

Thesis Report 2020

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Microaggressions

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KEYWORDS -

Microaggression, Social Culture, Community, Social Awareness, Social construct, Social violence, Social behaviour, Discrimination, Marginalize, Insults, snubs, slight, Comments, Statements, Actions, Negative messages, Criticism, Aggression, Subtle, Hostile, Derogatory, Prejudicial, Stigmatize, Degrading, Oppressive treatment, Offensive, Aggrieved, Inflict, Appearance based microaggressions, Body shame, judgemental, Body surveillance, emotions, Body dissatisfaction, Insecurity, lower mental health, Impact, Harmful effects.

ABSTRACT -

The societal idea that being physically and apparently perfect in every form is the only way to be acceptable has fostered dissatisfaction in our minds. Experiencing life as a girl with acne made it even more evident that the majority is cruel to those who don't fit the aesthetic ideal. Regularly experiencing derogatory comments and behaviours made me feel inferior, depressed and shattered my confidence. Through my research I have learned to know that not only me, but everyone experiences such indignities. Some based on their weights, and some on their heights. To give it a specific meaning, such intentional or unintentional indignities are called microaggression. In my work, I have used animation as the medium to address, expose and criticize this particular social problem, in a satirical way that is humorous, ironic, and exaggerated. Furthermore, I have tried to convey the message of how badly it ruins a person's self-esteem, mental health and self-confidence.

SIDE NOTES

This is how psychologist Derald W. Sue, who's written two books on microaggressions, defines the term: "The everyday slights, indignities, put downs and insults that people of color, women, LGBT populations or those who are marginalized experiences in their day-to-day interactions with people."

Source: What exactly is a microaggression?

INTRODUCTION -

Source:

Microaggressions: An Introduction:

Education Book Chapter

The major purpose of this thesis is to present, discuss and criticize the impact of appearance based microaggressions, we face in our daily lives in contemporary Pakistani Society. Microaggression is defined as daily commonplace verbal, behavioural or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that transmit hostile, derogatory or negative messages to a target person because they belong to a stigmatized or a marginalized group.

Struggling with acne and acne scars as a teenager, most of my formative years were spent being heavy. Ridicule and judgment from my peers and superiors left me emotionally scarred and inadequate.

Messages from the media and from each other often imply that we *should* want to change, that we *should* care about looking slimmer, smaller, and tanner. And if we don't, we worry that we are at risk of being the target of someone else's body-shaming comments.

Source: Body Shaming: What Is It & Why Do We Do It?

Later on looking at some motivational people who have overcome their physical flaws, inspired me to take a look in the mirror and face the imperfections that I have long been ashamed of. Facing my own reflection and not being ashamed of the way that my face looks has been a tough journey. This journey gave me the confidence and ability to live with my real self and stay positive even after experiencing such disturbing comments and behaviours. This whole experience has fueled me to work on this thesis topic. It inspired me to convey a positive message to the masses through which people could really understand how important it is to have nice, positive behaviours with each other.

The sole purpose of this project is to eliminate such toxic parts of the society, the microaggressions. And to come up with a possible solution which provokes the public to act and think more positively and responsibly towards it.

PASSION -

Few psychological concepts have caught on as successfully as the idea of the “microaggression”—subtle everyday experiences of discrimination.

My interest in this topic is basically derived from my personal experience as a woman who has acne, I myself have been the greatest victim of microaggression. This experience has been tremendously eye-opening as it really made me think about how unhealthy my environment is and It has made me see the community and world that I live in.

During my teen years, I got acne and gradually I started to get taunts and comments about my appearance from everyone I met, some would casually tell me the remedies to cure it and others would just ask me what I did to my face. All these harsh statements and comments somehow shattered my self-confidence, It made me more conscious and more shy about myself. It became hard for me to go to college or family functions or to interact with people. Having pimples and acne was tough but tougher was handling these everyday comments that caused depression and anxiety. My struggle with such disturbing microaggressions inspired me to work on this topic. With the passage of time, I realised that it’s not only me who face microaggressions but every single person every single day is being judged on the basis of their appearance. More tragic is the fact that, It has become normal for people to point out each other’s flaws and imperfections without knowing the impact of their words or actions.

The overweight individual, especially if she is a woman, probably suffers more from the social and physical stigma of obesity than she does from the actual physical condition. In a wide variety of ways, she is negatively defined by her weight and is excluded from full participation in the ranks of the normal.

Some are called short, some fat, some skinny, some are insulted for their skin color. In the society we live in it is not considered a bad thing to make fun of other people's physical appearance. Rather it is considered totally normal and is present in every day-to-day conversation. People just laugh it off without realizing what effects they can bring to the next person and do not even feel bad about it. The idea of microaggression has somehow been increased in our society over the past few years due to the strong negative

Sitcoms (comedy shows) so frequently use overweight characters' bodies as the basis of many of the show's jokes.

Source: Body Shaming: What Is It & Why Do We Do It?

effects of beauty standards caused by social media and the fashion industry. These combined factors can cause the average person to look at themselves poorly, in comparison to these perfect and unrealistic versions of beauty that the media displays. People are constantly struggling to just look perfect, to forget the real and natural features of themselves that make them unique and to look acceptable in the society they live in.

This eventually disturbs the mental peace of individuals and makes them extremely conscious about themselves, which in some cases, eventually leads to serious issues —people committing suicides and doing self-harm due to inferiority complex.

PROJECT SCOPE -

Microaggressions are everyday encounters of subtle insult or discrimination that people of various marginalized groups experience throughout their lives. In my project, I am focusing on the negative effects caused by the appearance based microaggressions, both on men and women in our Pakistani society on a daily basis.

I started this thesis project because I wanted the concept of microaggressions to be discussed in more detailed and meaningful ways and to be made available to all kinds of audiences. It's a concept that has got some recognition in the western society, it is being discussed in academic circles, social service organizations, Social research centers and among college students. However, when it comes to the Eastern society, people in general are not aware of this term at all. We need to teach more people about microaggressions, in order to educate them about how hurtful microaggressions can be and how negatively they can affect people's lives. We need people to be mindful of their words and the little things they do that harm people's lives.

So as a direct victim of microaggression, the sole purpose of doing this project is to educate the public in order to eliminate such toxic parts of society —the microaggressions, which result in an alarming increase in mental health issues.

DESIGN STATEMENT -

Design as a solution to a social problem

Visual communication Design plays an important role when it comes to producing meaningful visuals that need to be understood by the masses. If the design and the concept do not go hand in hand, then it could be difficult for any creative practitioner to convey their message to the target audience. In my thesis, I am using animation as a medium to address a particular social problem largely known as — Microaggression and to come up with a possible solution which provokes the public to think more positively towards it. So to develop a deeper understanding of the topic as well as the associated design concept, I used a world renowned and widely practised methodology called Design thinking. This methodology helped me to gain an empathetic understanding of the problem. Through interviews and surveys I analyzed that the challenges & the implications of the topic I have chosen to work on is not easily being understood by a lot of people. Many people still struggle with the concept of microaggression, they do not know what microaggression is in the first place. People cannot usually differentiate between microaggression and other forms of serious discriminations.

So when I started to generate ideas the first and the foremost thing I had in my mind was to keep the medium simple in a way that people could easily understand my concept. I experimented with illustrations, Comics and Photo manipulation, none of them turned out to be impactful. Then finally I chose to make a series of 2-D animations, each animation addressing a certain microaggression. Each animation has a different story that revolves around

the negative effects of the everyday microaggressions based on the physical appearance. Through these short animations that show microaggressions about weight, height, skin, hair and other physical features, I want to make people realize how serious these subtle comments can turn out to be. Each animation has a different character, who is experiencing a certain microaggression and is being attacked by the words. I have shown how the words impact us in a negative way, rather than encouraging us these subtle comments make us even more insecure about our appearance. Such comments disturb our mental health, shatters our confidence and makes us extremely conscious about ourselves. Such negativity leads to people doing different things to look acceptable in the society they live in.

TARGET AUDIENCE -

Microaggression is something that is present in our daily life, everyone around us experiences some sort of microaggressions on a daily basis. Microaggressions often appear to be a compliment or a joke, they happen so casually and frequently that most of the time we do not even identify a microaggression nor do we respond to it.

So my target audience includes everyone, people who experience it as well as those who intentionally or unintentionally make such comments that fall under the category of microaggression.

Chapter 2

RESEARCH QUESTIONS -

- *What kind of microaggressions are present in Contemporary Pakistani society?*
- *What sort of appearance based microaggressions people experience on a daily basis and what do they feel about it?*

- *What is the impact of appearance based microaggressions on both men and women?*
- *What role do such microaggressions play in shaping our perception about our self and our appearance?*
- *How concerned are people about their appearances?*
- *Do such comments affect the mental health of the individuals who experience it?*
- *How can we eliminate the element of microaggression from our society?*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK -

There are many contemporary concepts that fall under the category of microaggression. Such as

Race or ethnicity:

In 2007 Social scientists Bucceri, Lin, Sue, Nadal and Torino described microaggressions as "the new face of racism". They said that the nature of racism has shifted over time from overt expressions of racial hatred, toward expressions of aversive racism, such as microaggressions, that are subtle, ambiguous, and often unintentional. One of the examples of aversive racism is, A White man or woman clutches their purse or checks their wallet as a Black or Latino man approaches or passes by. (Hidden message: You and your group/race are criminals)

Gender Politics:

Explicit sexism in our society is on the decline, but still exists in a variety of subtle and non-subtle expressions. Women encounter microaggressions on a daily basis in which they are made to feel inferior, sexually objectified, and bound to restrictive gender roles, both in the workplace, in academia, as well as in athletics. For example, a female physician wearing a stethoscope is

mistaken as a nurse. (Hidden message: Women should not occupy the decision making roles, they should only work as helpers. Women are less capable than men).

- Whistles or catcalls are heard from men as a woman walks by. (Hidden message: Your body or appearance is for the enjoyment of men. You are a sex object.)

- If a boy is crying he is asked to “stop crying and acting like a little girl.” (Hidden message: Boys are emotionally and physically stronger and girls are weaker.)

Sexuality and sexual orientation:

In focus groups, Individuals identifying as bisexual report such microaggressions happening to them while others deny or dismiss their self-narratives or identity claims. They claim to be unable to understand or accept bisexuality as a possibility, pressuring them to change their bisexual identity and expecting them to be sexually promiscuous. They question their ability to maintain monogamous relationships.

- A young lady uses the term "gay" to describe a movie that she didn't like. (Hidden message: Being gay is associated with negative, undesirable and disliked characteristics.)

- Two gay men holding hands in public are told not to flaunt their sexuality in public. (Hidden message: Same-sex display of affection is abnormal. Keep it private and to yourselves.)

People with illnesses:

People with illnesses report receiving more overt forms of microaggression than subtle ones, coming from family and friends as well as from authority figures. The Microaggressions are not only limited to those who are visibly disabled such as wheelchair-users or physically deformed or those with a cleft lip but also those with learning disabilities or difficulties such as

"Too often do we forget that people with disabilities, too, have to deal with Microaggressions on the regular,"

Source : 13 Microaggressions People With Disabilities Face On A Daily Basis

dyslexia and dysgraphia, major depressive disorder and other disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome. Comments such as **'The way you've overcome your disability is so inspiring'** are so disturbing for the people who have to deal with such microaggressions on a regular basis.

Ageism and intolerance:

Microaggressions of ageism and intolerance are described as the subtle things people say and do that show a bias against older people and unwillingness to accept their views. Microaggressions affect the older people in the same ways they impact members of other marginalized groups—destroying their self-esteem, causing distress and worst of all, closing doors to opportunities that should be open. A joke isn't funny if it harms other people.

'Do you even know what Snapchat is?' Those who believe that only they in their 20s and 30s could possibly know about new technology, memes and twitter are stereotyping old people.

CONCEPT/S -

Social theorists reason that subtle expressions of prejudice are far more effective in maintaining hierarchical differences between social groups than are overt forms, because it is natural to question the very existence of the prejudice itself when expressed with subtlety.

Subtle expression allows prejudice to exist as a visible, yet hard to verify, aspect of social life that maintains current unequal social and economic conditions between majority and minority group members. It is within this historical context that microaggressions enter. These subtle expressions of prejudice can theoretically contribute to the maintenance of economic and social inequalities between majority and minority individuals in society

while simultaneously raising the specter of doubt in their very existence. The historical context suggests that though they are thought to be less severe, modern forms of prejudice appear to be doing the same job as more overt forms of the past did by disadvantaging/degrading ethnic minorities and other marginalized populations in society in favor of dominant group members.

In this historical context a seemingly benign question posed toward an Asian American student like “What is your nationality?” highlights the subordinate citizenship status that ethnic minorities hold relative to Whites—a citizenship status that Japanese Americans had directly questioned when they were placed in internment camps during World War II while their Italian and German American counterparts continued to live in their homes. When a person says something as well-intentioned as “Everyone can succeed in this society, if they work hard enough,” to an American Indian student, it is possible that the student will interpret that statement in the historical context within which their relatives were systematically eradicated from North America so that Whites could settle on the land.

LITERATURE REVIEW -

The term Microaggression was basically introduced by psychiatrist and Harvard University professor Chester M. Pierce in 1970, to describe insults and behaviours that he witnessed white people inflicting on black people. Later on in the early 21st century, this term started applying to the degradation of any socially marginalised group, such as the LGBT society, women, old people, disabled people and people living in poverty.

Another psychologist and Columbia University Professor Derald Sue has written several books on this topic, one of them is ‘**Microaggressions in Everyday Life**’. In this book Derald Sue has provided suggestions through research and theories to overcome and eventually eliminate the element of microaggression from our society at the individual, institutional and societal

In an April 2014 interview with USA Today, Sue said that he was happy to see the term microaggression go "mainstream" and said he'd noticed that college students found microaggressions "experientially true." In other words, people have embraced it because it described things that are really happening to them.

Source : What exactly is a microaggression?

1. Microaggressions happen casually, frequently, and often without any harm intended.

2. "People who engage in microaggressions are ordinary folks"

3. Microaggressions can even cause physical health problems.

Source : What exactly is a microaggression?

level. In a very constructive way he has provided an insightful and thought provoking analysis of the term microaggression, talks about the types of microaggression and how these biases impact the people who constantly face it. Through research and studies he has shown that people who experience microaggressions more often have more mental health issues than the ones who experience it not at all. Microaggressions may appear to be subtle and indirect than other types of discriminations, but they still can have a cumulative effect over time, which impacts the mental health of an individual. The ambiguous and subtle nature of microaggressions make them frustrating for victims, since they may be unsure of how to respond. Plus, they can affect the environment of a workplace or a school, making it more hostile and less validating.

Moving on I read multiple articles one of them is **‘What exactly is a microaggression’** by **Jenee Desmond-Harris** which basically gives us a detailed knowledge and understanding of what microaggression is, where and how it happens. The nature of microaggression as well as the consequences brought by it. It enlightens us on the harmful effects of microaggression, states that Microaggressions not only causes mental health issues it can even cause physical health problems. Another article

In a recent research it is found that experiencing microaggressions more frequently can lead to frustration, self-doubt, and lower mental health. In one study, a researcher named Nadal and his colleagues looked at the relationship between experiencing microaggressions and mental health. They asked 506 participants to indicate whether they had experienced different microaggressions in the past 6-7 months, and participants completed a survey. The researchers found that participants who had experienced more microaggressions reported higher levels of depression and anxiety, and lower levels of positive emotions in their lives.

In another research at Fordham University's Lincoln Center campus, A photographer named **Kiyun**, asked her friends to write down an instance of racial microaggression they have faced. They carried out this project in order to show how these comments create and enforce uncomfortable, violent and unsafe realities onto people's workplace, home, school and public transportation. Following are some photographs from this project.

Source:
21 Racial Microaggressions You Hear On A
Daily Basis



Similarly another project was carried out to document microaggressions against the LGBT community by **Kevin Nadal** a psychologist, researcher and expert on the effects of microaggressions on racial/ethnic minorities and LGBTQ people. He asked some of his friends to share the microaggressions they have heard or experienced as members of the LGBT community and photographed them holding signs with the microaggressions written on it.

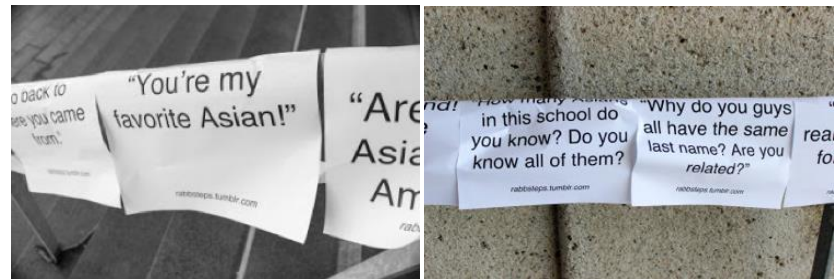
Source:
https://www.buzzfeed.com/hnigatu/19-lgbt-microaggressions-you-hear-on-a-daily-basis?utm_term=.knBK29G71#.tpzDe4LMx



Another project related to microaggressions was carried out by the Asian student association at Brandeis University. They set up an art exhibit in a public space on campus to stir up a conversation about race. These Asian

American Students Association also sent a lengthy email to the general Brandeis student population saying that the “burden of microaggressions can be overwhelming and frustrating.”

Source:
Asian students' art exhibit 'outs' racial microaggressions.on campus



This blog, however, is a space to extend this concept to different socially constructed identities that embody privilege in different ways - sexuality, class, religion, education level, to name a few - in hopes of making visible the ways in which social difference is produced and policed in everyday lives through comments of people around you.

Source:
power, privilege, and everyday life. — About

There is another project in which they have created a website in order to create a platform specifically to talk about these everyday microaggressions about class, religion, sexuality, gender, physical appearance and much more. The purpose of this project is to make people share their experiences with each other and talk about them in order to spread the idea of microaggression and spread awareness about the social differences. That is what they say about their project.

“This project is a response to “it’s not a big deal” - “it” is a big deal. “it” is in the everyday. “it” is shoved in your face when you are least expecting it. “it” happens when you expect it the most. “it” is a reminder of your difference. “it” enforces difference. “it” can be painful. “it” can be laughed off. “it” can slide unnoticed by either the speaker, listener or both. “it” can silence people. “it” reminds us of the ways in which we and people like us continue to be excluded and oppressed. “it” matters because these relate to a bigger “it”: a society where social difference has systematic

consequences for the “others.” but “it” can create or force moments of dialogue.”

Source:
Suzie Blake

Moving onto another great project called ‘**The Wall Of Shamed**’. It is an art installation started by the Australian artist Suzie Blake. She installed the wall at the Victorian College of the Arts Masters Graduate Exhibition in Melbourne, Australia and placed a bag full of markers so that women, and people of other genders, could write out the hateful words or microaggressions other people have said to them. What I found interesting about the project is the fact that this project is not only a work of art but it also works as a research method to collect data. Women wrote down the hateful comments or microaggressions they experience about their bodies and their physical appearance. Following are some pictures of the project.



that is Black Americans. Such prejudice or bias was once commonplace in the US.

In another Cartoon Network's cartoon series, **'Power Puff Girls'** - we find a similar content in its Five-part television movie called Power of four. Professor Utonium did a chemical experiment to bring Bubbles, blossom and buttercup into existence. Similarly, In the past he conducted the same experiment, which produced another daughter, who ended up being left in a distant land due to complications involving lack of control over her powers. The long-lost sister now returned, and her name is Blisstina, Bliss for short. On 6th September 2017, Cartoon Network announced the new addition through an Instagram post that displayed the silhouette of the taller, darker sister. This character is shown to have an attitude problem, and that it tucked her into the stereotype of the "angry black girl."

Another issue arises with Bliss's appearance: longer legs, taller, cinched waist and accentuated hips. While her appearance can be justified as her being old in comparison to her sisters, many viewers take her appearance as a fetishization of black female bodies.

There are a number of movies that are based on the topics that come under the umbrella of microaggression. **'Nappily ever after'** is one example of them. It's a movie that shows the life of a black woman with an overbearing mother obsessed with her daughter's physical appearance and ability to attract the perfect man. Since her childhood she has been told by her mother that she has to look slim, smart and beautiful all the time even when she sleeps. The daughter's emotional struggle with life is shown, she is not allowed to gain weight. She is never allowed to be ugly, to be the way she naturally is. Due to her natural hair being curly and frizzy, her mother always keeps her hair straightened so that she never looks ugly and no one sees her like that in her natural state. This constant pressure by her mother

Receiving comments about one's natural hair is a frequent struggle for African-American women in particular. Black women's textured hair is often seen as 'less professional' than smooth hair, according to the Perception Institute.

Sources:

<https://www.businessinsider.com/microaggression-unconscious-bias-at-work-2018-6>

emotionally shatters her at a point where she stops caring about whatever her mother has always taught us to do.

This movie depicts the connection between hair and identity for black women, how they constantly struggle with their hair looking perfect so that no one criticizes their appearance. It represents how these women are trapped by the expectations of society and how they constantly struggle to just look acceptable in the society they live in.

Similarly, another movie '**Get out**' does a phenomenal job of showing how microaggressions work and more importantly how they can often be as frustrating and scary as overt hostility, even when they come from seemingly good intentions. This movie depicts the real face of racism in contemporary America. It shows a main character named Chris, a black guy who ends up meeting his white girlfriend's family. The family tends to be very nice to Chris, their attempt to show how un-racist they are only serves to alienate him and make him awkward. In a party at her girlfriend's house, Chris deals with numerous microaggressions from white people such as "Black is in fashion" when his girlfriend introduces him with the guests. Then another white man asks him "Do you find that being African-American has more advantages or disadvantages in the modern world?". All these scenes are full of suspense and tension, which makes the audience feel the same tension and stress marginalized people feel everyday.

Moving onto another reference '**13 reasons why**'. The story gives an overview of the kind of things that can drive people, especially teenage girls, to kill themselves. Even more it is about the small, subtle things that people might not even think about. These small things do not directly lead to suicide but they do undermine a person's self-esteem and self-worth. Hannah who is the main character, is the victim of a number of acts of sexism throughout the show. A list goes on around the school that places Hannah in the 'best asses' category. Guys begin to stare at her which makes her so

uncomfortable that it becomes hard for her to spend time in the school. She is betrayed by her multiple friends, she is being ignored or undermined due to these scandals about her. The amount of pain and anxiety Hannah is put through is exhausting. This show depicts the difference between what men experience and what women experience in our society. No matter what a guy does, he is never targeted by society but when it comes to women they ... However, the worst thing is that a lot of those conversations/comments that are shown in this tv show are exactly what girls hear every day. These subtle comments at the body reduce the feelings of independence in women. 13 reasons why is the analysis or summary of the things that can lead to major depression, or the large events that can destroy lives.

VISUAL REFERENCES -

Visual references play an important role in helping us jot down creative ideas to make powerful visuals. I found a lot of interesting works that were directly or indirectly related to my topic "Microaggressions". I looked up different artists and collected a variety of imagery that helped me develop interesting and meaningful visuals.



Tyler feder
@tylerfeder on Instagram



@race_issues on Instagram

An online space discussion racial microaggression created by @canadiancmf. They share race issue comics and other related works.



Cinta Tort Cartro

@Zinteta on Instagram

This 21 years old artist is using her instagram page to spread body-positive messages online.

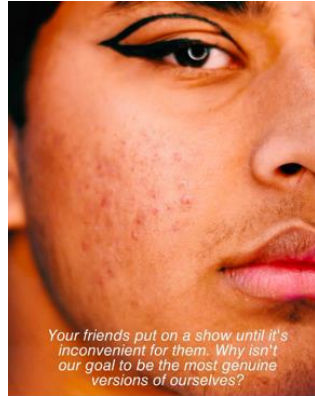
Andrea Wachter, a psychotherapist and author says – *“I have learned that changing my body will not make me feel loved, loving myself will. To love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance and all women and men have the right to accept their body. The shame is on the ones who use that to attack their self-esteem.”*

Source: Love Your Body | Andrea

Wachter



@the_illustrator_of_curves on Instagram



@Baemisaal on Instagram



"WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOUR SKIN?"

MY BATTLEFIELD IS IN MY MIND & ALL DAY I BATTLE BETWEEN HOW OTHERS VIEW ME AND HOW I VIEW MYSELF. ALTHOUGH I AM ABLE TO DEFEAT MOST OF MY BATTLES, THEY STILL AFFECT MY MIND, HOW, AND WHAT I THINK. IN ADDITION, SOME TEASED, FEARED, AND VIEWED DIFFERENTLY AS OTHERS CAUSED A GRENTH IN COMPASSION WITHIN ME. FOR OTHERS WHO SUFFER FROM THE SAME DISCRIMINATION, I DO NOT WANT PEOPLE TO VIEW SOMEONE THAT IS NOT "NORMAL" AS AN OUTCAST, BUT AS A PERMANENT ABNOMALY.

-YVESMARK



"What's on your face?"

My birthmark does not define me.
My birthmark does not make me ugly.
My birthmark does not make me weak.
My birthmark makes me strong.
My birthmark makes me confident.
My birthmark makes me beautiful.

What's on my face shouldn't matter.

-Amber



Peter De Vito
Photographer and Illustrator

“Most of us are potential victims of ‘body shaming’ – the widespread phenomenon of receiving cruel feedback when our bodies don’t meet the unreal beauty standards of our time. We spend our time lost in self-critical thoughts, despising our body and comparing ourselves unfavorably to others. Let us make each other realise that fat, tall, short, thin are not insults but just characteristic.”

-- Kaanchi Chopra

Source: Let's talk about body shaming



Kaanchi Chopra

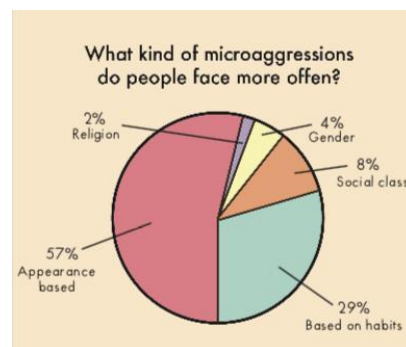


Shehzil Malik

RESEARCH QUESTIONS EXPLAINED -

1. What kind of microaggressions are present in Contemporary Pakistani society?

I carried out a series of surveys and interviews, where I asked people around me about the microaggressions they face on a daily basis. In the data I gathered during this exercise, I found that most of the people experience microaggressions based on their physical appearance. I collected more than 100 comments from different people and most of these comments targeted people on the basis of their physical appearance. So to answer this question, I would say that the appearance based microaggressions are more common in our contemporary Pakistani Society. Here are some comments and the statistical data that I collected in my research (surveys) to support my answer.



Sehat kyu itni down ho gae hai (Hidden message: You look so skinny. You need to put on some weight.)

Lambe balon mai pyari lgti thi (Hidden message: You looked pretty in long hair now you do not look good.)

2. Do such comments affect the mental health of the individuals who experience it?

Microaggressions are the kind of comments, questions, or actions that are painful because they have to do with a person's membership in a group that's discriminated against or subjected to stereotypes.

Although microaggressions appear to be subtle than other types of discrimination, but they can have a cumulative effect over time, which impacts the mental health of the individuals who experience it. Microaggressions happen casually and frequently and most of the time the perpetrator of a microaggression may or may not be aware of the harmful effects of their behavior. Microaggressions often appear to be a joke or a compliment, but contain a hidden message or insult. They are more than just insults, insensitive comments, or generalized jerky behavior. The ambiguous and subtle nature of microaggressions makes them especially frustrating for victims, since they may be unsure of how to respond. Social theorists and Researchers have also suggested that experiencing microaggressions can lead to frustration, self-doubt, and lower mental health.

1. Be constantly vigilant of your own biases and fears.
2. Seek out interaction with people who differ from you (in terms of race, culture, ethnicity, and other qualities).
3. Don't be defensive.
4. Be open to discussing your own attitudes and biases and how they might have hurt others or in some sense revealed bias on your part.
5. Be an ally, by standing personally against all forms of bias and discrimination

3. How can we eliminate the element of microaggression from our society?

In order to eliminate the practice of microaggressions from our society, we need to first make an effort at an individual level.

It's not very hard to put some thought into the biases we might hold, we should become curious about the way our words and actions are perceived by others. We should listen when people explain why certain remarks offend them, and make it a habit to stop for a beat and think before we speak, especially when we are weighing in on someone's identity.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY -

My research methodology was based on it being qualitative as well as quantitative. I am basically focusing on the microaggressions in a local context and what kind of microaggressions are present in our present Pakistani society. First of all, I myself have been a direct victim of microaggression so the first thing I did was to observe and write down all the microaggressions that I personally experienced on a daily basis, I carried out a similar activity in my class, my home and my hostel. I started noticing the microaggressions that were happening around me - mostly with my friends and family. I would write down all those actions and comments that I witnessed and put them in my journal.

Then I moved onto interviews. I interviewed some of my friends and family members, and a couple of people from my hostel. Most of them did not have any idea about microaggressions. So to give them a better understanding, I shared my knowledge about this topic and my experience with the microaggressions. These interviews did not turn out to be effective as people were shy to talk about this in person. They did not find it comfortable to share their personal experiences.

Later on, I found it important to gather quantifiable data as well. It was necessary to see the statistical image of Microaggression in contemporary Pakistani society. I carried out my research in the form of surveys in order to know what kind of microaggressions are locally used in contemporary Pakistani society, what sort of microaggressions people around me experience regularly and what do they feel about it. I used different platforms to carry out the survey, I first carried out an online survey on my instagram with around 100 participants and recorded the data. Then I did the same survey in a physical or paper form with my classmates, there were a total of

25 participants. The responses I received from people showed that most of the microaggressions people face are based on their physical appearances.

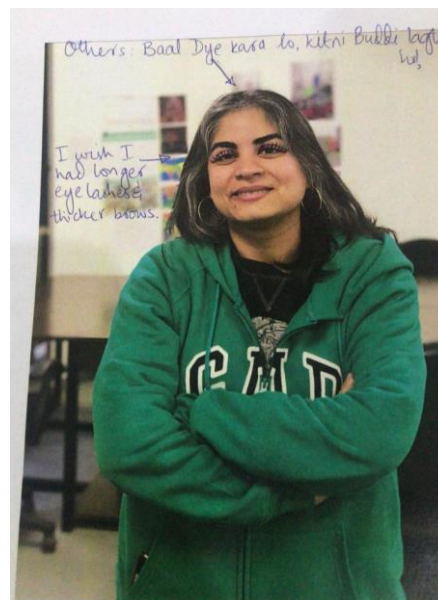
I further made a chart incorporating the data I collected through the surveys and interviews. **(shown on the next page)**

In another presentation that I conducted in my class, I did an activity with my peers in order to collect data. The number of people that participated in this activity was around 20. It was a fun activity, I got printed pictures of each person with me and distributed them in a way that everyone got his or her own picture. then I asked them to do the following

- Draw what you want to change in your body.
- Then tell if you are being told by others to change it or is it what you think of yourself.
- If you are being told by others to change your physical appearance then please write down the comments or microaggressions that you experience.

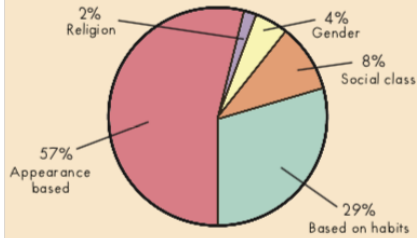
Following are some pictures from that activity.



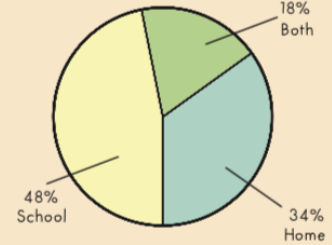


RESEARCH DATA

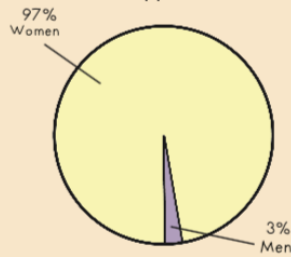
What kind of microaggressions do people face more often?



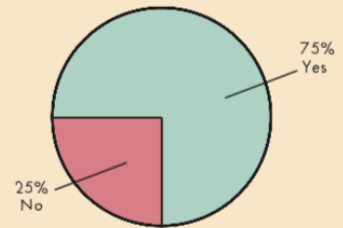
Where do people usually face a microaggression?



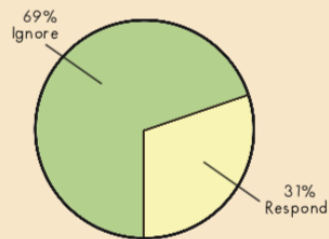
Who gets more criticised about their appearance?



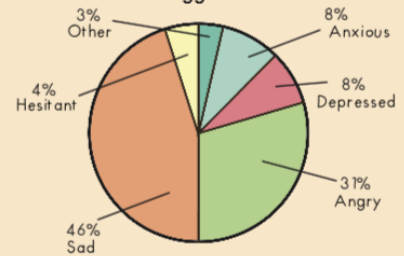
Do such comments affect a person's mental health in anyway?



How do people react to such comments?



What do people feel after facing a microaggression?



What people get criticized for more often?



Survey 1 - Questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of my thesis research, All information will be kept strictly confidential.

Name _____ Date _____

1) Sex: Male Female

2) Age: _____

3) Weight: _____ Height: _____

4) Marital Status

Single Separated/Divorced
 Married or cohabiting (living together) Widowed

5) Current Employment

Unemployed
 Employed or Self-employed
 Student (Full-time)
 Retired

Read this information before answering the following question.

In my thesis I basically want to study and talk about what kind of microaggressions are present in our society and how we can overcome it. Microaggression is basically a statement, action or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalised group. For example,

“Yaar tum kitna khata ho, moti ho jaogi”

“Dhoop mai na jaya karo complexion kharab ho rha hai”

These are the statements normally used in our society, we say such things intentionally or unintentionally without knowing the impact of them.

6) What sort of microaggressions do you face more often?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Based on your appearance | <input type="checkbox"/> Based on your habits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Based on your religion | <input type="checkbox"/> Based on your Social class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Based on your Gender | |

7) Where do you usually face microaggression?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> At Home | <input type="checkbox"/> At School / College |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Both | |

8) How important to you is your appearance?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extremely important | <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat important |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not so important | <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all important |

8) Who do you think gets more criticised about their appearance?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Men | <input type="checkbox"/> Women |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Both Equally | |

9) What have you been criticised for?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Over-weight | <input type="checkbox"/> Skinny |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Height | <input type="checkbox"/> Facial Features |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hair or Hair color | <input type="checkbox"/> Acne or acne scars |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disability | <input type="checkbox"/> Birth marks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

10) Please state the microaggressions you faced today or yesterday.

11) Do such comments affect you in any way? if yes then please tell how?

12) Do you respond to such comments or you just ignore them? if Yes then how do you respond?

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respond | <input type="checkbox"/> Ignore |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|

13) How do you feel after facing a microaggression

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sad | <input type="checkbox"/> Angry |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxious | <input type="checkbox"/> Depressed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hesitant | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
-

14) Do you think people make such comments intentionally or unintentionally?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intentionally | <input type="checkbox"/> Unintentionally |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Both | |

15) Who/what has the power to make you insecure about your body/appearance?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> Friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual/romantic partner | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctor/medical practitioner |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Media | <input type="checkbox"/> Strangers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I myself | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) |
-

16) Have you ever pointed out someone's flaws or made fun of their imperfections?

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

If yes, then is it intentional or unintentional

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Intentionally | <input type="checkbox"/> Unintentionally |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Both | |

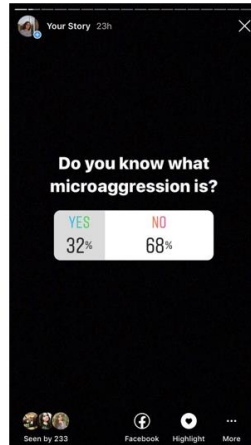
17) Do you think that the idea of microaggression has increased over the years due to the negative impact of beauty standards caused by social media and the fashion industry? If yes then how?

Yes

No

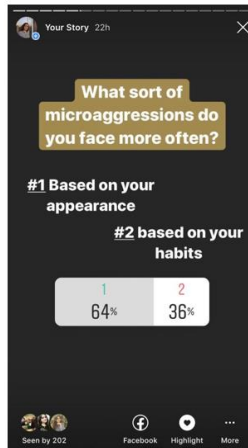
18) How do you think we can reduce or eliminate the idea of microaggression from our society?

Survey 2 (Online) - Findings and questionnaire



Total Participants : 88

28 Votes for Yes	60 Votes for No
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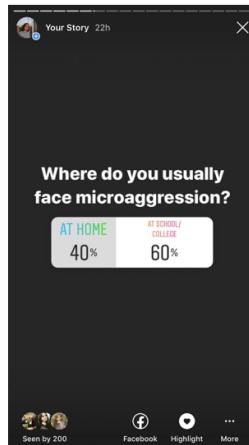
Total Participants : 104

59 appearance	30 habits
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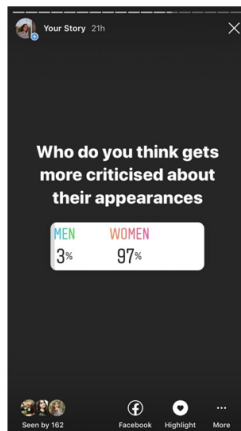
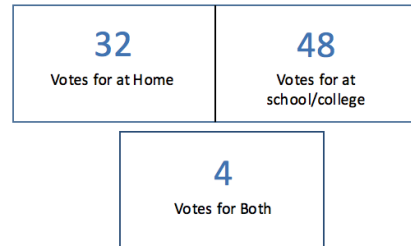


Total Participants : 84

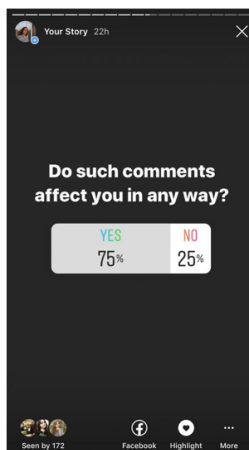
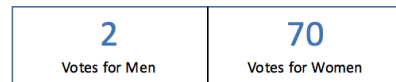
30 Votes for 1	38 Votes for 2
11 Votes for 3	5 Votes for 4



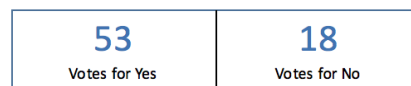
Total Participants : 84

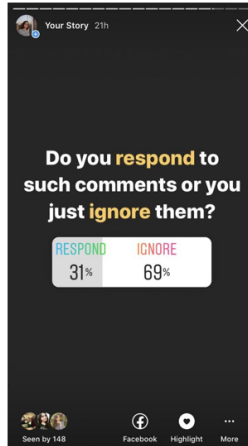


Total Participants : 72



Total Participants : 71





Total Participants : 70

22 Votes for Respond	48 Votes for Ignore
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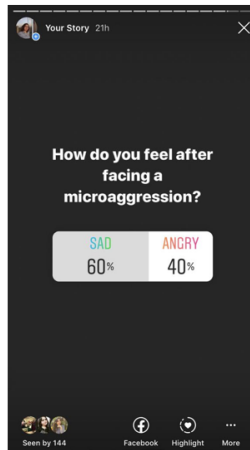
Total Participants : 71

67 Votes for Yes	4 Votes for No
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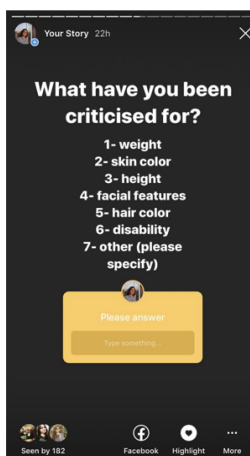
Total Participants : 68

31 Votes for Yes	37 Votes for No
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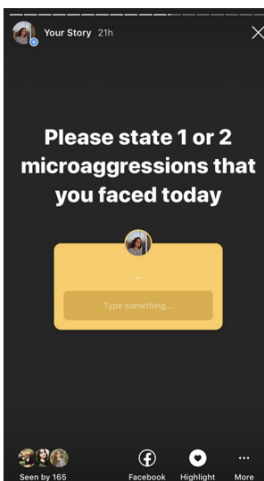
Total Participants : 60

32 Votes for Sad	15 Votes for Angry
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Total Participants : 68

46 Votes for Weight	9 Votes for Skin color
22 Votes for Height	24 Votes for Facial features
9 Votes for Hair color	1 Votes for Disability
16 Votes for Acne and scars	3 Votes for teeth



Total Participants : 13

- You always do what you want, You never listen to anyone
- Bohot moti ho gae ho ye wali exercises karo. Kam khao
- You have flat nose
- You need to lose weight or you won't be able to conceive in the future
- Munh ka kya haal ka hai.
- Moti ho rhi ho kuch khval karo
- Tangin dekho apni kitni moti ho gae hain
- Haw iski eyelashes nhi hain
- Your teeth aren't perfect
- Khulay kapre mat pehno aur moti lago gi
- Moti
- Wazan bahao thora
- Why so skinny
- Being looked down for not fitting in the clothes at a store

DATA SOURCES

I used all three data sources that are primary, secondary and tertiary to gather data/information for my research on this topic called microaggression. When I chose this topic I did not have much understanding about it. So I started with the secondary source, the very first step that I took to gather some information about my topic was desktop research. I looked up every possible answer for the questions that came into my mind regarding this topic. I read different books and articles that talk about microaggressions in a detailed manner. One of the books I read was “Microaggressions in everyday Life: Race, Gender and sexual Orientation” written by the Columbia University Professor and Psychologist Derald Wing Sue.

Then I read multiple scholarly articles, Some of them are *Microaggressions Matter* by Simba Runyowa, *What exactly is a microaggression* by Jenée Desmond-Harris and *How to respond to Microaggression* by Hahna Yoon.

Moving onto other references, I found many research works or activities related to my topic done by some well-known researchers. These research works inspired me so much and turned out to be very helpful for me as they gave me ideas about how I can carry out my research in some interesting ways, such as photography. So I am sharing one of those researches, This project was aimed to document microaggressions against the LGBT community, it was carried out by Kevin Nadal(a psychologist at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York) a researcher and expert on the effects of microaggressions on racial/ ethnic minorities and LGBTQ people. He asked some of his friends to share the microaggressions they have experienced as members of the LGBT community and took pictures of them holding signs with the microaggressions they have heard written on it.

Simultaneously, I was involved in the tertiary source of data collection as I had to use different Encyclopedias such as wikipedia to look up the concepts that were new to me. To look up different books, articles, movies that were

related to my topic. I also used multiple dictionaries to look up the meanings and definitions of all the words and terms that I found tough and new to me. So when all the concepts got clear and I had a fair idea of what I was working on I started the research with me being the primary source and I observed and analyzed the microaggressions happening to me and happening in my surroundings with my friends and family then I approached different people to talk to them about their experience of microaggression. and Lastly, I carried out surveys both an online and a physical survey to gather the data for better analysis. So as explained during this process, I got involved in all three data gathering sources.

Citation of stated sources

Runyowa, Simba. (2015, September 18). *Microaggressions Matter* <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/microaggressions-matter/406090/>

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Chapter 4

MEDIUM OF PRESENTATION

For my thesis project, I chose to make a series of 2-D animations using a couple of softwares. Initially, I planned out the story of each animation and then I sketched each one of them in the form of a storyboard. My initial sketches were hand-drawn but later on I found it important to make neater digital storyboards for better quality and better understanding.

I started making digital illustrations of each animation, frame by frame. I further moved onto photoshop and after effects, shifted back and forth from one software to another to animate these frames.

I experimented with other mediums as well such as thought provoking Illustrations, Comic strips and Photomanipulation. But through these mediums I was not able to communicate a powerful message to the public that would make them question their role in the society. These mediums did not give me a space where I could show an action with the microaggressions and the reactions to it. So I found it better to go for animations where I could show the essence of this topic through a powerful storyline that would easily be understood by the masses.

Each animation has a different scenario and different happenings so the biggest challenge was to create uniformity between them. I kept the art style as well as the color palette similar for each illustration in order to make these animations look alike. I have kept the mood of all the animations satirical, humorous and bizarre to criticize the social behaviour and the social problem called microaggression. In order to make people think about their role or behaviour in the society they live in.

PRE - PRODUCTION

My work kept on evolving with the passage of time. After deciding the aesthetic of my animations which includes the artstyle and the color-palette, I started making the animations. The first batch of animations I made did not have text in it. But after doing more research on my topic and having some feedback in my crits from my teachers as well as my peers, I realized that the idea of microaggression is not properly being conveyed without text. So I started putting all the comments (microaggressions) that I gathered in my

research. The animations with text actually turned out to be more impactful than the ones without it.

The ideas that I had in my mind kept reshaping, I would add one thing and then subtract it later. It kept happening so on and so forth.



Stills from the first few animations

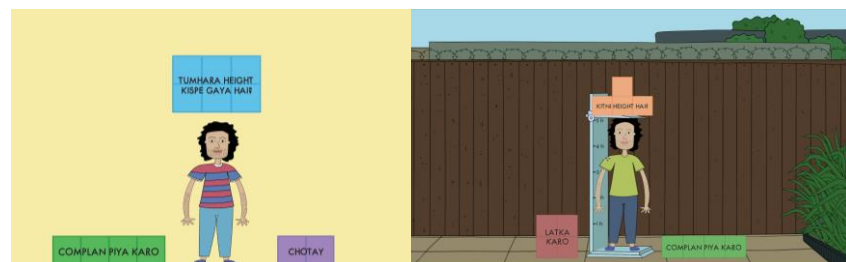
Then another big decision I made was to change my artstyle a bit. I wanted to give it a bit of local feel. Not entirely, but in a way that my animations show that I am talking about the microaggressions happening in Pakistan.



First I kept the backgrounds of my animations plain, having a flat color so that the character remains prominent. Later I experimented with the background of one animation and it turned out looking way better than a flat background. So then I started putting a detailed background as well.



Some of the animations that I made just remained a part of my process. I did not include them in my final work.



Chapter 5

PRODUCTION

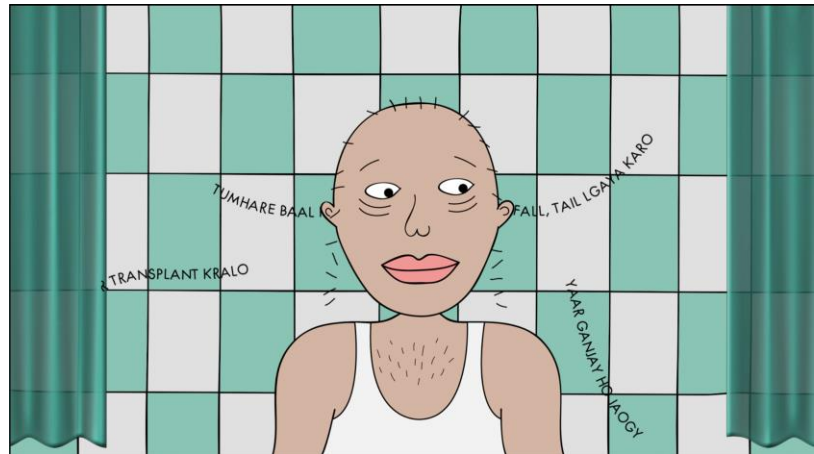
Initially I planned to display all the animations separately on different screens with headphones attached to it. I wanted to give the viewer an experience where they would stand in front of the screen and would watch and listen to all the animations one by one, I wanted to give them an experience where they would feel empathetic towards each character and would question their role in the society, when they watch these animations. But unfortunately due to this global pandemic, none of us found this opportunity to display our thesis in a physical form. Rather we had to showcase our work virtually, using digital platforms. So now I will be

uploading my work on any social platform in order to make it available to the public to create some awareness about microaggressions.

Some Visuals from the animations



Girl who faces microaggression about her body hair. Being told to remove them.



Boy who faces microaggression for having little hair left. Being told to have some treatment for his hairfall.



Boys who experience microaggressions for being fat. He is suggested to lose weight.



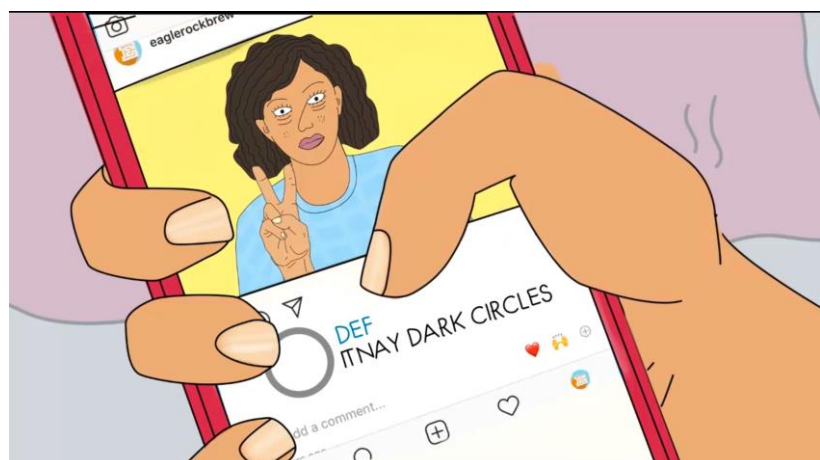
Boy who experiences microaggression for being skinny. He is told to gain some weight.



Girl who experiences microaggression about her clothes. being told to dress according to her figure.



Boy who is short and is made fun of for having a short height.



Girl experiencing microaggression in the form of social media comments. She is being criticized for her facial features and short hair.



Girl who faces microaggression on her weight. She is being suggested ways to lose weight.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION -

Out of all the projects I have done in my four-year bachelor's degree, this Project has been an extensive one. In terms of time as well as the amount of work we were required to produce. I went through many challenges during the production of this project, from the very first step which was the ideation phase till the very last. But this whole experience of producing the work and dealing with different complications was worth it.

When I started working on this thesis project, I was totally blank about the topic as well as the process. I was scared and confused with thousands of questions in my mind. But as I moved on and went into a detailed process of research, I learnt a lot of concepts, theories and ideas that were directly or indirectly associated with Microaggressions. My understanding of the

concept became stronger and enhanced over time. I gained new information about microaggression as well as other topics that are related to microaggression such as racism, ageism, gender discrimination, Sexual orientation and much more. I not only gained this knowledge to incorporate it in my thesis project but to impose it in my personal life as well. It taught me how we can improve our social behaviours, how we can become more kind and more empathetic towards each other. I also learnt how we can control this practice of microaggression and make it a habit to stop for a beat before we speak. Another great experience was carrying out my research in the form of surveys and interviews. I interacted with different individuals coming from different backgrounds, we got to share different stories about our personal experiences with each other that we never shared.

I enjoyed exploring this new topic, explaining this new term to others who were not aware of it was another big but interesting challenge. I have put so much effort in this project to make it look visually appealing as well as conveying a strong message to the viewers through it. I kept the mood of my animations a little humorous so that the viewer gets a serious message but in a lighter way.

This project was not only a thesis project but something very close to my heart that I was involved in for the last 9-10 months and I was totally immersed in this for a very long time. And I hope to get the best out of this project.

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GLOSSARY -

Stigmatize - describe or regard as worthy of disgrace or great disapproval

Marginalize - to put or keep (someone) in a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group.

Slight - insult (someone) by treating or speaking of them without proper respect or attention.

Prejudicial - harmful to someone or something; detrimental.

Slight - insult (someone) by treating or speaking of them without proper respect or attention.

Marginalize - to put or keep (someone) in a powerless or unimportant position within a society or group.

Stigmatize - describe or regard as worthy of disgrace or great disapproval.

