrals

<http://www.nmha.org/go/searchMHA>

Psychology Today Find a Therapist

<http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/>

National Board for Certified Counselors

<http://www.nbcc.org/CounselorFind>

APPENDIX G

PHOTO RELEASE FORM

Title: “You don’t belong here”: Exploring how environmental microaggressions shape romantic expectations through PhotoStory.

I consent to be photographed as part of the PhotoStory project on environmental microaggressions and how my perceptions of them shape romantic expectations.

I know that means my picture might be published to show the results of the study. For example, my pictures may be used: in a dissertation, in book chapters, on a website, in journals, in a conference presentation, and all other scientific channels, at photo exhibitions, meetings, or other non-profit public events related to this study.

_____ Print name

_____ Sign here

_____ Date

APPENDIX H

PARTICIPANT PHOTOS

Figure 17

“Black girl on Tinder”



Figure 18

The Only One



Figure 19

“Trump Sticker”



Figure 20

“Mexican AM doll”



Figure 21

“What’s My Blood Pressure?”



Figure 22

“Bad Hair”

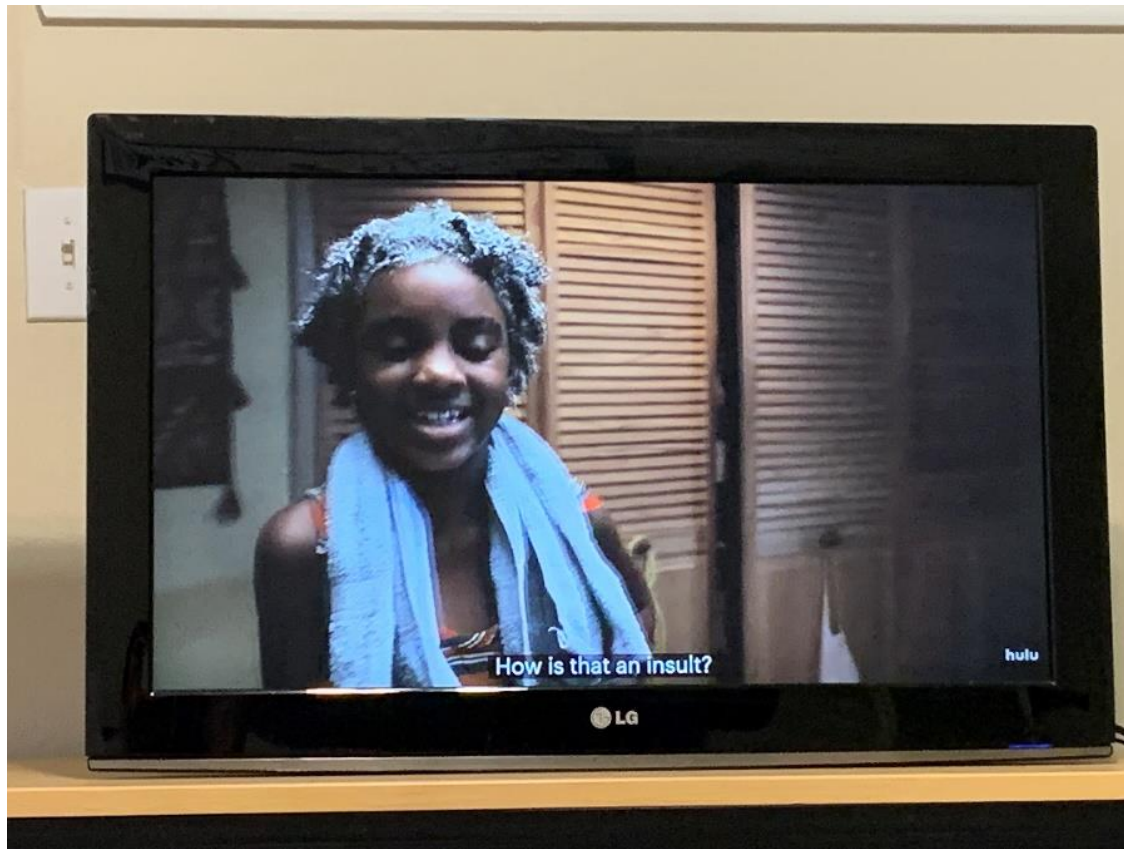


Figure 23

“Latinos overrepresented in service jobs”



Figure 24

“Blue lives don’t exist”



Figure 25

“Single story”



Figure 26

“One size doesn’t fit all”



Figure 27

“It’s always the same light skinned girls”



Figure 28

“Drug dog”

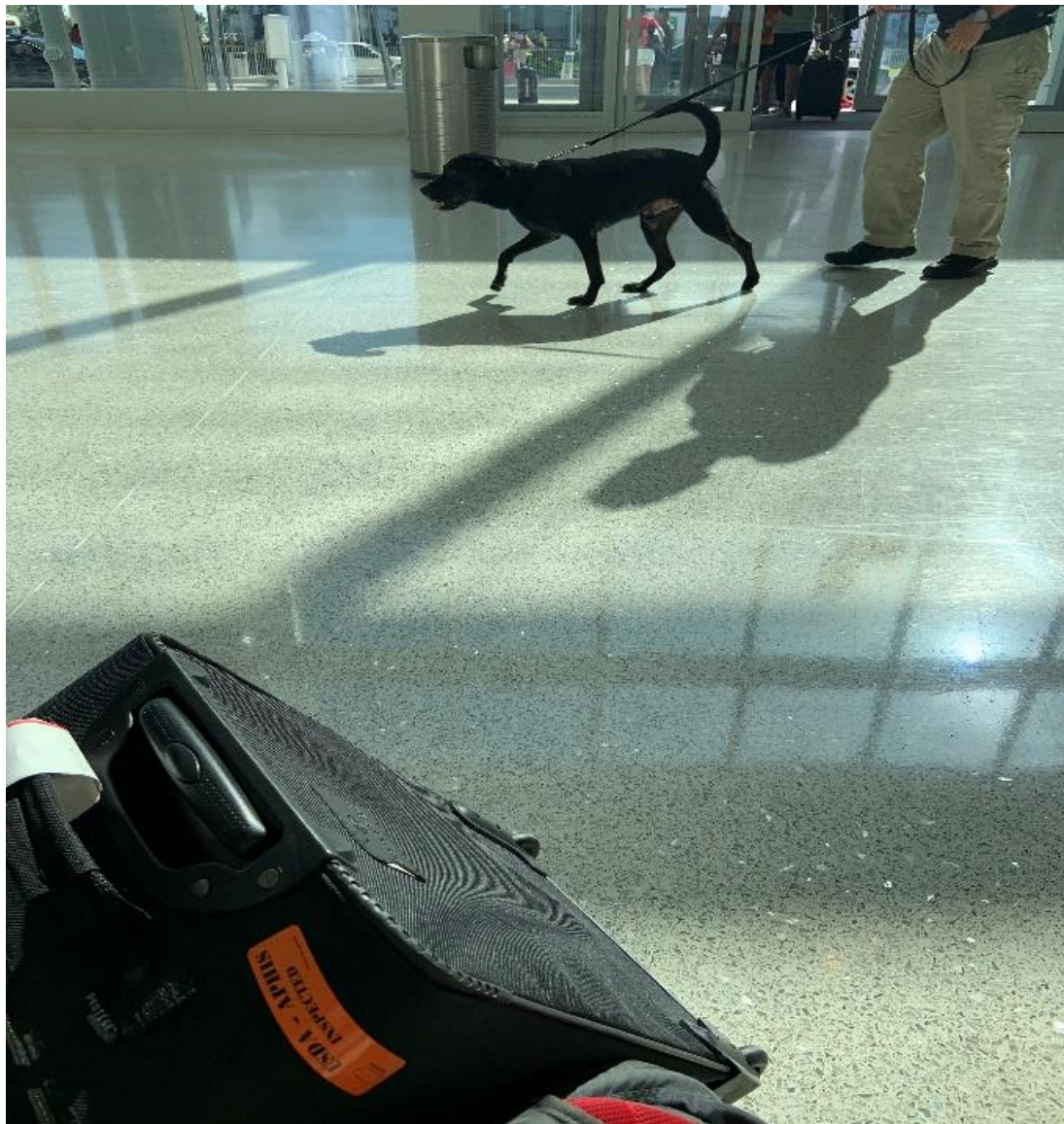


Figure 29

Stereotypes



Figure 30

“Top Nascar drivers”



Figure 31

“White city hall”



Figure 32

“Board of trustees”

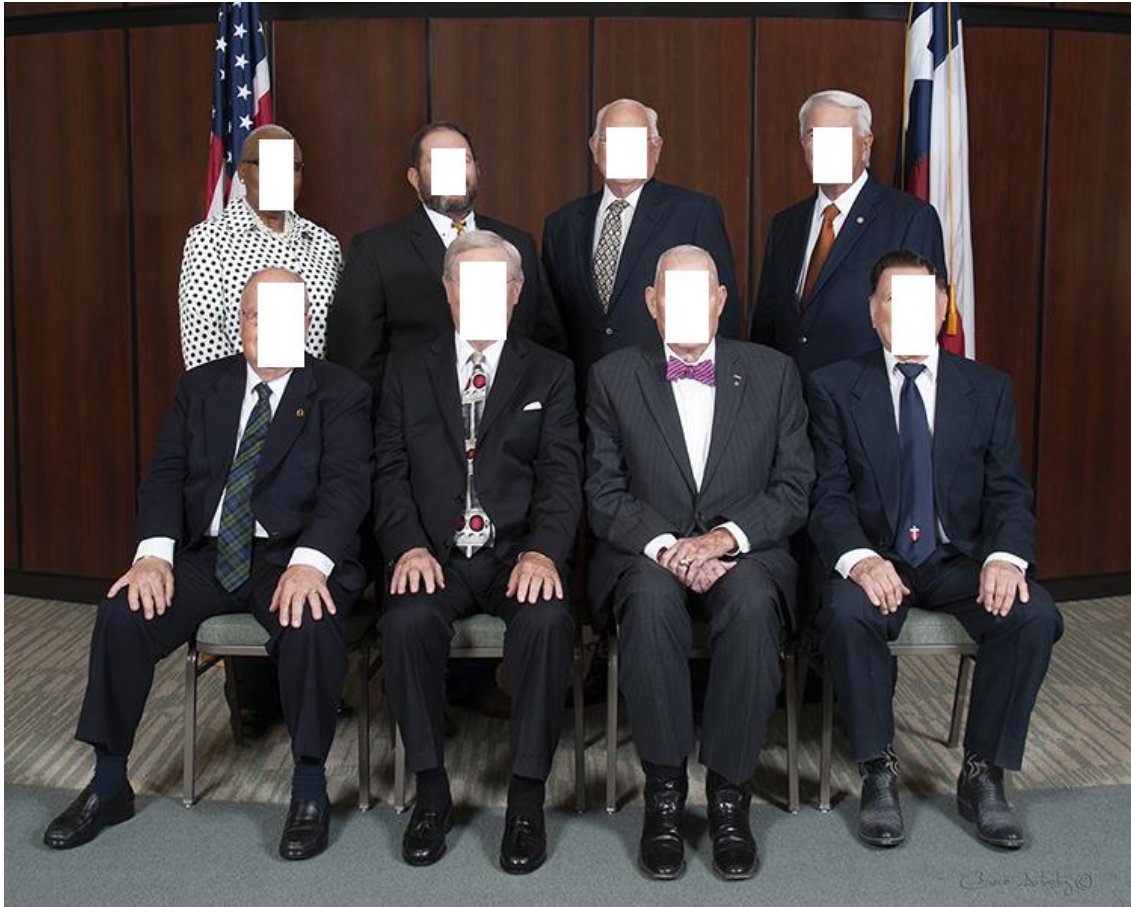


Figure 33

“Natural style”

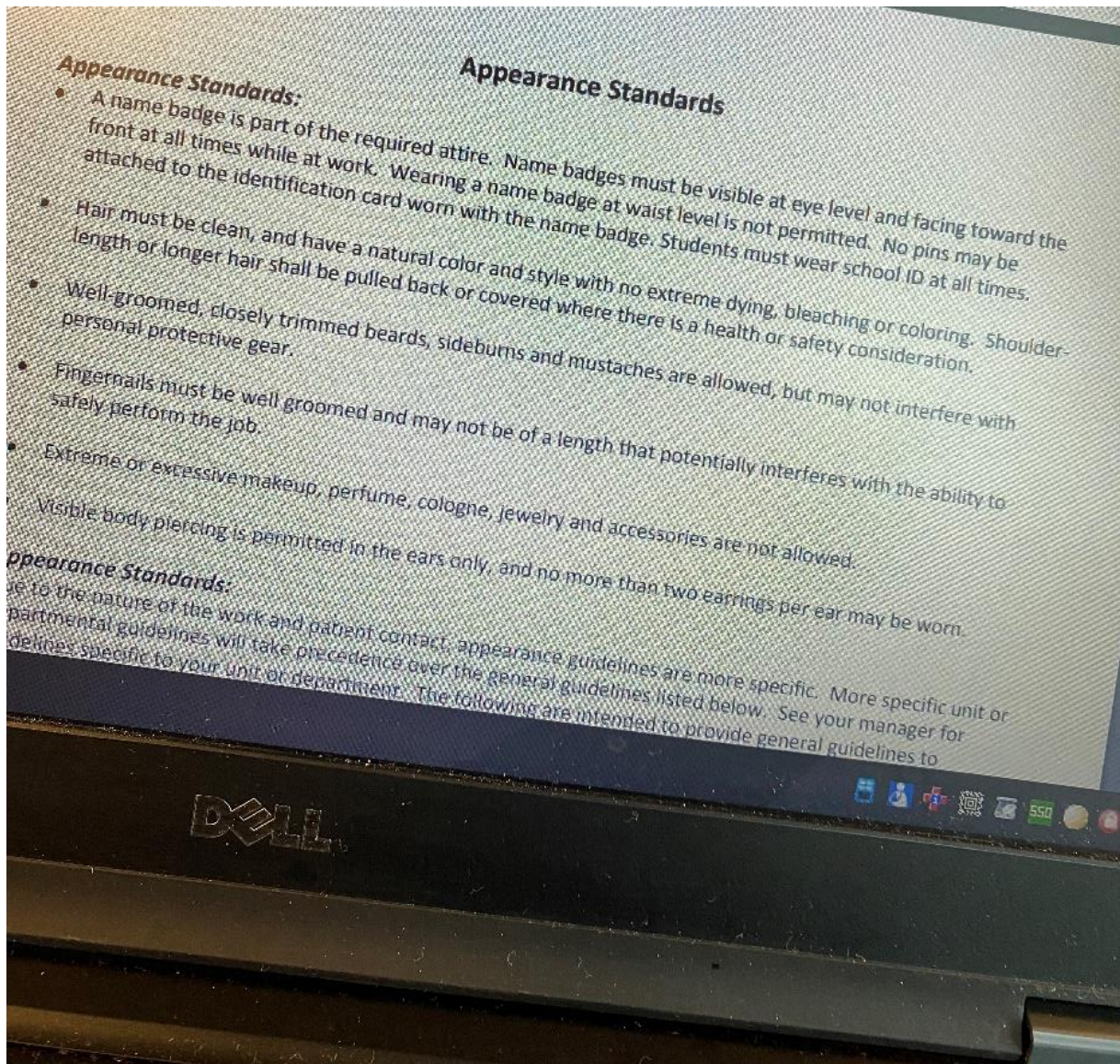


Figure 34

“Lynchburg drive”

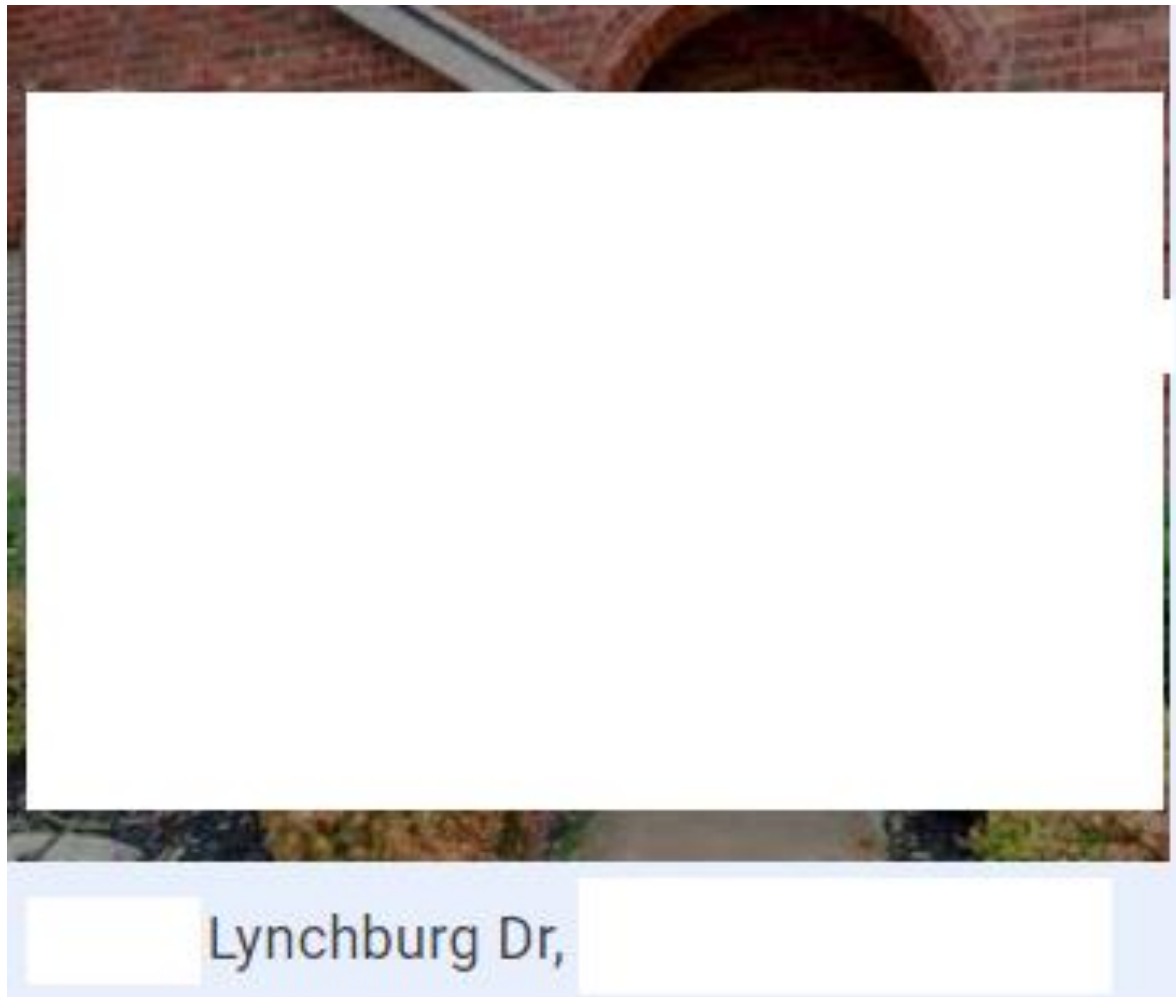


Figure 35

Historical Holiday

Specific goals for day		Actual accomplishments this day	Remote/Campus Hours Worked	Refle
University Closure		University Closure	8 hours w/lunch from 11:30-12:30	
University Closure		University Closure		
University Closure		University Closure		
University Closure		University Closure		
University Closure		University Closure		
Holiday		Holiday		
University Closure		University Closure		
University Closure		University Closure		
University Closure		University Closure		

Figure 36

“Christianity is the norm”



Figure 37

Public Park



Figure 38

“Nice slave owner”



Figure 39

Slurs

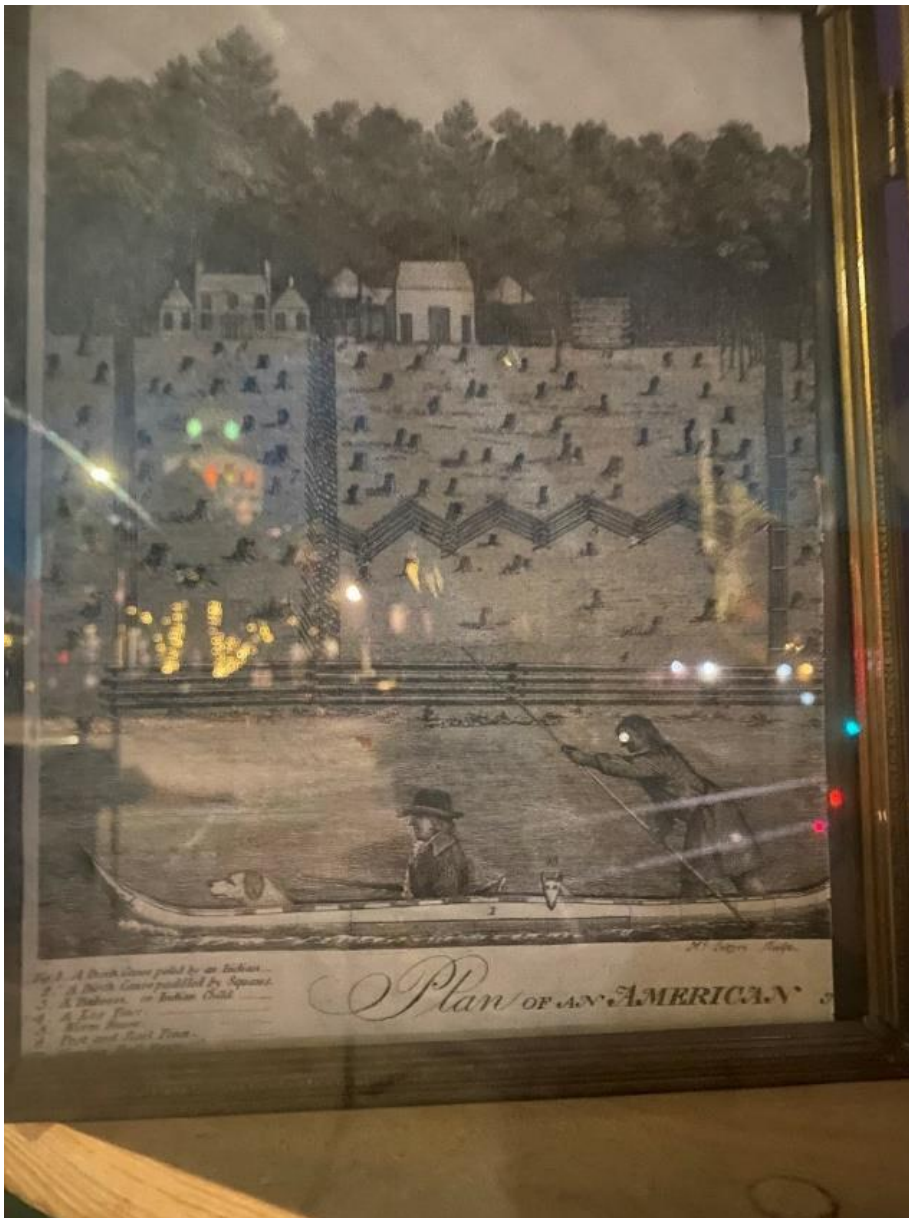


Figure 40

Honoring White Nationalism



Figure 41

“White male US presidents and Obama”

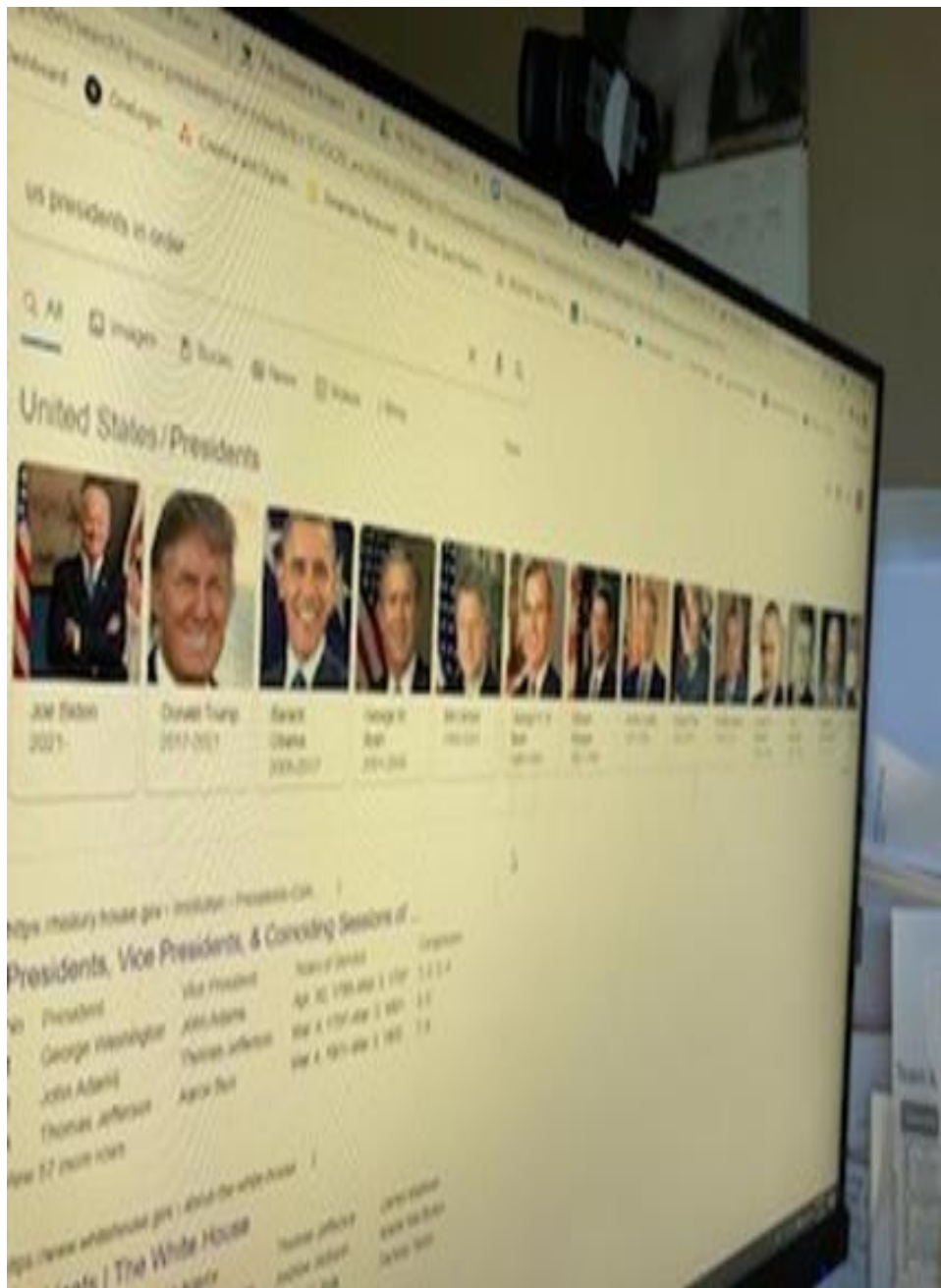


Figure 42

“AM girl doll”



Figure 43

“White Jesus”

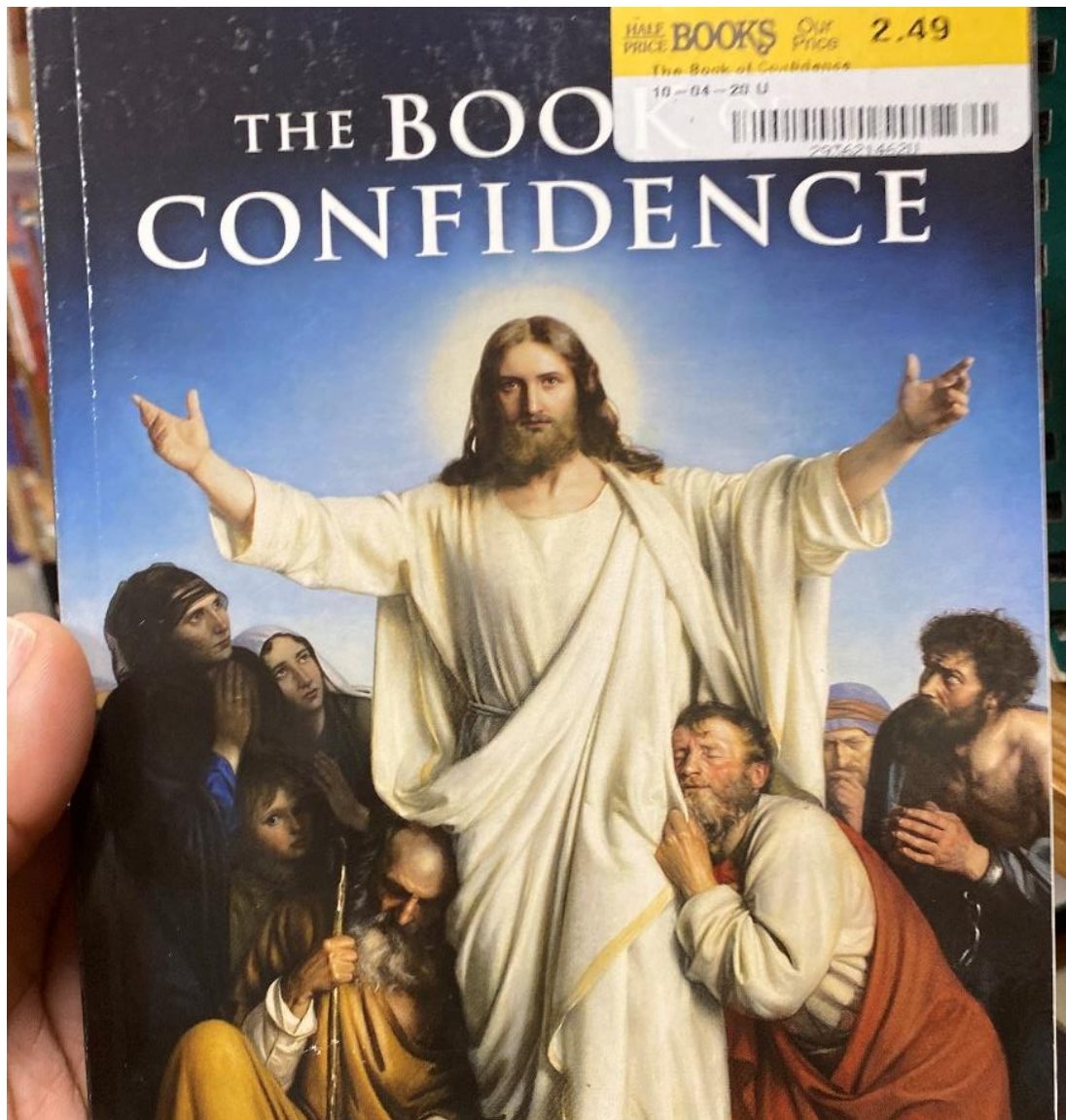


Figure 44

Appropriation



Figure 45

“They all look the same”



Figure 46

“No fat people allowed”



Figure 47

White Nationalism Symbol



Figure 48

“White American dolls”



Figure 49

Triggering Humor



Figure 50

Lingerie Store Display



Figure 51

Store Display Window



Figure 52

Narrow Beauty Representations



Figure 53

"Love isn't for me"



Figure 54

“Top news anchors when I was growing up”



Figure 55

“White tour de France”



Figure 56

“White soccer”



Figure 57

Mall Store Window Display

