MODERN-DAY MINSTRELSY: ONLINE MICROAGGRESSIONS AND THE DIGITAL NARRATIVES OF HOMELESS BLACK MALES

by

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ABSTRACT

Microaggressions are brief and often unintentional daily acts that communicate insults or negative messages to marginalized individuals or groups. Most research on microaggressions comes from psychology and higher education and focuses on the interpersonal effects of the target of the microaggression. Additionally, the research focuses predominantly on racial microaggressions. This qualitative study focused on microaggressions targeted at Black, homeless males, in order to explore the societal effects of these acts. Using narrative analysis, this study examined the articles, images, and comments related to three homeless Black males whose stories went viral. In this project, I examined 48 news articles, 25 videos and images, and 1,764 comments from *NPR.org*, *theGrio.com*, and *USAToday.com*. Utilizing the typology of microaggressions outlined by Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, and Esquilin as a framework, this project identified ten themes of microaggressions: 1) Waging stereotypical attack, 2) Assertion of violence, 3) Second-class citizen, 4) Intellectual inferiority, 5) Ascription of exceptionalism, 6) Decentering the subject, 7) Assumption of criminality/deviance, 8) Significant absences, 9) Divine assistance, and 10) Assumption of sameness. More significant is that when these themes are examined together they begin to alter the narrative resulting in the emergence of stereotypes historically associated with Black people: minstrelsy, the coon caricature, and the Uncle Tom. This research finds that no matter one's intentions, social conditioning instills within each of us ideas, beliefs, and stereotypes

outside our awareness. So, while many individuals consciously endorse equality, on an unconscious level they act in ways that impede equality. It is clear through the stories, comments, and videos that we are not postracial. This finding is significant with the current political administration appearing to support conservative White nationalism. These findings can help those who challenge these policies by recognizing how they may inadvertently support the White, male, dominant hegemonic order so that they can create positive change. Additionally, these results can provide education and guidance to the media and its consumers to become more critical producers and consumers of the media.

Dedicated to Farin.

For being supportive of me quitting my job and moving away from home for four years.

Dedicated to my Grandma.

You passed away the day after my comprehensive exams, but I know you would be so proud of me for completing my Ph.D.

Also to KC, Friday, and Walker.

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CHAPTER 1

RACE AND HOMELESSNESS IN AMERICA

> To engage in a serious discussion of race in America, we must begin not with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society—flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes.
>
> —Cornel West, *Race Matters*, 1994

This study seeks to document and categorize online microaggressive expressions targeting the intersection of race and homelessness. The purpose of this multicase study is to explore how these microaggressions have a negative impact on society by creating digital narratives of their targets. The research employed qualitative narrative inquiry focusing on the newspaper articles, their images, and associated comments centered on three Black homeless men. The data for this study was derived from the content produced by authors of the articles, the images and videos included to enhance the articles, and the comments by those who voluntarily chose to post in article discussion boards.

This chapter begins by contextualizing the relationship between Black people and homelessness in the United States. A brief history of Black homelessness in the United States, an overview of the concept of homelessness, and statistics on race and homelessness are provided. Following this is the problem statement, statement of purpose, and accompanying research questions. Also included is a discussion of the

research approach and researcher perspectives. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the proposed rationale and significance of this research study and some of the key terminology used.

Contextualization of Race and Homelessness in the United States

Historically, wars, economic issues, immigration, and discrimination were some of the main causes of homelessness in the United States. According to historian Kenneth Kusmer, "vagrant persons" can be traced back as early at 1640 when peace officers in Boston were charged with finding and punishing them (2002, p. 13). It was in the late eighteenth century that homeless populations, often known as the "wandering poor," "sturdy beggars," "vagrants," and "paupers" became noticeable (Kusmer, 2002; Marvasti, 2003). By the 1700s day laborers, indentured servants, former and runaway servants, and escaped slaves augmented the homeless population, especially in the Northern colonies (Kusmer, 2002). Kusmer explained that in the 1790s, escaped slaves and servants in Philadelphia were frequently sentenced to prison and hard labor for vagrancy. As he further noted, homelessness and incarceration were preferable to the wait for the Pennsylvania manumission law to become effective (2002, p. 16).

Prior to slavery, the colony of Virginia was "plagued" by bands of young men who lived without work. The institution of slavery in the early 1700s was the greatest reducer of homelessness (Kusmer, 2002). Not only were Black people enslaved, "Poor Laws" allowed the auctioning off of the able-bodied poor, including the mentally ill, to the lowest bidder (Mavasti, 2003). This could conceptually be the beginning of the connection between homeless Black people and the notion of being mentally ill and/or

lazy. In 1672, Virginia passed its first vagrancy laws, which were followed by an immediate act aimed at apprehending and suppressing runaways, Negroes, and slaves (Kusmer, 2002). Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, which resulted in "lower-class elements" (including slaves and former indentured servants) rising up against the plantation owners, put in motion even more laws for the control of Black slaves; these laws took little interest in White vagabonds (2002).

The 1700s saw ever-greater demand for slaves, especially in the large plantations in the South. As the slave population grew, "slave codes" were put into place to restrict enslaved people's behaviors and to prevent the chances of an uprising (Bunn, 2014). The importation of slaves was banned in the United States in 1808; however, American born slaves had outnumbered African born slaves since the 1750s. Between 1777 and 1804, spurred by the Revolutionary War, the Northern colonies abolished slavery. Yet, because of the basic prejudice felt by many Northern Whites, following emancipation many White people took over the jobs of Black people, laws were created to expel Black individuals who were not citizens, interracial marriages were barred, and additional Northern colonial race laws were created to discourage Black individuals from fleeing to or staying in the North (Greene, 1942; Litwack, 1965; McManus, 1966). Between the Northern colonial race laws and the slave codes of the South, Black individuals lived in a precarious situation dependent on the tolerance of Whites (Harper, 2003).

By the 1820s, the newly freed Black slaves in the North disproportionately represented the homeless population. Kusmer explained that while Black people made up only about 10% of a city's population, 40-50% were incarcerated for vagrancy and about 20% of those gained admission to the county's almshouse (2002, p. 24). In the 1850s, the

percentage of Black homeless was comparable to the Black population in Philadelphia where vagrancy became more associated with immigrants, rather than Black people. Following the Civil War, the White South was increasingly hostile to Black vagrants and tramps. In the South, Black Codes[1] were established to restrict freed Black slaves' activity and to ensure that they were available for the labor force. These codes allowed Black people convicted of vagrancy to be sentenced to involuntary servitude through auctioning, being sent to work on chain gangs, or leasing to coal mining corporations. Additionally, Kusmer (2002) noted that some police would raid Black establishments and arrest those who could not account for themselves, thus forcing Black men into undesirable and low paying jobs (Kusmer, 2002). As the 1870s emerged, the characteristics of Black male vagrants were quite different than those of White males: they were younger than average, less likely to be married, over half were illiterate, few were skilled artisans, and many had been servants (Kusmer, 2002). As Kusmer (2002) explained, it was the difficult economic situation for Black people and women that resulted in their overrepresentation in the homeless population.

Black homelessness was reported as declining between 1850-1894, in the Northern states; by the 1900s the percentage of Black people utilizing homeless services was greater than their percentage of the population. In other words, aid was provided to between 8-11% of Black people in Philadelphia, but the Black population was only about 6% of the city's population. The First World War's need for industrial workers caused many Black people to flee the South and head north for employment. This was the first

[1] Black codes were laws passed in the Southern states in 1865 and 1866. These codes were part of pattern of White individuals working to suppress Black individuals. These codes were part of the foundation of the Jim Crow era and the Separate by Equal doctrine.

Northern Migration. While Kusmer (2002) noted that, at times, Black people had lower unemployment rates than White people, many of them had more reliable, yet lower paying service work. However, racism and newly arriving immigrants began pushing Black people out of these lower paying jobs and discrimination was working against Black skilled workers and businessmen (Kusmer, 2002, p. 114). This potentially pushed more Black people into homeless situations.

Another term related to homelessness was “tramp.” The term tramp can be traced back to the Civil War era when small bands of soldiers headed out “on a tramp” or exploration on their own (Kusmer, 2002, p. 37). By 1875, the word tramp began to be used to describe train-riding vagrants. The rise of Black “tramps” may be traced to those enslaved people who ran away when they heard about the impending approach of Union soldiers. Following the abolition of slavery, many Black individuals simply migrated as an expression of their freedom of movement (Cohen, 1991; Kolchin, 2003; Williamson, 1965). Those who migrated were seeking intermittent manual labor, escaping the South, or were travelling musicians or entertainers (Harris, 1992; Jones, 1992; Kusmer, 2002). As Kusmer (2002) explained, tramp life was often appealing to Black men as racial segregation was quickly growing throughout American society. To some extent, tramp and vagrant life was more accepting of racial diversity (Caplow, 1940; Kemp, 1922). However, historian Todd Depastino (2003) explained that Black individuals were averse to tramping due to the racial discrimination in public services, as well as the outright violence they expected to encounter on the road. Kusmer (2002) noted there were conflicts and violence based solely on racial intolerance.

While homeless “tramps” found varying degrees of acceptance, those in urban

communities in the North were subject to more and more racial segregation, especially as the Black homeless population increased. While some municipal lodging and shelters accepted everyone, others had separate dormitories for White people and Black people, and some completely excluded Black people (Kusmer, 2002). This type of segregation prompted civil rights activist and journalist Ida Wells-Barnett to challenge the Chicago social service agencies who refused refuge to Black individuals. It was not just the homeless shelters that were segregated, but also residential areas. Black lodging houses were often located in areas full of bars, prostitution, and illegal activities (Anderson, 1961; Kusmer, 1976, 2002; Spear, 1965). Unlike other areas with large lodging houses, those in Black neighborhoods had houses that were small, in bad condition, and split into tiny apartments with kitchenettes (Kusmer, 2002). As documented by Kusmer (1976) and Spear (1965), Black families were substantially more likely to take in lodgers compared to White families, causing even more crowding in Black family homes.

As the United States moved into the Great Depression, the homeless population of Black people continued to increase. Various research indicated that the percent of Black people in homeless shelters and transient housing was disproportionately higher than the total Black population in the communities that they served (Drake & Cayton, 1970; Kusmer, 1976, 2002; Thomas, 1992). As Kusmer (1976, 2002) illustrated, Black homelessness was caused by racial and economic discrimination. Black individuals were the first to be laid off in skilled work, unskilled labor positions, and in domestic service. This resulted in higher percentages of Black homelessness. During this time, the Federal Transient Service was established to coordinate the federal, state, and local authorities in providing job training, housing, meals, and medical service for the rising number of

homeless individuals (Kusmer, 2002). These services brought people of different classes together. However, while they were open to all races, they frequently segregated the eating and sleeping quarters and hired Black staff members to deal with Black transients (Kusmer, 2002). Although there was segregation in some of these facilities, Black people were not prevented from using their services.

In 1935, the program was abruptly ended, resulting once again in an upturn of homeless individuals. Thus, the rise of skid rows—impoverished areas inhabited by the poor, homeless, or those forgotten by society—began and continued through the mid-1970s. One of the biggest misconceptions of skid rows was that the residents were unemployable. Both Kusmer (2002) and Depastino (2003) highlighted evidence that the vast majority of men on skid rows were working and very few earned an income from begging or illegal activities.

Kusmer (2002) wrote that between 1945 and 1975, homeless people were considered nothing more than a nuisance by those in more privileged classes. The drive to clean up blighted areas and skid rows began to bring the issue to light. Most research during this time perpetuated the stereotypes relating to general behaviors, like alcoholism or laziness. However, as Kusmer (2002) remarked, some research found that those in skid row neighborhoods wanted to live independent lives. Beginning in the late 1970s, beggars and street people became more noticeable in the large cities (Kusmer, 2002; Depastino, 2003). Depastino (2003) pointed out that racialized minorities were never underrepresented; in fact, nationwide they comprised over one half of the homeless population. The stigmas associated with homelessness had a direct impact on the resources and support they received.

During the late 1970s through the mid-1980s, the demographics of homelessness changed drastically and the homeless population saw its largest increase since the Great Depression. Between the deinstitutionalization of mental hospitals and institutions, and the economic recession caused by the Reagan and Bush administrations (da Costa Núñez, 1996), the number of homeless individuals surged. It became recognized that homelessness was not just alcoholic men living on skid row (Kusmer, 2002; Zltonick, Zerger, & Wolfe, 2013). Along with the stagnation of the economy and the increase in unemployment, there was a marked decrease in low-income housing, housing assistance, and social programs (da Costa Núñez, 1996). In the 1980s, federal spending on social programs related to housing, health, job training, child nutrition, and education decreased. During this time, the Republican administration cut funding to many areas that had been fought for by Civil Rights activists in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Education spending decreased by 10% and there was an almost 80% decrease in spending for low-income and housing assistance, yet military spending increased by almost 50% (da Costa Núñez, 1996). Depastino (2003) pointed out that during this period, women and non-White people were the hardest hit because of deindustrialization and job migration. While women, predominantly White women, were able to garner pity and inspire intervention, homeless men of color frequently faced arrests and incarceration making it even harder to gain employment (Depastino, 2003, p. 251). These “unworthy” men of color caused demands for police intervention for those seen panhandling.

Today, both scholars and everyday citizens still turn to the predictable and often stereotypical causes of homelessness: deinstitutionalization of the mentally ill, addiction, and laziness (Baum & Burnes, 1993; Durham, 1989; French, 1987). Even leading

scholars doing research on homelessness, such as Donald Bogue (1963), Samuel Wallace (1965), Howard Bahr (1970, 1973, 1974), and Theodore Caplow (1974), who conducted excellent work in discussing the diversity of the homeless population, tend to overemphasize vices and deviancy of the homeless. Homelessness in America has been an ongoing issue for hundreds of years (Kusmer, 2002; Depastino, 2003; Marvasti, 2003), yet the intersection of race with homelessness remains understudied.

Defining Homelessness

There is no single definition of homelessness, which has a strong effect on how various programs determine eligibility for services. Homelessness is characterized and experienced in a variety of different ways, so understanding homelessness as a single concept is impossible. As such, homelessness takes on a variety of meanings: an individual who lacks housing, someone whose primary residence during the night is a shelter, a resident in transitional housing, an individual who lives on the street, a person who is *doubled up* (meaning forced to stay with a series of friends or family members), or a previously homeless person being released from prison or the hospital without stable housing, to name a few (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, n.d.).

Both the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (USDHUD) report that homelessness is decreasing (Henry, Cortes, Shivji, & Buck, 2014; Witte, 2012). The USDHUD reported that the *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* has helped decrease homelessness by 10% since its implementation in 2010 (Henry et al., 2014). The report stated that the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness

has decreased by 21%, the number of homeless veterans has decreased by 33%, and the number of people in homeless families has decreased by 11%.

According to the NAEH and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council (NHCHC), one of the keys to ending homelessness has to do with economics (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2016; Witte, 2012). Economic factors, which include housing costs, health care, unemployment, average income, and foreclosure activity, play a part in determining access to housing. Additionally, the NAEH reports that demographics also play an important role in homelessness (Witte, 2012). This report specifically noted that people living in doubled up situations, those discharged from prison, young adults leaving foster care, and people without health insurance are at increased risk of homelessness. While many of these governmental agencies talk about homelessness as a whole, there is limited or outdated research on race and homelessness.

Current Statistics Related to Race and Homelessness

In a 2011 report published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), gender, age, race, and ethnicity are important factors to consider when dealing with homelessness; however, much of these data were drawn from reports in the mid-1990s. SAMHSA reported that 62% of sheltered individuals over the course of a year were male, 54.7% were over the age of 30, and 58.4% identified as non-White. Mental illness and substance abuse also played a role in those being sheltered with 26.2% having a severe mental illness, and 34.7% having chronic substance use issues. Furthermore, those experiencing chronic or long-term homelessness were middle-aged males with 56.6% being African American and 28.7% being Latino/a. The data also

indicated that African Americans made up more than 40% of families residing in shelters or transitional housing programs. Rates of homelessness were higher for veterans who identified as African American, Native American, and Hispanic/Latino.

A March 2012 policy brief by the Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness (ICPH) reported the harsh realities faced by Black Americans that led to homelessness. Nearly 25% of Black families lived in poverty, which is three times the rate of White families at 7.1%. In 2010, persons in Black families stayed in homeless shelters at a rate of seven times higher than those in White families. As the ICPH (2012) pointed out, interrelated social and structural factors led to this overrepresentation of Black people in homeless shelters. The ICPH (2012) brief specifically illustrated the issues of economics and demographics that NAEH and NHCHC addressed. Black males tended to have lower educational attainment that led to fewer opportunities for gaining job employment in better compensated sectors. In 2010, Black males with an associate's degree experienced higher unemployment than White males with only a high school diploma. Finally, Black males with college degrees earned 25% less on average than White male workers (ICPH, 2012). The employment and earnings disparity impedes Black Americans' attempts to move beyond poverty. The accumulative effects are also apparent. Living at or near poverty levels impacts the ability to accrue financial assets, which can help cover health care, unexpected expenses, or job loss.

As Ralph da Costa Núñez, professor of international and public affairs and president of Homes for the Homeless stated on Citylimits.org, homelessness is a racial issue and one that is not being discussed (2012). He explained that although government-sanctioned racial discrimination is a thing of the past, the overrepresentation of Black

people in or near the poverty level and in homeless shelters highlights the fact that Black people continue to face prejudice and barriers to basic necessities that are not experienced by White people.

Overview of the Research

Problem Statement

Traditional research on microaggressions focuses primarily on interpersonal interactions (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquex, 2011; Nadal, Wong, Griffin, & Srikin, 2014; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Microaggressions do not just present a variety of problems to the individual, but I argue to society as a whole because they serve to normalize stereotypes and faulty assumptions about marginalized groups. As such, I sought to explore how microaggressions could be found in online, mediated sources, specifically online newspapers, their images, and their comments.

Because mediated depictions of homeless people present a form of storytelling that serves to influence our understanding of homelessness, news articles regarding homelessness are an important source of information. News regarding homelessness is perceived by many as presenting an objective portrayal of the realities of homelessness. The news has the potential to shed light on this issue by providing us a background, discussing problems, and presenting individual and societal solutions to this ongoing social issue (Reynalds, 1999). However, as research shows, the media presents a deficit model of homeless individuals, rather than examining the societal mechanisms or acts of prejudice that perpetuate racial and class inequalities (Campbell & Reeves, 1989; Min,

1999; Power, 1999).

Compounding the problem of the presentation of the deficit model of race and homelessness, media that was once locally driven is now accessible on a global level courtesy of the internet. Not only do we have access to our local news, but we can more easily access national and international newspapers, as well as specialty newspapers that align with our personal ideologies. This ability to access news globally presents issues because viewers are repeatedly presented with the same types of articles on race and homelessness that potentially help solidify a narrative pointing to individual problems, rather than social issues. In addition, many of these online news sources allow for comments and discussions associated with the published article.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to examine how online publications and their comments serve to reinforce hegemony and master narratives through the use of online microaggressions. This research seeks to explore online news articles, photos, and comments to discover the subtle ways language and images are used when addressing the intersection of race and homelessness. In addition, this study is concerned with how these textual and visual microaggressions are affecting society through their subtle creation and maintenance of master narratives as the stories permeate through the internet. To shed light on the problem, the research questions are:

1. How and in what ways are writers and commenters employing microaggressions within online news stories?
2. How does the use of microaggressions within the article and/or the comments

alter the narrative being produced by the story?

3. How does the use and proliferation of online microaggressions reinforce master narratives?

Research Approach

This qualitative interpretive study examined the digital narratives created for three homeless men who each had an incident in their lives captured and shared online, subsequently resulting in viral stories. In this study, I utilized narrative analysis as my method to analyze and bring meaning to the stories being created and told *about* a particular population.

Narrative inquiry done through analysis of online newspaper articles was the method used to identify microaggressions and illuminate how their use creates or maintains master narratives. The documents included the articles, images, videos, and comments found in three online news sources. The information obtained from these textual, visual, and audio documents subsequently informed the basis for the overall findings of this study. As noted by the interdisciplinary group of scholars Claire Hewson, Diana Laurent, and Carl Vogel (1996) and social work scholars Dorothy Van Soest, Robert Canon, and Darlene Grant (2000), communication via the internet may result in more candor and less adherence to socially desirable norms. Additionally, psychologists Craig Murray and Judith Sixsmith (2002) found that computer-mediated communication through online documents provided access to emerging conversations allowing for a more holistic picture of the communication around a topic.

The Researcher

As a middle-class White woman, there seems to be a disconnect between my life and the study of race and homelessness. However, I cannot help but wonder how my own beliefs, experiences, actions, or inactions both shape and are shaped by society. Could my own beliefs and actions somehow factor in to how society treats marginalized individuals? In what ways do I perpetuate the hegemonic order and White privilege? For the majority of my life I have grown up in predominantly White communities with very small or inconspicuous homeless populations. In some ways that was good. Because there were so few minority members where I grew up, it was seen as positive to befriend them. I recognize now that the small population of minorities was not deemed a threat to the White population, therefore interaction with the few *female* students of color was not a big concern. Additionally, rarely seeing individuals panhandling or gathered around shelters at meal times, made me believe that I lived in a community where people worked hard and succeeded.

Yet, as I reflect back, I recognize many ways that White dominant ideologies influenced my upbringing. Although I had friends of differing races and ethnicities, they were often subtly or not so subtly belittled in ways that included referring to them as my "little Black friend" or the "Indian girl down the street," by sharing stories of how their family members were in trouble, or pointing out their lower income status. With the exception of one situation, I do not recall these same things being said about my White friends. These words and actions shaped my ideologies and, for many years, I often associated race with lower incomes and bad behaviors. It was not until I moved to Salt Lake City that I had any real awareness of homeless populations. I was surprised that the

vast majority of homeless people I saw were White men. Living here was the first time I regularly experienced people sleeping in parks, lined up to get meals through some of the church outreach programs, or seeking contributions of clothing, food, or money. Walking through the city and seeing these individuals both scared and saddened me as I did not, and still do not, know how to help.

What has affected me most are the family members and acquaintances who openly disparage or denigrate anyone who is not like them. Hearing people that I know shout things in public like “get a job” to an elderly homeless man, continue to use the “N” word when referring to Black people, or support policies specifically designed to perpetuate the marginalization of certain populations is what truly motivated me. In my attempts to engage some of these individuals (most of whom are older), I have rarely had anyone open to listening to a differing opinion, let alone have a discussion. While I may not be able to help open the minds of some, I hope that this research will inform my teaching to help my students think and act critically so that they might make a difference.

My impetus for this study came from two courses taken during my doctoral program. The first was a course on media and society where I first became aware of the image of a shoeless man (Jeffrey Hillman) and police officer (Lawrence DePrimo). During this course, I wrote about this viral image and its relationship with surveillance and control, linking the viral image with directions on how we should behave (DePrimo) and what happens when we do not (Hillman). Because Hillman did not do what was expected of him, he was surveilled, and to some extent punished, through the unflattering stories that were told about him. While this still resonates with me, I could not help thinking I was somehow missing something.

In a subsequent class on critical race theory, I learned about microaggressions. Although the focus of microaggressions was always on the individual, I wondered if they had a larger impact than just at the individual level. I began to revisit the content on the shoeless man, looking at the articles and the comments that were present. I reflected back on it, wondering what it was about this image that caused it first to go viral and second what was the need to continue reporting on Hillman following the initial "feel-good" story. What I began to notice was the limited amount of overt racism and classism present, but more subtle ways that the articles and commenters were invoking stereotypes. Articles went from using words like "shoeless" and "homeless" to "hobo" and "bum." Issues of substance abuse and mental illness were later linked to Hillman through articles and comments, although there was no evidence of this. A digital narrative was being created by the authors and the commenters that seemed to be reminiscent of familiar racial stereotypes, although the egregious language from the past was not being used.

The story captured my attention and led me to two other viral stories of homeless Black males. Through these stories, I was seeing similar digital narratives being created through subtle stereotypes and storytelling methods. I began to ask myself if the use of microaggressive language was moving beyond interpersonal communication and becoming imbedded in our general communicative language and what the ramifications of that process would be.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for this study emanates from my desire to expand the research on microaggressions beyond the experiences of the victim(s) to also include the actions of the perpetrator(s), to provide an opportunity to explore the societal impacts of these actions. Currently, research on microaggressions focuses on the victim, not the perpetrator. As Clark, Spanierman, Reed, Soble, and Cabana (2011) pointed out, microaggression research addresses the target, forcing them to substantiate the racist or oppressive action. However, in our current "color-blind" society, perpetuators or nontargets suggest victims are just oversensitive or making everything about race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). By studying online expressions of microaggressions, we can document them and explore their use and pervasiveness, which allows us to study the greater societal effects they cause.

As sociologist Jessie Daniels (2009) has explained, research on internet racism is sorely undertheorized. Additionally, media and communication scholars Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White (2012) have noted our digital communication is not only altering understandings of race, but creating new types of racial inequalities. This project is two-fold. First, it will build on the research of Clark et al. (2011) and Steinfeldt et al. (2010) to help fill a gap in the current literature on how discursive language is used on the internet. Second, it will build on the growing research of microaggressions in a previously unstudied area of the intersection of race and homelessness. This will illustrate how pervasive microaggressions are and how their manifestation online serves to reinforce powerful master narratives reinforcing stereotypical depictions of race and homelessness.

Key Terms

This section includes definitions of important terms that are used throughout the study.

Article – The journalistic piece written for an online media outlet.

Black – For the purpose of this paper, I use the word Black rather than African American as it is a term which refers to skin color. The term African American relates to those individuals of the Diaspora that were oppressed, enslaved, or who are decedents of those individuals. Not all Black people in the United States are of African descent and others, who do not know their history, prefer other terminology. Black is a more encompassing term as it is inclusive of multiracial individuals and those with similar heritage worldwide. I use the term Black as an adjective rather than a noun. Using color as a noun dehumanizes people by reducing them to a species or an inanimate color. I do this for the term White as well.

Commenter – The person who responds in the comment section following an online article. A commenter may post one or multiple comments. In this particular study, on several occasions a commenter posts in multiple articles of the same subject or across case articles.

Color-blind – Rather than valuing differences, this is a disregard of racial characteristics proposed by White people suggesting that racism is a concept of the past. This idea erases the experiences and backgrounds of individuals of varying races and ethnicities.

Digital Narrative – The convergence of storytelling media found online that allows for individuals to create narratives about individuals, organizations, or events.

This primarily happens when the actual subject(s) are not provided their own voice in the online medium, allowing for others to tell their story and define their lives.

Hegemony – A concept developed by Antonio Gramsci where the ruling class can manipulate the value systems and beliefs of a society so that their view becomes the world view. A dominant and oppressive culture sets the standards for minority culture.

Homeless – A homeless person is an individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets; stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned building, or vehicle; or in any other unstable or nonpermanent situation. It can also include those who have a residence but choose or are forced into an alternative living arrangement for a number of reasons. This is just one among many definitions of homeless. I also use the term homeless as an adjective, rather than a noun for the purpose of humanizing those who are already experiencing dehumanizing conditions and situations.

Intersectionality – A concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to understand how aspects of our social and biological identities overlap and interact with each other and how they lead to domination, oppression, or discrimination.

Master Narrative – A concept developed by Jean-François Lyotard described as the colonially derived story of events, typically emphasizing European perspectives.

Microaggressions – "Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (Sue, 2010, p. 3). Microaggressions are comprised of: (a) microassaults – overt biased beliefs or attitudes directed at a

marginalized individual or group, (b) microinsults – unintentional or covert interactions or environmental cues that communicate demeaning messages about a marginalized individual or group, and (c) microinvalidations – color-blind comments or post racial beliefs suggesting that minority groups do not have different experiences based on their marginalized status.

Narrative – Unlike a story, a narrative is open-ended. A narrative is a system of stories told over time.

Postracial – The belief that a society that once had a history of racial prejudice and discrimination no longer practices racial prejudice and discrimination.

Race – A socially constructed classification system whereby groups of people are identified as distinct from others based on supposed physical or biological traits shared by that group. This includes the physical manifestation of skin color, hair type and color, face shape, and other visible characteristics.

Racism – The belief that there are inherent differences among racial groups that determine individual achievements. It is often the belief that one's own race is superior and has the right to dominate those of other races, which often leads to hatred or intolerance of other races.

Story – An account of an event that relates the who, when, where, and how. It has a beginning, middle, and end. An article, the images, and comments come together to tell a story.

Viral images/stories/videos – Online objects that become well known outside their contexts through the process of internet sharing. Virality is determined by the speed of shares, volume of shares, and longevity online.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 of this study provides background information, the problem, purpose, research approach, information about the researcher, rationale and significance, and a definition of key terms relevant to this study. Chapter 2 includes the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 is a review of the literature to contextualize the study. Chapter 4 provides a description of the methodology, including an overview of narrative analysis, the process of selecting and gathering data, and a description of each individual case. Chapter 5 is my first analysis chapter focusing on Ted Williams, the homeless man with the golden voice. Chapter 6 focuses on my second case study of Jeffrey Hillman, the shoeless man given boots by a police officer. Chapter 7 is the final analysis chapter that focuses on Billy Ray Harris, the homeless man who returned a very valuable ring to its owner. Chapter 8 will provide a conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> "Racism didn't magically go away just because we refuse to talk about it. Rather, overt racial language is replaced by covert racial euphemisms that reference the same phenomena—talk of "niggers" and "ghettos" becomes replaced by phrases such as "urban," "welfare mothers," and "street crime." Everyone knows what these terms mean, and if they don't, they quickly figure it out."
>
> —Patricia Hill Collins, *On Intellectual Activism*, 2012

In this study, I employ a narrative analysis grounded in critical race theory (CRT) and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of power and practice. The study explores how the trajectory of three homeless Black males, who went from obscurity to temporary celebrity through viral media, are digitally constructed through a series of online news articles, visual imagery, and audience comments. While traditionally CRT and its narrative approaches "present stories about discrimination from the perspective of people of color" (Creswell, 2013, p. 31), in an effort to expand the research of microaggressions and racism, I interrogate how digital narratives are constructed through online discourse. Specifically, I sought out instances of online microaggressions to see how or in what ways they are invoked, as well as how they are often used to shape a story, thus affecting our cultural and societal master narratives. As my research focuses on the intersections of race and homelessness and embedded systems of power, issues of race, class, and power are a central focus to this project. To provide a framework for this study, I first offer a

description of CRT and its basic tenets, delving specifically into the social construction of race, postracial color-blindness, and stereotyping through microaggressions. Next, I overview Pierre Bourdieu's theory of power and practice. Finally, I show the interrelationship of these two frameworks.

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Race Theory

The reality of ending racism is a remote prospect and is embedded psychologically in the layers and system of the American society (Bell, 1989). Human rights scholars and activists have taken keen interest in critically studying and transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power through the framework of CRT (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Matsuda, Lawrence III, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Smith et al., 2006; Yosso, 2005;). The framework is rooted in the principles of legal studies in the 1980s. According to legal scholars Mari Matsuda, Charles Lawrence III, Richard Delgado, and Kim Crenshaw (1993), CRT was conceived in the 1970s following the stalling of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the reversal of gains made during that time. Scholars, teachers, students, and activists recognized "that dominant conceptions of race, racism, and equality were increasingly incapable of proving any meaningful quantum of racial justice" (Matsuda et al. 1993, p. 3). Additionally, in the 1980s, during the Reagan administration, as many Republicans were tapped to serve, most of the Federal Judges appointed were conservative, leaving their liberal colleagues teaching in law schools (Russell, 1999). Many of those who remained in law schools recognized that the law was biased and worked together to form

critical legal studies (CLS). CRT is a spinoff of CLS, but with a focus on race and racism, rather than the traditional CLS focus on gender, class, and economic structure (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995).

However, when we consider the concept of "critical" in CRT, we need to look back further as there had been substantial treatment of the concepts of race, racism, and systems of oppression more than a century prior to CLS. As early as the 1700s in Europe, enslaved Africans began to speak out and challenge notions of racism. Anton Wilhelm Amo, the first intellectual of African descent to earn a doctorate in Germany, wrote about the rights of Black people in Europe (Abraham, 1964). Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, later baptized as John Stuart, was a Ghanaian who was kidnapped and forced into slavery in Grenada and later taken to England in the mid-1700s. While there he became an influential abolitionist. In the late 1700s, he published a piece on the evils of slave trade and the commerce of humans (Cugoano, 2005).

Throughout American history, there have been many writers, orators, and activists challenging the status of Black people in the United States. In 1829, abolitionist David Walker wrote *Walker's Appeal,* one of the earliest Black protests against slavery and racism. Drawing upon biblical text, Walker compared slavery in the United States to the Israelites, Helots, and Roman slaves, as he questioned the enlightenment of Christian Americans. Through this appeal, he hoped to encourage readers to fight their oppression and for White people to realize how slavery was both a moral and religious failure. Inspired by David Walker, Maria Stewart's work focused on religion, sexism, racism, and slavery. In 1831, her first essay focusing on religion and morality was published as a pamphlet. By 1832, she gave her first public address, making her potentially the first

American-born female public lecturer (Richardson, 1987).

In the 1840s, Fredrick Douglass began his work on the injustices experienced by Black people by first focusing on abolition and later attacking Jim Crow and lynching. As a writer and orator, he indicted slavery and racism, while providing hope for his people. In one of his most well-known and ironic speeches, "What to the slave is the Fourth of July," Douglass (1852) reminded abolitionists that the Fourth of July is a celebration for White Americans, but a day of mourning for slaves because of the unfulfilled promises of equality for all as written in the Declaration of Independence. Douglass was a voice of social justice during this era.

One of the key early philosophers essential to the development of critical race theory is W.E.B. Du Bois. As noted by ethnic studies professor Reiland Rabaka (2006), Du Bois' collection of work utilized a wide range of theoretical perspectives from varying disciplines. Additionally, his work centered racism, sexism, and colonialism in critical theories, where most other critical scholars merely mention these concepts in passing (Rabaka, 2006). As such, Du Bois' work has been essential to the creation of critical race theory. There were many other advocates of social justice issues for Black individuals, who not only voiced and penned on freedom issues, but on the complex issues relating to the barriers of oppression.

Just like the earliest abolitionists, orators, and writers, CRT focuses on the marginalized individual or population central to the analysis. According to Matsuda et al. (1993), CRT "is grounded in the particulars of a social reality that is defined by our experiences and the collective historical experiences of our communities of origin"

(1993, p. 3).[2] In addition to lending its voice in numerous ways within academic arenas, CRT encourages scholars to push for equality and social justice for racial and ethnic minorities (Gildersleeve et al., 2011). Scholars such as Derrick Bell, Kimberley Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Mari Mastuda, and Daniel Solórzano have developed six interrelated tenets that shape CRT (Yosso, 2005).

First, CRT asserts that racism is central in American life and it is endemic. For individuals of color, racism becomes a routine occurrence within their daily experience. CRT scholars are less focused on how discrimination can be eliminated, but rather how the dominant interests and values utilize racial subordination to maintain the status quo (Matsuda et al., 1993). Second, CRT challenges the traditional, dominant claims of race neutrality, color-blindness, and equal opportunity as being a camouflage for the self-interests of the dominant group. Because of this, racism is infrequently challenged by those in the dominant population. The third tenet is that CRT scholars view race as a social construction. They suggest that current inequalities and social "practices are linked to earlier periods in which the intent and cultural meaning of such practices were clear" (Matsuda et al., 1995, p. 6). Fourth, CRT is committed to social justice and the elimination of racism as part of the broader goal of eliminating all forms of oppression. CRT scholars recognize that aspects of our identity intersect, resulting in multiple forms of subordination. Fifth, CRT recognizes that the experiential knowledge of people of color is appropriate, legitimate, and necessary to understanding the law and the lived experiences of people of color. Because of what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) identified as positionality, individuals and populations of color approach issues as an outsider looking

[2] By "our" the authors are speaking about their own experiences as individuals of color.

in. Through their own experiences via methods such as storytelling, individuals of color share what happens to them through their vantage point of observing how they are treated by those in the dominant class. Finally, CRT uses interdisciplinary methods of analyzing race and racism. Thus, by incorporating a variety of theories and methods, or various aspects of theories and methods, CRT can examine issues of racial injustice in various ways that most effectively allow the marginalized voice/experience to be heard and critically understood. Cumulatively, CRT seeks to deconstruct and destabilize the many forms of racism and racialized oppression constructed by the dominant White culture (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

In summary, CRT research foregrounds race and racism in all aspects of research, examines White privilege and institutionalized racism from a structural perspective, and challenges traditional methods in order to offer transformative solutions to the interrelated problems associated with race, gender, and class subordination caused by our social and institutional structures (Cresswell, 2013). Some of the structural components of CRT include the social construction of race (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Lewis, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1994), color-blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2014), and microaggressions (Pierce, 1995; Solórzano, 1998; Sue, 2010). Given their importance as analytical tools of CRT, the following sections provide further detail on these concepts.

Social Construction of Race and Racism

Historically, both social and biological scientists portrayed race as if it were a biological fact that rendered certain groups genetically inferior to others (Bonilla-Silva,

2010; Myers, 2005). Although there is no such thing as “Black” or “White” genes or blood, for some these notions are still tempting ways to explain racial difference (Myers, 2005). Many scholars and philosophers suggest that the contemporary roots of race and racism stem from the Enlightenment (see Eze, 1997; Goldberg, 1993; Mosse, 1997). The Enlightenment was marked by creating order and classifications. The thinkers of the time (Hume, Voltaire, Jefferson, etc.) explored the ideas of innate differences between groups, developing kernels of ideas that evolved into the 19th century’s focus and concern with racial difference.

Today, most scientists agree that race is a social construction, although sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva explained that there are some social scientists who conceive of race as being biological or primordial (2010). Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) recognize that race is not fixed because throughout American history racial categorization depended upon political context. Both Omi and Winant (1994) and Bonilla-Silva (2001) have demonstrated that racial boundaries have continued to change over time both advantaging and disadvantaging individuals depending on how they are racially classified at any given time. The concepts presented from Aristotle through many of the Enlightenment philosophers have been conflated over time creating racial classification systems that have led to the notion of essentialism.

As molecular anthropologist Jonathan Marks (2002) explained, what we identify as race is a compilation of genetic traits that include such things as skin, eye and hair color, hair texture, and facial features. We then use these visual cues to organize people into racial groups. These visual cues provide clues about who someone is and through these clues we guide our behavior (Bourdieu, 1986; Lewis, 2003; Omi & Winant, 1994).

Our behaviors based on these visual cues often lead to essentialism, the idea that particular groups of marginalized people have specific core qualities that are inherent and unalterable. For many in marginalized positions this results in racism, classism, sexism, or other forms of cultural imperialism. It is through social collaboration that we create meaning within and between these categories, frequently crafting boundaries to determine in and out groups based solely on difference. According to African American studies scholar, Amanda Lewis, "race is about who we are, what we do, how we interact. It shapes where we live, whom we interact with, how we understand ourselves and others. But it does so in specific ways based on our social and historical location" (2003, p. 7).

The notion of social construction suggests that racial categories are human creations and are subject to change (Bonilla-Silva, 2010; Myers, 2005). However, Bonilla-Silva (2010) stated that there are multiple approaches that social scientists take in understanding the social construction perspective. First, some researchers suggest that since race is socially constructed it is no longer a fundamental category of analysis and praxis. Second, researchers simply give lip-service to the notion of social construction, but fail to acknowledge or focus on the social dynamics producing racial differences. Third, social categories, such as race, class, and gender are recognized as constructed, but there also is a recognition that they have a social reality that produces real effects on those within that category. I show it also produces effects on those outside of that category. Bonilla-Silva noted that the concept of social construction suggests instability, yet there is a quality of "changing same" at its core (2003, p. 9). This suggests that although there is this notion of change, it is only the façade that is changing, and this

results in similar types of disadvantage and oppression for those in marginalized groups. Even with the notion of race as socially constructed, these racially differentiated groups were still being used to show the dominance of one group over another (Banks, 1993).

Civil rights activist Audre Lorde wrote that racism is "the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (1992, p. 496). According to race scholars Joe Feagin, Hernan Vera, and Nikitah Imani (1996), racism "encompasses subtle and overt discriminatory practices, their institutional contexts, and the attitudes and ideologies that shape or racialize them" (p. 7). According to Bonilla-Silva (2001), racism is based on social systems, where individuals are racially classified, putting them in categories producing inequitable hierarchies that favor dominant races over all others. The hierarchies reward individuals based along racial lines and produce ideologies that lead to racial conflict (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Sociologist Kristen Myers (2005) agreed with Bonilla-Silva, noting that racism is a systematic means that restricts and denies access and opportunities based on racial classification. There are multiple definitions of racism, but as education scholars Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso (2002) noted, there are three important factors that tend to be embedded when you begin to look at definitions of racism: a) One group deems themselves as superior, b) the superior group has the power to enact racist behavior, and c) racist acts benefit the dominant group while negatively impacting other subordinate groups. Essentially, racism is about "institutional power" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 24).

From Racism to Postracial

The concepts of color-blindness and a postracial society imply that our social and political life is now race-neutral and Americans no longer tolerate practices of overt racial discrimination and prejudice. Color-blind racism, as defined by Bonilla-Silva (2001), is a racial ideology that expresses itself in seemingly nonracial terms. Color-blind racism is a form of new racism that emerged following the Civil Rights Movement (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Fiske, 2007). This type of racism allows White people to understand and talk about the social world as if race is no longer a factor. This notion is appealing as it suggests equality for all, but it also suggests that the USA's contentious history of racial inequality and racism is downplayed or forgotten. While this is appealing for White individuals, people of color have experienced a history of marginalization, discrimination, violence, and murder. American society expects individuals of color to become race-neutral by forgetting their past and investing in this new color-blind society. If they choose to do this, the expectation is that they must leave the past in the past in order to move forward, effectively erasing a history of overt racist acts while embracing a present and future filled with covert strategies leading to the same type of segregation and discrimination.

Legal, cultural, and physical boundaries marked all those who had dark skin or were considered "non-White" against the civilized White people. So even as slavery ended, these demarcations left these individuals with enormous disadvantages compared to their White counterparts. Over the course of history, Black individuals faced systematic emotionally and physically degrading treatment (Feagin & McKinney, 2003). While much of the overt racism associated with slavery, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights

Movement is much less visible,[3] newer forms of racism and racial segregation are developing, creating the appearance of a postracial society.

As Bonilla-Silva (2014) explained, today in the United States few White people claim to be racist and many claim to be color-blind, judging people on their character, not the color of their skin. Unlike the racism of the Jim Crow era, "color-blind racism 'otherizes' softly" (2014, p. 3). Color-blindness is becoming a naturalized form of racism as it is not recognized as racism by the perpetuators. Because of the belief that we are now beyond race, when an issue of race is brought to White people's attention they deny their intention to offend, accuse the person of misunderstanding, or believe the person is being oversensitive, thus insisting minority members are the ones maintaining the racial divide (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Sue et al., 2007).

Bonilla-Silva (2002) argued that color-blind racism, which has become the central racial ideology of the post-civil rights era, developed a particular style made of up five components. The first is simply the avoidance of racist language. Today certain racial slang is hardly used in public through our everyday language. When it is used, it sets off a heated and mediated topic normally resulting in public shaming. The problem with this is that our avoidance of and immediate chastising of those who use it serves to shut down dialogue about race, effectively preventing society from having an open conversation about the prevalence of race in our nation. A second component is the use of rhetorical strategies to safely express racial views. Semantic moves or positioning statements allow the individual making the comment to save face with the use of disclaimers. A third component of color-blind racism focuses on projection. In this particular situation, White

[3] I am by no means suggesting name calling, open hostility, and outright violence against minorities no longer exist.

individuals tend to refocus the blame onto the minority. The use of diminutives is a fourth way for White individuals to soften racial blows. For instance, saying "Affirmative action is a little concerning to me" suggests opposing certain issues, while cushioning an individual's racial views. Finally, Bonilla-Silva described the concept of incoherence when faced with uncomfortable racial discussions. This suggests that grammatical mistakes, long pauses, stammers, and repetition become very prevalent when individuals are discussing sensitive topics.

The color-blind ideology is used to maintain White dominant ideologies through subtle, nonracial institutionalized practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2002). The move from overt racism to anything perceived as racist left little space for speech about race-related matters. These techniques and strategies simply masquerade a historical and deeply engrained racial bias within our society. My work touches on a variety of concerns with the use of language as a way for the dominant culture to maintain and control power. What this color-blind ideology leads to is the use of racially coded language or "racetalk," which is the use of rhetorical strategies to suggest racial linkages without sounding overtly racist. Coded language "affords elites the opportunity and incentive to activate racial thinking without explicitly 'playing the race card'" (Valentino, Hutchings, & van Dijk 1987, 2000; White, 2002, p. 75). In 1971, social and political psychologists David Sears and Donald Kinder used the term "symbolic racism" to point out how White people's deeply rooted oppositional attitudes toward Black people had more to do with abstract moral values rather than actual negative experience with them. As such, the idea of racial coding is used to provoke negative racist stereotypes.

As racist terms have become taboo in public settings, a variety of other

terminology with hidden meanings has taken their place in the media and everyday conversations of White people (Feagin, 2000). “Racial coding, parading as commonsense populism, associated Blacks with a series of negative equivalencies that denied racial injustice while affirming the repressed, unspeakable racist unconscious of dominant White culture” (Giroux, 1997, p. 288). For many, terms like thug, gangs, ghetto, slum, the poor, the economically disadvantaged, welfare recipients, violent criminals, and drug pushers have come to symbolize Black people (Collins, 2012; Feagin, 2000). Because these terms are not specific to any one group of people, anyone can use these terms to denigrate minority groups and still appear to be factual rather than prejudiced. One example of racial coding involves mainstream media linking certain stories such as those relating to crime or welfare with racial imagery, reinforcing linkages between race and violence or race and welfare (Coltrane & Messineo 2000; Entman 1990, 1992; Entman & Rojecki 2000; Gray 1995; Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002). For Myers (2005), racetalk is “any talk that demeans on the basis of race or ethnicity” (p. 2). Myers’ study focused on individual rather than institutional forms of racism, through the dialogue of college students in their everyday routines. This is talk that is used in sanctioned spaces, allowing for racial jokes, comments, and candid statements around like-minded people. Racetalk becomes a backstage form of communication, often done by people who claim not to be racist. To some extent, Myers’ work challenges some of the other notions of color-blind racism by noting that people are still invoking racial stereotypes, but only in specific spaces, thus regenerating racial stereotypes and beliefs.

Even without explicit reference to race, text and visual linkages can potentially activate racial thinking (Gilens, 1996, 1998; Jamieson, 1992; Mendelberg, 1997, 2001;

Valentino et al., 2002). Research suggests this strategy is frequently used by those in dominant groups to gain and support political advantage (Jamieson, 1992; Mendelberg, 1997; Pierce, 1969). A prime example of this is the Willie Horton ad run in the 1988 election. The narrator informs the audience of the horrific details of rape and murder of a White couple by Horton when he was on a two-day furlough, while simultaneously imposing a menacing picture of Horton (Jamieson, 1992). Political communication scholar Tali Mendelberg (2001) suggested this ad worked due to its implicitness, rather than a blatant racial appeal.

In her research on campaign strategy, Mendelberg (2001) outlined a theoretical approach to understanding racialized campaign messages. First, White Americans are torn between desire for equality and resentment of Black Americans for failure to live up to the American standards of individualism and hard work. Second, racial priming works as certain cues evoke racial schemas in memory. Third, awareness of racial content in messages would cause rejection as it would violate equality norms. Finally, these appeals are effective only if they are not recognized by the audience. While this framework was directed at understanding political campaigns, it works just as well to understand aspects of everyday racial communication.

While there has been substantial work on framing issues, most of that work has focused more on textual narratives or visuals that frame a message. Less work has been done on subtler single words or phrases with no explicit racial content (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005). Research has addressed how the words *welfare* and *crime* have become racially coded issues in policy settings, and specifically how White people think about welfare in racial terms (Gilens, 1996). Political communication scholars Tali Mendelberg

and John Oleske (2000) found instances of coded language during town meetings. For instance, phrases like *White flight, neighborhood schools, quality of education,* and *outsiders* were employed in ways that carried substantial racial meaning in a discussion of integrating school districts. In their research, political scientists Jon Hurwitz and Mark Peffley (2005) found that introducing the word *inner-city* had a direct effect on political views related to crime prevention. It is not just in the area of politics and policy where racial coding is used. Research by professor of education Eddie Comeaux (2010) on racial differences in faculty perceptions of student athletes found that faculty used coded language and distorted views of affirmative action to suggest Black student athletes' accomplishments were not entirely earned.

Racially coded language comes about in a variety of ways – narrative, text, images, short phrases, and words. Some of the earliest examples, such as the Willie Horton ad, pair text and narrative in ways to drive political messages (Jamieson, 1992). However, as the notions of color-blindness and postracial America perpetuate, coded-language becomes even less explicit. Not only is it showing up in political discourse (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2005; Mendelberg, 1997, 2001), but research shows it is appearing in social media (boyd & Marwick, 2011), education (Comeaux, 2010), and online (Hughey & Daniels, 2013; Loke, 2012). Additionally, newer racially coded language does not just signify or allude to a particular racial population, such as *thugs*, *welfare moms,* or *inner-city*. It also utilizes certain terminology to bring into question achievements by minorities, like questioning a Black female athlete's grades or implying her success is due to affirmative action. As the study of racial microaggressions is becoming more prominent, racially coded language offers a unique venue to examine the

instances and effects of microaggressions.

Microaggressions

Beginning in the late 1960s, psychiatrist Chester Pierce began talking about the subtle and often automatic "put downs" of Black individuals by offenders, known as microaggressions. Research in the 1970s and 1980s used the term aversive racism (Dovido & Gaertner, 1986; Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978) or modern racism (McConahay, 1986) to illustrate those who sympathize on past injustices, support the principle of race equality, and view themselves as not prejudiced, but at the same time still have negative feelings and/or beliefs about minority groups. Pierce (1969) referred to "offensive mechanisms" designed "to reduce, dilute, atomize, and encase" Black people in their place (p. 303). His later publications (1970, 1974) explained how these "offensive mechanisms" are cumulative, based in beliefs of White superiority, and serve to perpetuate racism. Throughout his research agenda, Pierce has discussed or related microaggressive acts in a variety of areas, including: health (1969), children and poverty (1975), the workplace (1988) and the media (1980, 1992). By 1995, Pierce, drawing from both racism and sexism, defined microaggressions as "subtle, innocuous, preconscious, or unconscious degradations, and putdowns, often kinetic but capable of being verbal and/or kinetic" (p. 281). He explained that while these acts may seem harmless, the ongoing nature of them over an extended time period contribute to both mental and physical health issues. Microaggressions are the framework for this study and they are embedded in critical race theory and can also be drawn from Bourdieu's concept of power.

Microaggressions take on many shapes, including nonverbal communication such

as moving seats on a bus so as not to have to sit next to a person of color, oral or textual communication that promotes stereotypes or deficit thinking, and environmental assaults that include leaving students of color off a college brochure or appropriating culture for Halloween costumes. According to psychologist Derald Wing Sue (2010), "microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (p. 3). Race, class, gender, (dis)ability, sexuality, and the intersections of these constructions, all factors beyond an individual's control, contribute to the marginality of these individuals who are often excluded, treated unequally, and are victims of abuse and violence. In addition to being oppressed and marginalized, these groups are often the victims of intentional and unintentional microaggressions.

Recently, research on microaggression has gained substantially more attention, especially in the fields of education and psychology. In these areas, scholars have focused on campus racial climates (Garcia, Johnston, Garibay, Herrera, & Giraldo, 2011; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso 2000; Watkins, Labarrie & Appio, 2010). They have examined the negative and adverse effects of microaggressions on self-esteem, as well as the psychological, physiological, and emotional effects (Nadal, Wong, Griffin, & Srikin, 2014; Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011). Others have examined microaggressions in K-12 schools where teachers could not or would not use students' given names in their classroom (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Other research, focusing on college campuses and associated online microaggressions, examined microaggressions and racial language associated with college mascots (Steinfeldt et al., 2010; Clark et al.,

2011), as well as online responses to racially themed campus parties (Tynes & Markoe, 2010). Finally, research has been conducted on microaggressions related to racist nativism and immigration issues (Buenavista, 2013; Pérez Huber, 2011; Roy & Rokas, 2011).

Education scholar Daniel Solórzano created a model for understanding racial microaggressions: (a) examine the types of race, class, gender, sexuality, or other factors that place one in a marginalized population; (b) look at the context of the racial microaggression or how and where the microaggressions occur; (c) examine the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of the microaggressions; and (d) consider how individuals respond to interpersonal and institutional racist acts and behaviors (as cited in Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). This particular framework provides scholars with a tool to expose, understand, and challenge subtle forms of racism. Although it was designed to study the lasting negative impacts on students, this model may be very relevant in fields outside of education in the exploration of microaggressions.

Categories and Themes of Microaggressions

Psychologist Derald Wing Sue, whose research spans education, counseling, and work, has broadened the notion of microaggressions from just race to class, gender, sexuality, and religion. According to Sue et al. (2007), there are three categories of microaggressions: (a) microassault, (b) microinsult, and (c) microinvalidation. These categories have been further refined into more specific themes to highlight their hidden messages (Sue & Capodilupo, 2008). Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of categories and themes within the racial microaggression taxonomy.

Microassaults are conscious biased beliefs and attitudes which are intentionally expressed or acted out toward a marginalized individual or group. These types of beliefs and actions are often referred to as overt bigotry, racism, and sexism. Within this category there is typically one theme identified as waging stereotypical attacks with the intent to hurt or harm another. Examples of this include name calling, publicly displaying images like confederate flags or playmate images, telling racial, ethnic, or sexually based jokes, deliberately moving away to avoid marginalized people, or outright discrimination and harassment. These types of actions take place online as the perpetrators have a degree of anonymity allowing them to feel free to engage in this behavior or as they participate in online groups with likeminded individuals.

Unlike microassaults, microinsults are often unconsciously enacted by another individual. They are similar to a backhanded comment which starts out with a positive statement, but ultimately insults the individual or group. This type of microaggression communicates demeaning messages about another individual's or group's identity (Sue, 2010). Microinsults can include verbal comments such as: "you are a credit to your race," or "you are sure smart for an athlete." Additionally, this type of microaggression includes such things as objectifying images of women or minorities, excluding diverse individuals from promotional materials, or using stereotypical images of marginalized individuals. All of these acts, while mostly unintentional, send a message to the marginalized group or individual that they are different or that they do not belong. Within this category, themes include ascribing intelligence based on race or gender, treating an individual as a second-class citizen based on race or class status, assuming someone is criminal or lazy based on race or class status, or assuming that groups with differing communication styles or

values are abnormal. These types of microinsults may manifest online through comments or images that reinforce stereotypes, such as an online newspaper headline referring to a homeless man as a hobo or bum or using a photo without context to the situation.

Like microinsults, microinvalidations often occur outside of conscious awareness. According to Sue (2010), these types of microaggressions might be the most harmful because they "directly attack or deny the experiential realties of socially devalued groups" (p. 10). Microinvalidations are comments and beliefs suggesting that we are all the same and minority groups and individuals do not have different backgrounds or experiences based on their gender, race, class, or sexuality. These microinvalidations deny marginalized persons their background and experiences. Individuals in majority groups often use these strategies to avoid appearing racist or to avoid engaging in discussions on race, gender, or identity (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Sue, 2010). Themes within this category include believing that minority members are foreigners; suggesting color-blindness; denying one's own racism, sexism, classism or perpetuating those "isms"; or believing the myth of meritocracy. Examples of this category of microinvalidation online might include news articles that silence marginalized individuals by allowing experts to speak for them, making comments that suggest the expert has more knowledge of the person's situation than the person him/herself.

The concept of visual microaggressions is a relatively new addition to research on microaggressions. Visual communication scholars Rick Busselle and Helena Bilandzic (2011) explain that images serve as additional information, often containing the bulk of the narrative or serving as a symbolic representation helping the reader/viewer

understand an event (p. 31). We use narratives to help us make sense of the world (Bruner, 1991; Fisher, 1984) and images become an essential part of the narrative (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003). As visual scholar William Mitchell (1994) noted, the images are either explicitly or implicitly linked to information not pictured. Further, Busselle and Bilandzic (2011) suggested that "images not only add to or define a narrative…but also independently convey narratives" through expressions of experientiality (p. 39). Thus, individuals are able to draw upon the image, other text, and their own knowledge and belief to construct a story to explain what they are seeing.

Visual microaggressions fall within the category of environmental microaggressions, but move beyond Sue's definition. There are several common themes that occur in traditional microaggression research that might also be found in visual microaggressions: sexual/racial objectification, second-class citizenship, assumptions of inferiority, social invisibility, and traditional gender role assumptions.

Currently, there is limited research on visual microaggressions. Education and culture scholars Lindsay Pérez Huber and Daniel Solórzano's (2015) research on the historical image of Mexican banditry is the only published article. Tara Yosso focused on Chicano/a resistance to visual microaggressions in her dissertation (2000). Huber and Solórzano's (2015) research findings suggest that the Mexican bandit image functions to continually misrepresent Latinas/os as criminal, nonnative and threatening. They also note that dominant White ideologies are essential to the maintenance and legitimization of this type of discourse, allowing for the Mexican bandit image to "pervade the public imagination of Latinas/os for over 100 years" (p. 233).

I define visual microaggressions as the everyday, banal, and often unintentional,

visual cues presented by individuals or institutions through images, art, displays, or other visual processes that communicate and/or reinforce hostile, derogatory, or negative stereotypes and insults to a marginalized individual or group, or those cues that create a sense of exclusion. I suggest that along with Huber and Solórzano's findings it is not just the image selected that often reinforces stereotypes, but also the embeddedness of stereotypes within our culture and society that influences the images we select. For instance, a photographer's or editor's own belief about a marginalized group or individual may result in the selection of an image that unintentionally reinforces that stereotype, rather than a more appropriate image for the situation. This type of research is key to understanding how online newspapers use their photos to continually perpetuate the stereotypes or master narratives associated with marginalized subjects.

From Interpersonal to Societal Microaggressions

Traditional research on microaggressions focused primarily on interpersonal interactions (Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; Nadal et al., 2014; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Smith, Hung, Man, & Franklin, 2011; Smith, Yosso & Solórzano, 2006; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In fact, Sue (2010) identifies four effects of interpersonal microaggressions: biological/physical effects, emotional effects, cognitive effects, and behavioral effects. However, microaggressions do not just present a variety of problems to the individual, but also to society as a whole. As such, more recent research on microaggression is beginning to examine the more embodied nature of racism in social systems. Although still focusing on the area of education, Garcia et al. (2011) and Tynes and Marko (2010) examined issues related to microaggressions and racially

themed parties and Clark et al. (2011) and Steinfeldt et al. (2010) examined online racial microaggressions that target American Indians as associated with naming and mascots of college sports teams. According to Sue et al. (2007) "[r]esearchers continue to omit subtle racism and microaggressions from their research agendas, and this absence conveys the notion that covert forms of racism are not as valid or as important as racist events that can be quantified and 'proven'" (p. 283). This dissertation research will focus on online microaggressions in order to extend the work of microaggressions into the realm of online newspapers and into the field of communication, where it is seldom employed.

The study of microaggressions is specifically identified as systematic everyday racism (Solórzano, 1997; Sue, 2010). Thus, it helps illustrate that racism exists beyond the individual act and is structurally and institutionally embedded in our culture, and therefore in our communication. As such, I see it as a more holistic tool for researching institutionalized forms of discrimination. Scholars who use this tool not only can explore specific acts or actions, they can also examine who perpetuates them, their effects, and/or strategies for combating them. Research on microaggressions, beyond simply identifying coded texts, acknowledges the deep-seated racism within the United States. The study of microaggressions does not just focus on one particular aspect of racial injustice, such as coded language, but rather it seeks out the prevalence of these acts and the underlying causes of these behaviors. By studying microaggressions on a target population, we can see how they function to continually misrepresent certain groups.

Bourdieu and the Dynamics of Power

In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, philosopher, sociologist, and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) explained that how we experience our society is directly related to our class orientation and our relations between these classes. Bourdieu did not believe that individuals are defined by a social class membership, but rather they belong to a multidimensional social space that is shaped by the types of capital one possesses. In accordance with Gramsci (1971), Bourdieu (1984) suggested that society functions in ways that preserves the dominant class position by involuntarily supporting inaccessible and vague conceptions of existence stemming from civil society. As Bourdieu (1984) explained, subaltern classes often have limited economic resources and therefore prioritize functionality before form. For the wealthier and dominant classes, they are able to access different forms of goods and services that convey cultural superiority that ultimately leads to the belief that they are more deserving of additional economic resources. In order to maintain their positions, those in subaltern positions often blindly follow the dominant classes rather than joining together to challenge the dominant class. This is part of the hegemonic design, where individuals fail to recognize that their behavior and the hegemonic structures, that have become comfortable and legitimate, actually function to keep them in their place. Thus, structures that legitimize the dominant class are reproduced, while a stratified class system is maintained.

Capital

In order to maintain these stratified systems, Bourdieu (1984) explained that all classes are given interrelated and tangible forms of cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Cultural capital is "symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence" (1984, p. 66). He emphasized that cultural capital is what marks the difference between classes. Cultural capital is ascribed based on our class orientation at birth. Social capital refers to the aggregate of resources that provides an individual with credentials. This type of capital can include such things as a family name, levels and degrees of education, language, values, the type of employment position held, or even the size of personal and professional networks (Bourdieu, 1986). These resources determine the power one has to advance his/her interest in a particular situation. Finally, symbolic capital represents "the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability…" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 291). Capital can be accumulated and transferred from one area to another (Navarro, 2006), thus becoming symbolic capital.

A person who holds symbolic capital and uses his/her power against someone who holds less symbolic power in order to alter that person's actions is said to exercise symbolic violence. Just as covert forms of microaggressions can be more powerful than overt forms (Solórzano, 1997; Sue, 2010), symbolic violence can be just as powerful as physical violence. Symbolic violence is powerful because it is unseen or unrecognized even by its victims. As such, it also allows for the possibility of more explicit forms of violence to emerge. Both symbolic and physical violence can become embedded in cognition and modes of action, resulting in a legitimization of the social order (Bonilla-

Silva, 2014; Bourdieu, 1977, 1984).

Habitus

Bourdieu's notion of habitus is essentially the physical embodiment of cultural capital. Habitus is the habits, skills, and attitudes we develop based on our life experiences. One's habitus is defined as a system of dispositions or tendencies developed in response to conditions encountered (Wacquant, 2005). It is not a fixed concept, but rather an interplay between past events and societal structures that shapes current practices and structures (Bourdieu, 1984). One's habitus both generates and regulates the practices that make up one's social life. One's aesthetic sensibilities are shaped by one's habitus that determines one's taste for cultural objects, one's likes, and one's preferences. Bourdieu explained that one's habitus is so engrained that it is mistaken for something that is natural rather than culturally developed. Because of this, social inequality can be justified because of the mistaken belief that some people are predisposed to lead better lives, while others are not (Bourdieu, 1986).

Field

Related to habitus is the concept of field that is the social arena where we negotiate for desirable resources. "Fields are defined by the stakes which are at stake—cultural goods (lifestyle), housing, intellectual distinction (education), employment, land, power (politics), social class, prestige or whatever—and may be of differing degrees of specificity and concreteness" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 84). Fields are the social and institutional locations where individuals express and reproduce their dispositions. Navarro (2006)

explained “a field is a network, structure or set of relationships which may be intellectual, religious, educational, cultural, etc.” (p. 18). Within these fields, individuals use their forms of capital to express their power at any given moment. For instance, in a public setting, individuals may not express their racial beliefs due public response or fear of losing capital, but when they are online or with like-minded individuals they may freely express their beliefs. Within Bourdieu’s conception of power is the idea of doxa, our learned, fundamental, deep-seated and unconscious beliefs, and our values that are used to inform our actions and thoughts in various fields. Doxa is the common sense behind the distinctions we make. Bourdieu explained it as “an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident” (1984, p. 471). Bourdieu’s theory of power emphasizes an individual’s own background and know-how in understanding how he or she operates in the social world. Individuals operate based on their habitus within the various fields they occupy, often reproducing mechanisms of social domination.

The Interrelationship Between CRT and Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu’s framework can easily be applied to race, just as it is for class status. Many of the same ideas that Bourdieu uses can also be used to help explain racial oppression. In the United States, Whiteness and class status are both underexamined identity markers, yet serve as the standard by which others are judged and measured (Feagin & O’Brien, 2003). Bonilla-Silva (2010) identifies “white habitus” as “a racialized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates White people’s racial taste, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters” (p.

104). For White individuals, this White habitus serves to create a sense of belonging or group identity that is used to segregate or "otherize" non-White individuals. This habitus creates a worldview and viewpoint on what constitutes White people's actions as normal behavior. In terms of the intersection of race and class, we have to consider the effect of one's habitus as a factor in the way we create narratives relating to race and homelessness.

Because fields are where habitus operates, they become the places where individuals compete for resources, where some individuals are dominant and others oppressed based on their capital. In these spaces, individuals use their power to determine meaning and legitimacy or the rights for the rest of the populations. This includes race and class. Bourdieu's notion of fields suggested that there can also be conflict between and among fields and the areas of behavior that are not strongly established by a particular habitus (Swartz, 1998). A field operates like a strategy game, where participants bring their capital and skills to try and conserve their position or to displace those in a dominant position (Prior, 2000). Media can serve as a field and so can comment sections. Depending on who is narrating and commenting, a battle can emerge challenging positions on issues related to race and homelessness.

Similar to Bourdieu's concept of capital, Lipsitz (1998) noted, "Whiteness has a cash value: it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing…unequal distribution of education…insider employment networks" (p. vii). This type of racial capital has been accruing over many decades across fields. As such, those who have this racial capital gain advantages through the institution of Whiteness. In comparable situations, White people have more capital than those with similar education,

knowledge, and skills. This was specifically illustrated in the introductory chapter in the case of less educated White people gaining employment over Black people and earning disparities between equally educated Black individuals and White individuals (ICPH, 2012). For poor White individuals, their whiteness is a form of social capital allowing them unearned opportunities over people of color, resulting in them seeing themselves as superior to Black people. This power creates a hegemonic hierarchy that serves white supremacist discourse in the United States.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I provided the theoretical framework I would be utilizing for this project. First, I explained the significance of critical race theory. Under the rubric of CRT, I outlined how race and racism are socially constructed concepts. Additionally, I explained how a shift from overt racist language to more political correctness has many individuals suggesting the United States is now a postracial society. By providing information on coded language, I illustrated that this idea of a postracial society is far from accurate. Next, I covered the three main categories of microaggressions: microassaults, microinvalidations, and microinsults. As these concepts are key to my research, I provided a history and the direction I plan to take in examining microaggressions. Then, I overviewed Pierre Bourdieu's dynamics of power. I outlined three major concepts: capital, field, and habitus. Finally, I illustrated the connections between CRT and Bourdieu's work. By examining issues of race and homelessness in the various news stories and comments, these two theoretical lenses will enable me to examine how authors attempt to shape the narrative based on their own habitus. Because

each of the subjects is a homeless Black male, there must be a central focus on race. Race and class have been intrinsically linked throughout the history of the United States as illustrated in the introduction. Because of this, both race and power dynamics must be considered within this analysis. The next chapter highlights the literature associated with race and homelessness.

Table 2.1: Sue and Capodilupo's 2007 Taxonomy of Racial Microaggressions.

Microaggressions Definition		
Commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults based on race, class, sexuality, gender, etc. These may include verbal, nonverbal, or environmental manifestations.		
Categories of Microaggressions		
Microinsults (often unconscious) Communication that conveys rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage, gender, sexuality, class status, etc.	**Microassaults** (often conscious) Explicit derogations characterized by violent verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attacks meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions	**Microinvalidations** (often unconscious) Communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of another individual
Examples of Microaggressive Themes by Category		
Ascription of Intelligence Assigning a degree of intelligence to a person based on race or gender	**Waging Stereotypical Attack** Attacking marginalized groups with the intention to harm/hurt the intended victim through name calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discrimination	**Alien in Own Land** Belief that visible racal/ethnic minority citizens are foreigners
Second-Class Citizen One is treated as less than another based on identity characteristics		**Color-Blindness** Denial or pretense that a White person does not see color or race
Pathologizing Cultural Values/Communication Style Notion that the values and communication styles of different races or gender are abnormal		**Myth of Meritocracy** Statements that assert that race, class, or gender plays a minor role in life success
Assumption of Criminality Presumed to be a criminal, dangerous, or deviant based on race or class		**Denial of Individual beliefs** Denial of personal beliefs or one's perpetuation of these beliefs

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

> You're a Black educated fool, son. These white folk have newspapers, magazines, radios, spokesmen to get their ideas across. If they want to tell the world a lie, they can tell it so well that it becomes the truth; and if I tell them you're lying, they'll tell the world even if you prove you're telling the truth. Because it's the kind of lie they want to hear.
>
> —Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 1952

Portrayals of Homeless People and Black People:

From News to New Media

News is an important commodity that many Americans receive on a daily basis. The American newspaper press began in 1690 with *Public Occurrences* that ended up being banned after its first issue (Wilson II & Gutiérrez, 1995). While press coverage continued over the next 100 years, it did not reach a vast population until the penny press was established in the 1830s as the first "mass medium" in North America (Wilson II & Gutiérrez, 1995). Today, Americans receive news through a variety of outlets including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and the computer. However, most of these mediums deliver news in a unidirectional manner, from the news source to the consumer. With the advent of the internet and creation of newspaper websites, social networking sites, information portals, blogs, and other online methods of communication, there are more ways than ever to share and discuss the news. These new sites of news need to be

examined both in the ways we have examined traditional media and in new and emerging ways that more fully encompass the range of experiences in which communication takes place.

In this chapter, I examine news as narrative, explore how issues of homelessness and race have been covered by the news media, and provide an overview on minstrels and minstrel characters. Because what was traditionally covered in the newspapers and on television has now found a home on the internet, I end this section with an overview of the literature relating to online othering. I do this to address how online newspaper comment sections further the stereotypes and ideologies often presented in traditional media.

But the News Said: Mediated Narratives

Narratives are not just a philosophical concept studied by academics, but are also becoming recognized in the field of journalism. Journalist Jay Rosen (2003) discussed how the master narrative functions in journalism. He described the journalistic master narrative as "a part of the press that too easily eludes attention: the big story, sometimes the back story, often a fragment of a narrative, that generates all the other stories, which are smaller pieces" (para. 1). He noted that although journalistic stories have a byline, to some extent the author is "'journalism' itself and its peculiar habits of mind" (para. 2). This idea ties directly into the issue of media and journalistic frames and framing. It is possible that the function of framing is less deliberate today, and is simply reconstituted master narratives used to tell stories about the world in terms that individuals can understand.

Those who report and read the news tend to believe that it is an "objective" version of the world we live in. The term "objectivity" began to be used by journalists in the twentieth century to express both their impartiality and reflect the reality of the world (Stephens, 1988, p. 264). This belief suggests that the news is simply facts delivered with accuracy.

The news sets the agenda of what the media establishment believes the audience should notice by covering some stories and omitting others, or by determining what aspects of the story to tell. As English professor Helen Fulton (2005) noted, individuals are often represented as stereotyped characters in recognizable locations (pp. 226-227). Communication scholar Anne Dunn (2005) pointed out that there are certain journalistic criteria that make something newsworthy: It is timely, it is perceived as having significance to people in the intended audience, it is unexpected or ironic bad news, or it is of human interest (p. 141). As sociologist Herbert Gans (1979) posited, it is the "Unknowns" that human interest stories focus on. These Unknowns become newsworthy by doing or having something extraordinary done to them (Dunn, 2005).

Fulton (2005) noted that there are consequences of news as narratives. She explained that the news narratives "are distinctively narratives in the sense of being shaped into stories or myths about the 'way things are'" (p. 242). One consequence is that the narrativization often presents current event news as a human-interest story. What should be a story with important information to the reader is turned into "infotainment" (p. 242). Another issue she addressed is the concept of individualization, which presents events as the work of individuals who are constructed as stereotyped "characters." What this does is makes most events seem as though they "are the result of individual human

agency and their impact is to be perceived mainly through individual experience" (p. 242). This is frequently done unless responsibility needs to be placed on an organization. Individualization is problematic because it often attributes agency to those who did not really have any agency or takes the focus off the real issue.

One of the recent trends I have noticed in all news formats is that they often highlight images and/or videos that have gone viral in some form on the internet, as two of my cases illustrate. When doing this, the news has to provide very little context and the "story" is already individualized. Thus, in this particular case, they make news out of something that is really not newsworthy or pass over the potential reasons that people are sharing a particular video or image, rendering the news story as noncomplex or as resolved.

Additionally, utilizing narrative principles in the news tends to "dumb it down." No time is spent explaining the historical, political, or cultural factors that have gone into the situation. While this may inform the public of the current situation, it also prevents access to the complexities involved in this news event. Fulton (2005) explained that this leads to misperceptions about our public leaders: That problems can be attributed to individual incompetence and if the right people were in place things would easily be solved (p. 243). Finally, Fulton acknowledged that the narrativization works against stories that unfold over time and against understanding of long-term consequences. Because the narrativized story focuses on immediate outcomes of the event(s), many stories are viewed simply as random occurrences rather than being interconnected. This either provides an impression the problem is solved or a sense that this story will inevitably be repeated (p. 243).

Considering the convergence of all types of media (text, video, photos, blogs) in online formats, as well other forms of social media and online interactive practices, understanding the role of narratives becomes increasingly important in how narratives, especially master narratives, are created and maintained. Helen Fulton wrote, “In a world dominated by print and electronic media, our sense of reality is increasingly structured by narrative” (2005, p. 1). If this is the case, it is going to become even more devastating for marginalized groups or individuals that have digital narratives created for them.

Homelessness in the News

News media, whether television, radio, newspapers, or online, has the potential to present stories on homelessness in a variety of ways which inform the public and frame social issues. How the media covers homelessness can influence public perception, can increase awareness, and can mobilize support to effect change (Reynalds, 1999, 2006). It can also limit the understanding of the issue, maintain stereotypes, and distort the public view on causes of homelessness (Campbell & Reeves, 1989; Min, 1999; Power, 1999). Since online newspapers are a direct spinoff from traditional news outlets, understanding how homelessness has been covered by news media is essential to understanding how narratives are created and reinforced through the articles/stories told by the various narrators. Research specifically focusing on media portrayals of homelessness is somewhat limited. In this research, several interrelated themes related to coverage of homeless people appear: seasonal appeals, newsworthy events, emphasizing otherness, and silencing the voices of the homeless. The next sections address each theme.

Seasonal and Environmental Appeals

The coverage of homelessness is the greatest during the holiday seasons or following some type of natural disaster. In his dissertation, communication scholar Insung Whang (1993) noted that news programs repeatedly reported stories about homeless individuals during the winter holiday season, with the focus on religious organizations' charitable services. Whang explained that this type of extended coverage during a particular season was not effective, as seasonal giving does little to solve the immediate or long-term problems of homelessness. Sociology scholars William Bunis, Angela Yancik, and David Snow (1996) did a comparison study between the *New York Times* (1975-1993) and the *London Times* (1980-1993) and found that coverage and sympathy for homeless people increased during holidays, namely Thanksgiving and Christmas, which are also celebrated during the colder seasons. They suggested that sympathy followed both temporal and cultural patterns that in part played out in the media, suggesting that this type of coverage helped individuals cope with their own consciences during the holiday. Communication scholars Rebecca Lind and James Danowski's (1999) quantitative research on the transcripts of television and radio content from May 1993 to January 1996 found a correlation between seasonal and weather markers in conjunction with homelessness. They found when weather was mentioned with homelessness the weather was bad and terminology such as frigid, cold, and freezing was prevalent. This suggested holidays and weather may be used to increase giving during these times.

Political scientist Todd Shields' (2001) extensive content analysis of television nightly news between 1980 and 1993 found extensive coverage between Thanksgiving

and Christmas Eve. Yet rather than focusing on the homeless individuals, the focus of the stories was on the volunteers working in soup kitchens or sharing meals with homeless people at this time. Additionally, Shields (2001) pointed out that there was more media coverage of the difficulties of being homeless when the temperatures dropped to freezing. In a study regarding homelessness in the United Kingdom, psychology scholars Darrin Hodgetts, Andrea Cullen, and Alan Radley (2005) examined 99 portrayals of homeless people by the British Independent Television News from January 1993 to December 2002. They found the number of news items peaked between October and December then dropped in January and February. Because almost 50% of the stories depicted homeless people out in the cold, the authors suggested the media used rhetoric focusing on charitable appeals. Similar research suggested that the emphasis on getting homeless people out of the cold had an underlying message of getting homeless people out of the way of the housed (Bunis et al., 1996).

While any coverage has the potential to raise awareness of the plight of homelessness, the research points out problems with the type of coverage in these stories. The main problems are that homelessness is a problem year-round, not seasonally or just during environmental catastrophes, and that the coverage focused less on homeless individuals and more on those who help.

High-Profile Events

Another common situation leading to stories about homelessness centers on high-profile events associated with homelessness. One of the most visible stories relating to homelessness happened in late 1987 and focused on Joyce Brown. Brown, a Black

homeless woman living on the streets of New York City, was the first person involuntarily committed to a psychiatric treatment facility under Mayor Koch's new program that removed mentally disturbed people from the streets. The program was based on a state law mandating involuntary hospitalization of the mentally ill who were considered dangerous. Brown was defended by the New York Civil Liberties Union and ultimately released after eleven weeks because the State Supreme Court ruled she could not be forcibly medicated and, although she was mentally ill, she was not found to be a danger to anyone.

Mass communication scholars Richard Campbell and Jimmie Reeves (1989) noted, however, that in 1988, 60 Minutes ran a follow-up story on Brown after she won her case. While in this particular story she did become the protagonist and the representative of common sense, this story did nothing to help bridge the difference between the reality of homelessness and the dominant understanding of the issue. In fact, by making Brown the "expert" and through editing, the 60 Minutes story reinforced the beliefs that most homeless people are crazy or homeless by their own choice, which was not an accurate representation.

The media covers not just stories about individual people, but also high-profile events targeting homeless populations. Shields (2001) noted that there was extensive coverage on Mitch Snyder in 1984 and his hunger strike to call attention to the plight of homeless people. Similarly, in 1986 the media event "Hands Across America" garnered extensive news coverage. The problem that Shields pointed out was that the stories about these events became political stories, rather than a discussion of the actual plight of homelessness, extent of homelessness, or social causes of homelessness. The stories were

about the event itself or particular characters within the event.

Stigmatization and Deviance: "The Other"

Homeless individuals are often negatively portrayed in news media with an emphasis on mental illness, substance abuse, criminality, or poor health. As early as the 1870s and 1880s, popular perceptions of homeless populations exaggerated and invented traits associated with homeless individuals as a means to separate them from those who held the dominant values of the time. As Kusmer (2002) described, media in the 1940s and 1950s focused on psychological problems painting homeless people as alcoholic, lazy deviants. Academic studies between the 1950s and 1970s reinforced these stereotypes, even though the data presented could be interpreted quite differently (Kusmer, 2002). Kusmer (2002) also acknowledged that research challenging or providing reasoning for the standard of living remained unpublished or inaccessible. As research shows, this type of stigmatization still occurs.

A dissertation by communication student Bernadette McNulty (1992) focusing on print and broadcast media between November 1986 and February 1989 identified five basic images of homeless individuals, four of which fall into the stigmatization or deviance category. The first, "institutional avoiders," are those who shun social institutions but take charity in the form of subsistence from institutions. They are considered both victims and villains (pp. 134-135). Next, "mentally-ill individuals" are described as those mentally ill homeless individuals who avoid relationships because of distrust of authority, fear of hospitalization, or a deluded understanding of their situation. A third category, "runaways or abandoned teens," includes teens who run away or get

pushed out. Often, they are victims of abuse or violence, but they are not portrayed as innocent; rather as social deviants involved in some type of criminal behavior (p. 169). Finally, homeless people are portrayed as "threatening villains" who prey upon ordinary people or behave in violent ways when dealing with legal or political institutions (p. 176). McNulty explained that these journalistic approaches illustrated homeless individuals as "ungrateful victims" who overly rely on public charity.

Lind and Danowski (1999) found that nearly 45% of all homeless references in their study contained an allusion to mental illness, drugs, crime, or illness. They asserted that their findings showed that homeless people tend to be extensively stigmatized by the media. In contradiction to this research, communication student James Power's (1991) dissertation suggested that news coverage of homeless individuals was less likely to present them as stigmatized. Only slightly over 20% were coded as stigmatized. In his study, stigmatization was defined as "the discrediting of the individual based on their physical appearance, character, or membership in specific groups" (p. 75). This study did not quantify the number of stories that featured the mentally or physically ill, substance abusers, or perceived criminals, although the dissertation did focus on the communication of otherness.

In a content analysis of over 30 years of coverage of homelessness by media and in journals, psychology scholars Phillip Buck, Paul Toro, and Melanie Ramos (2004) found that journal articles were more likely to list deviant and deficit characteristics as the causes of homelessness. They also noted that newspapers provided a more sympathetic focus on homelessness and focused more on some structural causes such as deinstitutionalization and mental health. Additionally, it was noted that in the 1980s there

was positive coverage of homelessness with an emphasis on programs and services for homeless people. While newspaper coverage may be more sympathetic, the notion of deinstitutionalization and mental illness still points to "othering" of homeless populations.

Finally, sociology scholar Rachel Best (2010) challenged the research that suggests homelessness is predominantly presented as a social problem. Best's research focused on content analysis of 475 newspaper articles. Her findings suggested that homelessness rarely presented as a social problem. She found that only 7% include statistics about homelessness, only 18% referred to a structural cause of homelessness, and only 11% included statements suggesting not enough was being done about homelessness. As such, this research suggests that media, whether or not intentionally, blames homeless people as the cause of their own homelessness.

Limiting the Voice of Homeless Individuals

While prior themes focus on what is in the news, this theme focuses on what is left out – namely the voices of homeless people. Even when voices of homeless individuals are heard they are often appropriated by the reporter or other officials, used to highlight a specific narrative, or tempered by images. Campbell and Reeves (1989) focused on how the media covered homeless people, specifically the coverage of Joyce Brown, as mentioned previously. Their research described how Brown and her story were packaged. In this case, the nightly news assisted the public in making sense out of events through the process of storytelling. This was done by featuring interviews with the well-informed and those with a "common-sense" perspective, intermixed with dehumanized

discourse that either showed images and soundbites of unidentified homeless individuals or interviews with incoherent homeless individuals. The lowest level of discourse was that of Joyce Brown, who was made an abstraction as her words were only heard secondhand. In this way, the media was able to maintain the division between us and them, through the silencing of "the other."

Insung Whang and Eungjun Min (1999) researched 25 stories in "mini-news magazine" segments in the network news. Their research examined how coverage ultimately served to blame homeless people for their plight. One of the key ways that media does this is by marginalizing the voices of homeless people. Their research found three major ways that homeless individuals were silenced. First, the voices of homeless people were semiotically stolen, becoming embedded in the narrative to give credence to what the reporter was assigned to cover. Second, their voices were used to tell only of the immediate effects of the particular situation, such as how they felt about being homeless or mentally ill. Finally, homeless people were made to appear as members of a group, rather than autonomous individuals. This was done by hiding identities, long shots, and voice overs. Canadian scholars Barbara Schneider, Kerry Chamberlain, and Darrin Hodgetts (2010) found in their study of Canadian newspapers, that fewer than 19% of the words quoted in their study were from homeless individuals. Similar to that of Campbell and Reeves (1989), the voice of professionals was also privileged over that of homeless individuals. The voices of the professionals become the collective abstract of authority regarding the homeless issue. These actions led to the news anchor becoming the ultimate window to view the story.

Additionally, some research has shown that even homeless individuals do not

believe they are being adequately covered. In her research on homeless people who are featured in street newspapers, scholar Danièle Torck (2001) found that street newspapers in both the United States and Europe failed to provide a voice or platform to those who need it most. Jeremy Reynald (2006), founder and director of New Mexico's Joy Junction, wrote that homeless people considered their situations and perspectives to be inadequately covered in the media. One of the struggles noted by sociologists Daniel Cress and David Snow (1996) and communication scholars Josh Greenberg, Tim May, and Charlene Elliot (2006) was that homeless people have limited access to resources that could help them gain access to the media. Ultimately, the silencing of the homeless population serves to create an "us and them relationship" between those who are homeless and the domiciled. Putting the voice of the problem and solution in the caretakers' hands absolves the ordinary population from actually having to do anything about the "homeless problem."

Black People in the News

Black people receive more news coverage than any other racial minority (Larson, 2006). Scholar and activist bell hooks (1992) emphasized that White and male ideologies are institutionalized in the media, explaining that representations of race in the media serve to oppress and exploit all Black people. In the research that has covered Black people in various news formats, four themes emerged: Black individuals as criminals, stories on race relations, Black people and poverty, and the invisibility of Black populations.

Deviants and Criminals

Historically, the association of Black people with crime is evident in all forms of media coverage (Larson, 2006). As far back as news coverage of the enslaved, stories relating to crime were told in colonial newspapers more than any other story (Copeland, 1995). In the spring of 1967, the United States witnessed much racial unrest, resulting in the creation of the Kerner Commission to examine the link between racial discrimination and urban policy. The commission reported that most violence was committed by young African American men committing property crimes (Jenkins, 2012). As journalism and communication scholars Carolyn Byerly and Clint Wilson (2009) explained, the media during this time focused its efforts on depicting young black males as deviant and violent through stories and images, creating a distorted view of American inner cities. The Kerner Commission pointed to the lack of diverse perspectives and diversity in the media (Thornton, 1990) and further noted that media sensationalism and quoting officials without fact checking presented a highly-unbalanced story between what actually was happening and what was being reported (Jenkins, 2012).

The link between race and drug use in the media is also worth noting. As reported by law professor Michael Tonry (2011) in his research on crime and public policy, Black individuals neither use nor sell drugs at higher rates than White individuals, yet their arrest, conviction, and imprisonment rates are much higher than those of White individuals. Media constructions of illegal drugs, users, and sellers repeatedly point to Black males as the worst offenders in all aspects of illegal drugs (Boyd, 2002). There is limited research on news coverage of race and drugs, but what has been studied mirrors what is portrayed in other forms of media. For instance, Reeves and Campbell (1995)

discovered that national news reports in the 1980s treated White cocaine addicts much differently than Black crack addicts. White individuals were considered offenders who needed rehabilitation and Black individuals were delinquents needing jail time. Drummond (1990) pointed out that the news media vastly over reported the number of Black drug dealers and buyers (cf Larson, 2006). News coverage focused on drugs and drug-related violence in inner-city neighborhoods, but spread outward leaving the White middle class vulnerable to random violence (Brownstein, 1991).

A specific variant of the story, Black men as sexual threats to women, particularly White women, has preoccupied many news stories (Knudson, 2000). This is particularly prevalent regarding Black athletes (consider stories about O.J. Simpson, Mike Tyson, Jim Brown, Darryl Strawberry, Warren Moon, and Ray Rice). This connotation of the "black brute" continues to be seen in local and national news through the language and images used (Enck-Wanzer, 2009; Hardin, Dodd, Chance, & Walsdorf, 2004; Moorti, 2001). As Hardin et al. (2004) pointed out, sports are one of the few areas where Black individuals are often shown to be superior to White individuals. The assumptions linking Black male athletes and the notion that sport leads to physical violence reinforce the stereotype of Black males as brutish (Enck-Wanzer, 2009; hooks, 1994). As media scholar Donald Bogle pointed out, "the black athlete, powerful and seemingly of superhuman strength, has always been a double-sided social/political figure, both celebrated and feared because of his remarkable skills" (2001, p. 243). As Bogle explained, the Black brute or buck was a savage and violent being with a lust for white flesh. This is one of the many historic stereotypes of Black males.

As noted by multiple sources, the local news is fascinated with violent crimes,

with stories and images showing up in newscasts, newspapers and on websites (Campbell, 1998; Campbell, LeDuff, & Brown, 2012; Entman & Rojecki, 1992; Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996; Larson, 2006; Martindale, 1997; Roberts, 1975). However, the coverage of Black individuals and White individuals differs (Campbell, 1998). Black people are more likely to appear unnamed and with mugshots, restrained or in custody of the police (Campbell, 1995; Dixon & Linz, 2000a, b; Entman & Rojecki, 1992; Jamison, 1992); reporters and anchors make more negative comments about them (Campbell, 1998); crime is presented as a "black problem" (Gilliam et al., 1996); and Black victims are largely ignored (Dixon & Linz, 2000b; Newkirk, 2000). Several scholars have suggested the news media has developed a script that links Black individuals and crime and that viewers link criminality with Blackness (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, b; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000).

A recent video short by Brave New Films (2015) compared and contrasted the television news coverage and language used between Black protests and White riots. It pointed out that during Black protests the media used language such as "bad guys," "lawlessness," "criminals," and "thugs" while showing images of the event, which often simply showed people lining up in the street, surrounded by police and military in riot gear. Yet, when the coverage was about White individuals who were tearing up a town after a sporting event the language referred to "young people danced on a flipped over car," "fans did stupid things," "some maybe got a little out of control," "passionate," "tough to lose," while showing images of people flipping over cars, dumping porta-potties, and burning various items. Additionally, the film showed how the news often does not even refer to the acts as riots, but rather "a party gone awry," fans getting "a bit

too rowdy," an "altercation," or a "brawl." They also compared the differences between how the police at these types of events act and have different expectations. During Black protests, the news showed officers in full riot gear standing at attention and the newscasters complained officers were doing nothing. While at a White riot, the newscasters pointed out the police are doing nothing, showing officers standing around in their uniforms "looking like they could be watching a parade" (Brave New Films, 2015). The video also explained that there was always a call for Black leadership during protests, yet during events damaging college campuses, no one asked where the White parents were as their children engaged in destruction.

Multiple studies have pointed out that racial composition of criminal offenders presented in the media has negative outcomes on viewers. Research by political science and media studies scholars Mark Peffley, Todd Shields, and Bruce Williams (1996) found that exposure to Black male suspects in the context of a violent crime caused White people to activate their racial stereotypes. This caused a racial double standard for viewers by enlisting negative stereotypes causing viewers to see the Black suspect as guiltier, deserving a harsher punishment, more likely to be a repeat offender, and being more fearful than a similarly portrayed White suspect. One study reported that for White people, the frequency of seeing Black individuals as offenders was a significant variable in predicting fear of crime (Escholz, 2002). In a 2007 study, communication scholars Travis Dixon and Cristina Azocar explained that the cognitive association of Blackness and criminality explains the exposure to the one eliciting the images of the other. As such, we continue to see the portrayal of Black people as criminals and deviants, directly impacting our perceptions of Black individuals and reinforcing negative stereotypes such

as the brute and even the coon.

Race Relations and Enlightened Racism

A second theme associated with Black individuals in the news focuses on stories of race relations. As journalism professor Carolyn Martindale (1986) explained, “Clearly, American journalism’s emphasis on news as events, and as controversy, helps produce a distorted picture of race relations and of American blacks” (p. 40). Journalism scholar Churchill Roberts (1975) found in his research on national news segments in 1972 and 1973 that the most frequent kinds of stories about Black people focused on the Civil Rights Movement, the tenth anniversary of Martin Luther King’s March on Washington, the Angela Davis trial, and Shirley Chisholm as the first Black woman to run for president. This suggests that while Black people were seen in the news, it was primarily related to major events that shaped the nation. Additionally, they were given limited participation in these stories.

Research on the coverage of the 1992 Los Angeles race riot/rebellion (Caldwell, 1998; Hunt, 1997; Ramaprasad, 1996) portrayed Black people as senseless criminals rather than purposeful actors demanding change, with only a small percent of the coverage discussing the causes of the event. Black victimization was ignored, and those interviewed were not the people on the street, but the helicopter pilots looking down on the event (Caldwell, 1998). The event was also blamed on individuals, not the system (Caldwell, 1998; Ramaprasad, 1996).

Media scholar Kim LeDuff’s (2012) study on race in the media during the Obama campaign and election from 2008-2009 illustrated the deep-seated racism still found in

the United States following the election of President Obama. As LeDuff (2012) pointed out, often local events reached national prominence because they were so ugly. For instance, town hall meetings or local discussion of health care became sites of racist discourse and actions, as did many of the conservative talk shows when discussing social programs, which many White people conflate with minority services. She also discussed the coverage of the story of black children attending a camp being ejected from a country club pool, even though prior arrangements had been made, and the story regarding Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. being arrested at his own home when a neighbor reported someone breaking in. Within the stories that were covered, news stories failed to address class diversity by focusing only on the haves or have nots, ultimately reinforcing hegemonic realities (LeDuff, 2012).

Mass communication professor Christopher Campbell's (1995) study of 28 news stations covering the 1993 Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday found the coverage reinforced the notion of enlightened racism. He suggested the use of more Black journalists covering this story reflected the notion of racial assimilation. Additionally, he reported that the coverage of the holiday was done in a way to imply that American racism was no longer relevant. This was done by conducting interviews of successful Black individuals, referencing the attainability of American Dream, juxtaposing the past violent treatment of Black people with the diversity of participants in the parades and celebrations, and discussing today's racial intolerance. Although Campbell noted that issues of contemporary racism were occasionally touched on, they were overshadowed by the other features in the story. The perpetuation of the American Dream ideology featuring successful Black individuals who do not challenge the idea that racism still exists

represent the idea that racism is over.

As film historian Donald Bogle (2001) and sociology professor David Pilgrim (2012) suggest, the Tom caricature is that of the socially acceptable, submissive, good Negro. Throughout history the Tom caricature of a Black male has taken on a variety of roles. It was born in antebellum America, along with the mammy caricature, in the defense of slavery (Pilgrim, 2012). As Pilgrim noted, the idea behind this was questioning how slavery could be wrong if Black servants were loyal and content. The Tom is often presented as dark, older, eager to serve, and nonthreatening to White individuals. As radio, movies, and television became staples of entertainment, various versions of the Tom caricature were depicted (Pilgrim, 2012). These Toms became more humanized, being portrayed as cool under pressure, congenial, religious, dignified, and confident.

The media tends to frame coverage of race in ways that either reinforce the Black/White dichotomy or pretend race is no longer an issue in the United States by showing Black individuals who have become successful, but who do not acknowledge racial injustice. By doing so, when issues of race and racism emerge it allows White individuals to put the blame on Black individuals as the news media continues to perpetuate the postracial myth. Thus, issues of race become an individual issue, not a societal problem.

Black People and Poverty

Another prominent way that Black individuals are covered by the news is in stories related to poverty. Research found that when Black people were presented they

were shown in blue-collar jobs (Roberts, 1975). Political science and sociology professor Martin Gilens' (1996b) work on poverty in the American news media found that although Black people made up about 29% of America's poor, within the newsmagazines and major broadcast news more than 60% of the American poor pictured were Black, more than double the estimated proportion. Essentially the urban poor became the face of poverty. However, few images of Black people were found in the most sympathetic groups of the poor: the elderly and the working poor. Because, as he noted, the public was not at all sympathetic to working-age adults, this led to misrepresentation reinforcing the public's exaggerated association of Blackness and poverty. Additional work by Gilens (1999) found that imagery associated with Black poverty found on network news can contribute to the stereotypes of Black people as lazy and undeserving of public assistance.

Political science scholars Rosalee Clawson and Rakuya Trice (2000) also found that coverage of the poor between 1993 and 1998 disproportionately featured Black people. They found that Black individuals were overrepresented in the negative stories on poverty; specifically, Black welfare recipients were pictured with large numbers of children, reinforcing the "welfare queen" stereotype. These same stereotypes continue as illustrated by political science professor Bas van Doorn (2015), whose content analysis of photos from 1992 to 2010 found that media coverage of Black individuals was disproportionately high relating to stories on welfare and the unsympathetic poor.

News media tend to conflate class and race, as journalists fail to "distinguish between race and class issues" (Simmons, 1993, p. 146). Because the news tends to associate their coverage of poverty with urban Black people, there is a misperception that

Black people are overwhelmingly on welfare (Entman & Rojecki, 1992; Kellstedt, 2000; Clawson & Trice, 2000). The reality is that more White people are poor and on welfare (Entman & Rojecki, 1992; Simmons, 1993).

Research also illustrates that minorities are frequently featured in powerless roles (Graves, 1999; van Dijk, 2000). A study of photographs from national newspapers found Black people portrayed as helpless victims and dependent on government assistance (Kahle, Yu, & Whiteside, 2007). Similar findings were presented by Voorhees, Vick, and Perkins (2007) in their study of media coverage of Hurricane Katrina. They found that the news coverage disproportionally showed minorities as powerless victims. They noted that White people were often pictured in safe conditions, such as shelters, homes, or boats, whereas Black individuals were shown on rooftops, being lifted by helicopters, packed in the Superdome or looting. Additionally, they found that Black individuals were portrayed as needing to be organized and rescued by White people.

By consistently conflating race and poverty, the media reinforces racial stereotypes that present them as lazy and shiftless. It also reinforces the notion that they are the primary beneficiaries of welfare and presents an unsympathetic and unrealistic image of Black people in the United States. Again, this points to individual issues rather than larger problems facing the country. As Bogle (2001) and Pilgrim (2012) have acknowledged, these types of beliefs led to the coon stereotype. It emerged during slavery and

> developed into the most blatantly degrading of all black stereotypes. The pure coons emerged as no-account niggers, those unreliable, crazy, lazy, subhuman creatures good for nothing more than eating watermelons, stealing chickens, shooting crap, or butchering the English language. (Bogle, 2001, p. 8)

As Gilens (1999) and others have pointed out, the continued association with Black

people and poverty and being lazy serve to perpetuate this stereotype. Through the news and other forms of media, versions of this stereotype continue to develop and perpetuate Black people as lazy and needing the help of others.

Invisibility

In 1968, the Kerner Commission charged the media with being "shockingly backward" and treating Black people as invisible (Thornton, 1990). Since then, multiple scholars have pointed out the continuing issue of "invisibility" of Black people in the news (Campbell, 1995; Gist, 1990; Roberts, 1975; Rubin, 1980). Research by Johnson, Sears, and McConahay (1971) of press coverage of Black people found that coverage of Black people did not increase from 1893 to 1968 relative to the growth of the Black population in Los Angeles, thereby rendering Black people invisible. While the press was not perceived to be as anti-Black as in the past, their focus was concerned with coverage of and stories about White people. According to linguistics scholar Teun van Dijk (1987), the role of news media is to construct a dominant consensus, which includes associating race with threats to the dominant value or cultures. It is also done through less media representation of minorities and less employment of minority staff (van Dijk, 1987).

In more than half of the stories featuring Black individuals, there was a failure to provide them any speaking roles (Roberts, 1975). There were also few Black news correspondents, limiting the Black voice even more. Campbell (1995) found limited coverage of minorities and minority life in his study, noting that "underrepresentation… can contribute to a dangerous ignorance about people of color…" (p. 57). Additionally, research has found that in certain circumstances, White individuals are overrepresented as

homicide victims and as police officers compared to actual employment records (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, b; Romer, Jamison, & de Coteau, 1998). The overrepresentation of White people in these situations essentializes Black bodies into stereotypical roles as criminals and White people as victims. Also, by not representing all aspects of the Black experience and continuing to silence Black individuals, viewers do not get a sense of what it means to be Black in the United States.

Black People as Entertainers or Minstrels

Research by Churchill Roberts (1975) found that Black people were hardly seen in entertainment roles in newscasts in the 1970s, which has changed today. Although there is limited research in this area, it is an important area that needs to be acknowledged. Campbell (1995) reported that during the inauguration of President Clinton, there was extensive coverage of Black entertainers during the preinauguration ball. Because there was so little coverage of other minorities during the event, Campbell (1995) submitted this as one of the few ways minority success is portrayed. This parallels what political scientist Andrew Hacker (1992) suggested when he noted that White Americans prefer Black people to be athletes and entertainers. Entman and Rojecki (2001) found that Black voices were typically silenced in almost all types of stories, except those of sports/entertainment, discrimination, or human interest.

As noted by a report from The Opportunity Agenda, a social justice communication organization, all media collectively presents a distorted representation of the lives of Black males (2011, p. 21). Campbell (1995) noted that the most frequently covered stories of Black Individuals came during the sports reports. Media coverage of

sports has been a source of entertainment for Americans for many years (Brown, Anderson, & Thompson, 2012). While to some extent this type of coverage has turned many athletes into celebrities and presented this utopian place where minorities can be seen as equal to or even superior to White people, media coverage provides notable inequalities. (Coventry, 2004; Kahn, 1991; Rada, 1996, 2000). Research has illustrated that sports announcers and media coverage of Black athletes focused on ability and physicality, but discussed White athletes in terms of work ethic and intelligence (Coventry, 2004; Eastman & Billings; 2001; McCarthy & Jones, 1997; Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005). Additionally, research found that there have been significantly more negative statements made about Black athletes' "off-field" persona (Rada & Wulfemeyer, 2005; Rainville & McCormick, 1977). Several projects have pointed out that there is more coverage when a Black athlete is accused of a crime compared to a White athlete accused of the same type of crime (Brown, Anderson, & Thompson, 2012; King & Springwood, 2001). As Rada and Wulfemeyer (2005) suggested, Black athletes can only be seen as athletes or entertainers. Once they move "off field" they face the same types of stereotypes of Black Individuals found in the media. This reinforces the White dominant hegemonic order by providing a venue where Black Individuals can seem successful, but within constraints, within their roles as entertainers. Once Black people move from that venue, they are immediately entrenched in stereotypical assumptions, preventing them from gaining equality with the dominant White population. This notion of Black people as entertainment for White people has a deeply entrenched history in the United States, especially in the minstrel show.

Blackface performances date back to the mid- to late-1700s (Wittke, 1968);

however, it was during the 1830s when Blackface minstrelsy came to life (Lott, 1995). Minstrel shows were frequently used to define slavery as acceptable (Toll, 1974). As Lott (1995) suggested, minstrelsy was a way that Americans worked through class identities. It was through these original minstrel shows that the abject othering of Black people allowed White individuals to racialize and color class (Lott, 1995). The purpose of the minstrel was entertainment for White audiences through stereotypical depictions of Black people, by White individuals wearing blackface. Anthony Sparks (2009) explained that the minstrel show was an effort to resubordinate formerly enslaved Black people. Additionally, Lott (1995) and Roediger (2003) explained that the minstrel performance was a mechanism to contain the body of the dangerous Black male. This containment and resubordination served to leverage White hegemonic power, by drawing distinctions between White and Black bodies or "us" and "the other."

Minstrel shows included comic skits, music, dancing, and variety acts. A key factor was the entertainment for the audience. These shows also had several stock characters with various stereotypes of Black people. One caricature was that of the coon, who was typically a lazy, slow fool who wanted to avoid all forms of work. Several varieties of the coon emerged. The "Zip-Coon" was an urban Black dandy who tried to impersonate White individuals, but was ignorant in his performance. There was also the "Urban Coon" who engaged in gambling (authentichistory.com, np), and the Tom caricature, a gentle old soul who was happy yet fearful. There was typically an adaptation of Uncle Tom's Cabin during the minstrel performance (Pilgrim, 2012), where the elderly ex-slave longed to return to the plantation. Additionally, there was the Interlocutor, the well-dressed White man, who controlled the actions of the Blackface actors. This was the

role with which the audience identified (Barnes, n.d.; Pilgrim, 2012).

Eventually Black individuals themselves began taking on these stereotypical portrayals. Black minstrelsy was the first formal opportunity for Black entertainers to enter American show business (Watkins, 1994). However, Black entertainers' contributions served to reinforce racist stereotypes. Toll (1974, 1978) suggested that White curiosity of Black talent was what motivated attendance at these minstrel shows along with the Black performers' persuasion that they were the experts in plantation material. Due to changes in society, by the 20th century, interest in the minstrel shows declined (Toll, 1978). Even though the minstrel show disappeared, the stereotypes of Black people remain. Numerous research articles illustrate how minstrelsy continues to be recreated in American culture subtly and not so subtly through both language and visuals (see Haggins, 2001; Patton, 2008; Sparks, 2009). As such, it is important to understand how minstrelsy relates to the coverage Black and homeless individuals receive in news media.

The Emergence and Study of Online Racism

As the internet continues to grow and transform, there is still limited research on issues of race, class, and gender as compared to more traditional media. Not only does the internet provide venues for traditional media formats, it also provides a plethora of new types of communication. These mediated types of communication need to be examined in new and emerging ways that more fully encompass the range of experiences in which communication takes place. While the internet and all its components are young compared to other forms of media, research on the internet does not seem to possess the

same energetic dynamic that traditional media studies does. Yet, just as traditional media is a form of pedagogy that teaches us, shapes us, and socializes us, so does the internet in even more comprehensive ways, making it essential to study.

Online Othering

Studying issues of racism, sexism, classism, and so forth, is a large undertaking in general, but when exploring them in an online context it becomes even more difficult. Not just because of the plethora of information, but also because of the lack of research in these areas. Although a prime source of communication, information gathering, shopping, socializing, gaming, self-expression, community building, and more, there is very limited research on the role and effects of racism, classism, and other such issues. in the online environment. Daniels (2012) suspects that because the majority of research about the internet is done by White people, who rarely acknowledge the relevance of race, they tend to adhere to the belief that the web is color-blind.

When the internet was first developed, visionaries imagined this new world as a utopian space where issues of gender, race, class, and other forms of "otherness" could be transcended. In its inception and through the early years, the internet was a text-based medium where social identity was not visible, making it democratic and free from issues of race, class, gender, and so on. (Hanson, 2006; Nakamura, 2002). The text-based format of the internet allowed individuals to become free from their limiting bodies.

Eventually, the internet became more visual, allowing users in various domains to create graphic representations of their identities that could be customized. Additionally, they could "try on" or appropriate identities as they moved through cyberspace, known as

masquerading or identity tourism (Nakamura, 2002). Many researchers view the internet as a site that allows for identity and community formation centered on race, class, and gender (Nakamura & Chow-White, 2012; Parker & Song, 2006). As Daniels (2012) pointed out:

> The key insight here for race and Internet studies is that rather than offer an escape route out of notions of race tied to embodiment, the visual culture of the Internet complicates race and racism in new ways that are still closely tied to a politics of representation with ties to colonialism. (p. 5)

In his article on the spectacle of the other, cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) addressed the idea of the "racialized regime of representation" and how it was developed. Hall noted that representations are the basis of stereotypes that serve as "part of the maintenance of social and symbolic order" (p. 258).

According to Daniels (2012), racism is produced and reproduced online in ways that are unique to the internet. In addition, she noted that the study of race or racism has not even become central to the field of internet studies (p. 2). With the ability for individuals to easily locate news stories across the globe, for online news sites to add video and imagery to stories and allow for individuals to comment and communicate with other users, online news sources are excellent sites to begin to study. Covert and overt denigrating communication online is emerging as an important area to examine.

User-Generated Content

In addition to looking at the news stories themselves, another way to study expressions of racism, classism, and sexism on the internet is through various online newspaper comment sections. Research has found that the top reasons for commenting include: expressing emotions or opinions, correcting inaccuracies, adding information,

balancing the discussion, educating others, sharing experience, community building, and persuading others (Stroud, Van Duyn, Alizor, Alibhai, & Lang, 2016) While there is the opportunity for community building on these sites, instead of using these venues to add one's voice to a dialogue, many individuals use it to propagate racial or racist ideologies or other forms of intentional or unintentional oppression (Daniels, 2009; Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003; Glaser, Dixit, & Green, 2002; LeDuff & Cecala, 2012; Steinfeldt et al., 2010). The supposed anonymity of posting may also lead people to careless or poorly thought out responses or comments as they have nothing to lose. Research has shown that public opinion condemns racist, sexist, and classist behaviors in public settings (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Picca & Feagin, 2007; Sue, 2010); yet, these same expressions and behaviors are beginning to show up in various online formats (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Melican & Dixon, 2008; Steinfeldt et. al, 2010). The anonymity provided by the internet allows bigoted speech and dominant ideologies to happen in a public sphere (Bargh & McKenna, 2004; Glaser et al., 2002; Melican & Dixon, 2008). The format of the internet serves as a vehicle for this type of communication to reach a larger audience and to be replicated by others who may share similar beliefs and ideologies. While research is showing how and why racist, sexist, and classist language appears online, very limited work examines the language itself and the type of online environment it is creating. Several recent research projects have begun to explore issues of online racism through comments on forums, blogs, social networking, and newspaper sites.

Education psychology scholars and researchers Brendesha Tynes and Suzanne Markoe (2010) examined the relationships between responses to online racial

discrimination and color-blind racial attitudes. Their research suggested that White people understand these acts are wrong but often accept racist acts because they do not know how or are not comfortable talking about racism due to color-blind ideologies. This research illustrated how college students do not recognize that what they post and how they respond can be taken as racist acts. Similarly, Steinfeldt et al. (2010) and Clark et al. (2011) studied how the attitudes and stereotypes about American Indians[4] are electronically expressed in online forums. What they found was an overwhelming number of forum commenters expressing ignorance and disdain toward American Indians. Those who commented posted misinformation about American Indians, had overtly racist attitudes, and perpetuated stereotypes. The findings indicated that comments conveyed a sense of privilege and power by subjugating and oppressing others.

Psychology scholar Clemence Due (2011) examined the ways in which denials of racism were presented in online comments of several Australian newspapers. In 2009, a popular former comedy show in Australia featured a reunion show with an episode where a group of racially diverse doctors performed a sketch in white- and blackface called the *Jackson Jive.* Following the performance, guest judge Harry Connick, Jr. scored the group zero out of 10 points and commented that this would never be allowed in America. Due (2011) specifically looked at the ways that Australians denied that they were racist, specifically illustrating how the denial comments built on and reinforced construction of Australian national identity and a nation free from racism. In doing so they ultimately silenced the voices of the colonized individuals who may have believed the act on

[4] I use the term American Indian because that is what both Steinfeldt et al. and Clark et al. use in their research.

television was racist.

Media scholar Jaime Loke's (2012) research on online news readers' comments argued that the anonymity of comments and the comment section, which is uninhibited by political correctness, provided readers a space to comment with a certain level of freedom not tolerated in public. Her research question focused on the construction and articulation of race in the readers' comments. Loke's findings indicated that racial epithets are being replaced by coded language and contemporary racist terms, culture is replacing race, and minorities are being blamed for others' actions. Loke's work provided groundwork to begin creating a thematic overview of findings prior to delving into the more nuanced understanding of microaggressions as they appear online. Research in comments sections is an emerging area that may provide new and exciting insight into the ways in which people communicate beliefs about race in public, yet anonymous venues.

Chapter Summary

The coverage of Black people and homeless people in the media are routinely stereotyped and presented in deficit ways. Research has shown that coverage of homeless individuals focuses primarily on seasonal appeals and newsworthy event. Within the coverage of homelessness, findings indicated that when homeless individuals are present they are frequently presented through a deficit model, "othering" them as compared to the dominant or domiciled population. Additionally, they are often silenced within the news with "experts" speaking about them and for them. Similar types of coverage are found in relation to Black people in the news. Black people are frequently presented in the news as criminals or deviants. Black people are also linked with stories relating to poverty and

welfare. As such, there is connection between Black people and homelessness in the news. When presented in a positive light, the stories frequently focus on race relations, specifically topics such as Civil Rights, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, or the election of President Obama. However, within these stories Black subjects are often invisible. Similar to coverage of homeless individuals, voices of Black individuals are seldom heard. One other area of positive coverage is related to that of sports or entertainment. Unfortunately, in these situations Black individuals frequently take on the role of the minstrel performer. Once Black individuals move from the entertainment venue, stories about them become entrenched with stereotypes.

Along with the news coverage of Black people and homelessness, this chapter also examines the literature related to online racism. It overviews research that illustrates how marginalized individuals are "othered" in online environments, including how user generated content has become an outlet for expressions of racism, classism, sexism, and so forth. Because there is very little research present examining how news stories and their comments sections can promote or challenge these racists and classist content, I chose to couple the literature on race and class in news stories with research on online content to establish a base for this project. The next chapter will discuss the methodology used within this dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

> Since anti-racist individuals did not control mass media, the media became the primary tool that would be used and is still used to convince black viewers, and everyone else, of black inferiority.
>
> —bell hooks, *Salvation*, 2001

Master Narratives, Social Narratives, and Digital Narratives

One of the key aspects in understanding the embedded nature of racism is through narratives. The purpose of this multicase narrative study is to explore how online publications and their comments serve to reinforce hegemony and master narratives through the use of textual and visual microaggressions. Because of this, narrative inquiry served as my approach to this study. This research uses a selection of online viral news stories, their photos and videos, and their comment sections to discover and analyze the subtle ways language and images are used when addressing the intersection of race and homelessness. Essentially, this project examined how the media, along with their readership, create digital narratives for Black homeless men by the way their stories are narrated by the author, by additional content, and by the audience. In addition to understanding how microaggressions manifest through online news stories, this study interrogates how those discussions serve dominant populations through their subtle

creation and maintenance of master narratives as the stories permeate through the internet. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, this study addresses three research questions: (a) How and in what ways are writers and commenters employing microaggressions within online news stories? (b) How does the use of microaggressions within the story and/or the comments alter the narrative being produced by the story? (c) How does the use and proliferation of online microaggressions reinforce master narratives?

In this study, I utilize narrative analysis, specifically social narratives, as my method to interrogate the stories created and told *about* a particular population. Below I provide a literature review of aspects of narrative analysis relevant to this project, the rationale for using qualitative methods, the specific methods used to select my cases, and a discussion of the analysis process.

Defining Narratives

Whose Story Are We Really Telling? Master Narratives and White Privilege

My understanding of master narratives as I use it in this project is strongly shaped by the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard. The terms “metanarrative” or “grand récit” were introduced by Lyotard (1984), and are now most commonly referred to as master or dominant narratives. For Lyotard, this master narrative serves as an invisible directive in which members of society unconsciously participate. I suggest the same is true for the use of microaggressions in our daily language. The master narrative is not just one overarching narrative, but rather multiple narratives that interlock and support each

other (Lawless, 2003). Again, this is similar to how microaggressions work. It is not just one type or one occurrence of microaggressions that cause harm, rather various types of microaggressions work together to create an oppressive environment for individuals and groups. Language is the basis for master narratives as they are based on storytelling. A narrative story is enduring as it is repeatedly told and retold by the community it affects. These master narratives serve as scripts that determine how some social processes are enacted in order to support the maintenance of dominant groups. The master narrative both explains and legitimizes knowledge (Lyotard, 1984). It also sees connections between events as a way to make sense of history and guide us into the future. Essentially, master narratives function as codes that individuals use to make sense of and to explain the world. Unfortunately, many of these codes are based on stereotypes and outdated notions.

Mary Romero and Abigail J. Stewart (1999) discuss the significance of stories in the creation and maintenance of social identity. Master narratives are those elaborate and often stereotyped stories wherein we are taught about who does what and why, as well as what they are likely to do (Romero & Stewart, 1999, p. xiv). As such, these master narratives function to both create and maintain our own social identity, specifically how we stack up in relation to others. Individuals use these narratives to classify, stereotype, marginalize, and make assumptions about others based on these perceived realities.

The problem with master narratives is that they represent a very narrow perspective of what it means to be Latino/a, African American, White, etc. (Montecinos, 1995). “A master narrative essentializes and wipes out the complexities and richness of a group’s cultural life…” (Montecinos, 1995, p. 293). White privilege is one of the ways

that master narratives relating to race are maintained. White privilege, which is often invisible, is a system of opportunities and benefits given to people based solely on the fact that they are or can pass as white (Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; McIntosh, 1989). As Solórzano and Yosso (2002) pointed out, “majoritarian” stories (or master narratives) are created by those with racial privilege, therefore making racial privilege seem “natural.” These master narratives are not just about race, but also about gender, class, and other forms of privilege. As such, a master narrative “privileges Whites, men, the middle and/or upper-class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as natural or normative points of reference” (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 28). White privilege can be viewed as a type of symbolic capital, providing hierarchical distinctions between individuals and groups. The intersection of dominant identities is used as a means to further oppress and dominate. It is important to recognize that these dominant or master narratives are not just stories but rather a tool used to maintain hegemonic hierarchies.

Not All Narratives Are Unique: Social Narratives

One of the ways in which master narratives are continually supported (and challenged) are through social narratives. Social narratives are the more local or regional stories. They can include tribal folklore, local legends, or social and cultural histories. These social narratives can shape or be shaped by master narratives. For instance, even though the Northern colonies emancipated the enslaved, White people used a variety of laws and rules to dominate and control Black people in an attempt to create a dominant White community. Yet, as pointed out by Melish (1998) New England not only attempted to forget it had slaves, but rewrote the region’s past identifying itself as historically free

and morally superior to the Black South. Thus, it creates its own social narrative. While this social narrative is specific to one area, it supports a master narrative of White people as morally superior and saviors, rather than as violent colonizers.

Bourdieu (1986) wrote, “social order is progressively inscribed in people’s minds through ‘cultural products’ including systems of education, language, judgements, values, methods of classification and activities of everyday life” (p. 471). As such, our taken-for-granted comments relating to social constructions of identity (race, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) and our own failure in challenging those taken-for-granted assumptions help to maintain these dominant social narratives. For political scientist Shaul Shenhav (2015) social narratives have the ability to bind people together as certain stories or versions are told and retold by individuals, groups, or institutions, which helps scholars understand why certain groups continue to bind and create affinity for members past and present. I would suggest that these narratives bind dominant groups together while continuing to marginalize other groups.

The social narrative is the integration of communicative aspects of speakers, text, and audience that has proliferated over space and time (Shenhav, 2015, p. 83). Multiple versions of a narrative can become powerful and even establish group norms. These social narratives frequently support dominant or master narratives as story becomes more influential than the narrator. This can be especially true when examining online stories. Just as the stories develop and spread, multiple versions of the narratives can develop. In terms of race, class, and gender, similar stories have been reproduced in various ways over time causing them to replicate, reinforcing master narratives through the reproduction of stereotypes.

Shenhav (2015) recently developed a methodological framework for examining "the impact of narratives on our lives and societies" (editor's forward, np). Shenhav's work focuses on what he identifies as the three key elements of narrative: story (what is being told or the tale), text (the modes of communication and representation of stories), and narration (the act or process of producing a narrative). Unlike other scholars, he adds a fourth element of multiplicity that is "process of repletion and variation through which narratives are reproduced at the societal sphere" (p. 82).

Shenhav also discussed the issue of normativity and its significance in the study of narratives. While I will not go into detail on this issue, it is important to consider the relationship between stories and social reality. Specifically, we need to consider the extent to which stories reflect social realities. Even though stories are understood somewhere between two poles – human fictions or the capability to fully represent reality, Shenhav explained the scholar may want to utilize an interactive approach that suggests stories and social reality shape and are shaped by each other. For example, this project looks at how the failure of the media to present facts on homelessness leads to the social reality that most homeless people are mentally ill or lazy. This belief is then perpetuated by those who comment. While the media is not reporting a fiction, by adding more factual information about homelessness they could more fully represent reality. This has the potential to reshape the social reality.

Shenhav has suggested we need to be aware of intertextuality, or how all texts somehow contain elements of other texts, whether by quotes, metaphors or references. By understanding these elements, we may better be able to account for power relations within the text. Finally, Shenhav addressed the issue of how marginalized groups tell

their stories and how narrators are empowered. He noted there are three major types of social narratives that can be considered: dominant-story relations, competing-stories relations, and story-proximity relations. A dominant social story is a story embraced by a group whose members consider it normal or desirable. Competing stories often challenge dominant stories, to try and establish hegemony. Additionally, counter-narratives are those employed by marginalized groups challenging dominant beliefs by sharing their own experiences and understandings that are in contrast to the dominant narrative. Proximity between stories is the degree of similarity between story versions. The levels of proximity can illustrate how the stories people embrace influence or reflect their behavior in certain instances (p. 114).

As Creswell (2013) emphasized, there are several features of narrative studies. Narrative researchers collect stories by and about people. These stories tell of experience and/or shed light on the identity of people. Many different forms of data may be used to collect these stories. Narrative stories are shaped into a chronology and can be analyzed in a number of ways. In narrative stories, researchers often highlight the turning points, plot twists, or tensions for emphasis. Finally, narrative stories have specific contexts that are vital for the researcher when telling the story. While all these components are not required, this provides a broad base of what to consider within the narrative. Online, multiple mediums are often present together allowing us to examine how their convergence creates or recreates both stories and narratives. Because the concept of digital narratives is socially constructed, I rely heavily on Shenhav's concept of social narratives. The remainder of this chapter will focus on my specific subjects, data sites, and method of analysis.

Online Social Construction of Others:

Digital Narratives

For this dissertation, I am particularly interested in the creation of digital narratives through the construction and sharing of stories that have multiple authors because of the addition of reader comments. Unlike master and social narratives that focus on the creation of grand story, digital narratives use aspects of the master and social narrative to create stories about others and/or the groups and activities in which they are involved. Often these narratives are wrought with stereotypes and are used to create an us versus them picture of a marginalized individual or group. I define digital narratives as the convergence of storytelling media found online and the comments of individuals who share their perspective as a way of adding to the story. These collections of online news articles and individual engagement with them serve to create digital narratives about individuals, groups, organizations, or events. While in some cases, the individual who the story is about may be heard, often the digital narrative becomes a story about a marginalized individual or the particular socio-cultural group to which they belong, drawing from specific cultural stereotypes and assumptions. Because of the interactive nature of the internet, these digital narratives can proliferate quickly and widely, allowing those who historically would not have even heard the initial story to now be able to read, share, and contribute to it. Each time the story is shared and commented upon, it contributes to the ways in which narrative is created and/or maintained. As such, these narratives become cultural productions that have the potential to enhance or challenge the dominant or master narratives.

Rationale

Those Who Tell the Stories Rule the World:

Qualitative Narrative Analysis

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry used for the acquisition of new knowledge. By utilizing qualitative methods, a researcher can enter the world of others at a particular point in time in order to examine social situations or interactions providing a more holistic understanding (Cresswell, 2013; Saldana, 2011; Tracy, 2013). The impetus behind using qualitative methods is its focus on discovery and description with the purpose of interpreting the meaning behind what the researcher witnesses and experiences (Cresswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Qualitative research looks broadly at interconnected processes and engages in a dialectical way between the questions and the data (Cresswell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). One particular form of qualitative research is that of narrative inquiry or analysis. Humans use narratives and stories from, by, and about participants to make sense of current and past experiences (Saldana, 2011). Humans are story makers and storytellers, and thus it is important to examine the impact these stories have on a society.

"Those who tell the stories rule the world" goes the proverb. Storytelling has been a function of all human groups throughout the history of humankind (Barthes, 1975). The survival of ancient stories and myths was due to the storytellers who were able to share with and between generations, as well as teach future generations the importance of continuing these stories. Today, we continue to use storytelling as a way to make sense of our world (Bruner, 1990; Foss, 2009; Gee, 1985; Mishler, 1986). Narrative analysis is grounded in a principle that human beings are fundamentally story-making, storytelling

creatures, and narrative is our primary mode of knowing, of constructing meaning, and of navigating our day-to-day worlds (Polkinghorne, 1988). Narrative analysis refers to a family of approaches that utilizes stories as its object of investigation (Riessman, 1993). Narrative analysis is more interested in the study and interpretation of human knowledge.

Who Cares About Viral Stories of Homeless Men?

Through the stories written, shared, and commented upon, a digital narrative was created for each of these homeless Black men. When we look at these narratives individually, we see varying trajectories; however, when we look at these narratives collectively, we begin to see a larger master narrative relating to race and homelessness. While there are certainly a variety of news stories relating to race and homelessness, these particular stories were selected for several reasons. First, each of these stories deals with the intersection of race and homelessness. Within this intersection, there are many myths and stereotypes that emphasize personal problems – laziness, mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction, criminality, a belief in homelessness as a life of freedom and leisure, or poor decision-making – over societal issues. However, as noted previously, homelessness is predominantly tied to poverty, which affects minorities much more than White people. These stereotypes lead to a fascination with "the other," making their stories more palpable and possibly serving the dominant culture.

Second, each of these stories had a social media component that factored into it going viral, thus creating digital narratives for these men. One started on YouTube, one on Facebook, and the other through a local news story and fund sourcing website that allows users to invite others to share the story to raise funds. This allowed these stories to

spread well beyond their regional interest area, thus allowing the potential for millions of people nationally and internationally to read about them, comment on them, and share them. The viral nature of the articles continued to lead to more publicity. In some instances, later stories referenced the characters or plots in the earlier stories. While these are all "feel-good" stories, nothing about any of them should be of that much interest beyond the region in which the events occurred.

Third, the timing of these stories might factor into their publication and viral spread. Research by Whang and Min (1996) on television coverage of homelessness found that the majority of stories ran from Thanksgiving through the winter season, with 70% broadcast between December and February. The timing of these stories falls into this category with one going viral between Thanksgiving and Christmas, one right after the first of the year, and a third right around Valentine's Day. Each of these viral images become conscious or unconscious representations of the particular holiday season. If coverage indeed surfaces around the winter holidays, are we somewhat primed to cause these types of stories to go viral at certain times of the year?

Finally, rather than just considering one of these stories to illustrate the manifestation of microaggressions and the maintaining of dominant or master narratives, I argue that it is more effective to show how this occurs within and between each case. Because these stories start out as feel-good stories but take different trajectories in their outcomes, it is also relevant to see how the microaggressions emerge in different ways. Specifically, how does the narrative change or is it maintained through the readers' comments?

The present research fits well within the criteria of narrative analysis. Not only

does it examine the articles/stories present, it also considers the commenters as additional narrators adding their voices to help construct meaning. For this project, I seek to utilize the concept of narrative analysis to interrogate how technology is being used to create and/or maintain narratives about a particular marginalized group of individuals.

The Research Selection

Three Viral Stories of Homeless Black Men

The data for this study are drawn using a narrative inquiry that focuses on the digital narratives of three homeless Black men: Ted Williams, Jeffrey Hillman, and Billy Ray Harris. The narratives centering on these three men were selected because they began as simple, local feel-good stories, but ultimately went viral causing them to garner national and international attention. The narratives selected for analysis represent the various ways that race and homelessness are often depicted in the media and expanded upon or challenged by consumers of media. I will first provide details of each of these stories and then my rationale for selecting them.

Ted Williams

Ted Williams gained national and international attention when a recorded interview was conducted with him by Doral Chenoweth III, a videographer for the *Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch*. The recorded interview took place on a street ramp off northbound I-71 in Columbus, Ohio during a time when Williams was homeless (Joy, 2011). Williams was reportedly living intermittently in a camp behind an abandoned gas station, even though he had been offered the opportunity to be relocated to a shelter (Joy,

2011). In the video, he explained that drugs, alcohol, and other things had derailed his ambitions, but he had recently marked two years of sobriety (Joy, 2011). Chenoweth III put the video online at *Dispatch.com* and someone posted it to YouTube resulting in a viral video. This quickly projected the spotlight on Williams, who became the focus of media stories, interviews, local and national job offers, and who reconnected with family members. This attention brought him back together with his mother, ex-wife, and several of his children. However, all of the fame was too much for Williams causing this recovering alcoholic to resort to drinking again. His new-found fame rekindled past problems and his trials and tribulations were repeatedly the focus of media attention. Stories regarding his sudden claim to fame, going in and out of rehab, reconnecting with his family, loss of finances, his book, and his work on the *Houseless* movie continued to make the news as recently as January 2016.

Jeffrey Hillman

In November of 2012, a photo was put on the NYPD Facebook page showing a New York City police officer giving boots he had just purchased to a barefoot man sitting on the sidewalk in New York City. The image was shared through Facebook and Reddit resulting in overnight viral status, moving from online social media to mainstream media, due to the act of kindness it represented. This subsequently resulted in the identification of the police officer as Lawrence DePrimo and the shoeless man as Jeffrey Hillman. While the officer became famous for his act of kindness, receiving awards and media attention, Hillman became infamous as he was seen a few days later without the boots. An Army veteran, Hillman reportedly worked in kitchens in New Jersey prior to

becoming homeless (Santora & Vadukul, 2012). When Hillman was asked how he became homeless, reports differ. According to the *New York Times*, he replied "I don't know" (Santora & Vadukul, 2012), but in an interview with the *New York Daily* he said it was his choice and noted he struggled with mental problems (Mikelberg, Smith, Brown, Kemp, & McShane, 2012). Technically, Hillman was not homeless as it has been reported that he had lived in transitional housing and later secured housing through the Department of Veterans Affairs (Brown, 2012). However, according to the Department of Homeless Services, Hillman had a history of turning down these services (Brown, 2012).

Hillman's story continued on for several months with media and others tracking him trying to determine if he was "truly" homeless, what he was doing, and why he was not wearing his boots. While the stories helped him reconnect with family and friends, they appear to have served more as a mechanism of surveillance and control, potentially reifying the negative perception of homeless individuals. The stories regarding Hillman continued into March 2013.

Billy Ray Harris

The final case is of Billy Ray Harris, a homeless Missouri man. In February 2013, Harris, who reportedly lived underneath a bridge in Kansas City and panhandled at the Country Club Plaza (Webster, 2013), gained national and international attention after finding an engagement ring in his donations cup. Rather than pawn the ring, which he considered doing, he kept it until its owner, Sarah Darling, returned to see if he had it. After Harris returned the ring, a friend of Darling's told the story to a local Kansas City news station that ran an article that was picked up by multiple news outlets. Because of

Harris' act of kindness and "interest from others in helping out," Darling's husband, Bill Krejci, set up a 90-day GiveForward fundraising campaign (Krejci, 2013). According to Darling they had set a fundraising goal of $1,000, but were hoping to raise $4,000 because that is what a jeweler had offered Harris for the ring. However, more than 8,000 donations poured in, raising over $190,000. This resulted in additional media coverage and a surprise reunion of Harris with his family on NBC's *Today* show in March of 2013. Stories on Harris continued in the news media and on various websites until September 2013, following his purchase of a car and his down payment on a house.

Searching the Internet and Locating My Data Collection Sites

Using the internet as the location of data collection for a qualitative study is not a new concept; however, using it as my source of data for a narrative analysis is somewhat unusual. However, as Clark et al. (2011) showed, commenters can be used as research participants as they have voluntarily posted information to public websites. Scholars have suggested that those who respond anonymously to online content may be more likely to reduce their need to respond in a socially desirable manner resulting in greater candidness (Hewson, Laurent, & Vogel, 1996; Van Soest, Canon, & Grant, 2000). This type of online communication also allows users to feel safe when posting opposing positions (McKenna & Bargh, 2005). As Wall (2005) explained, online forums function like a virtual town hall, allowing those who have an opinion on a topic the chance to participate. Of particular interest to this project, Xiao and Polumbaum (2007) and LeDuff and Cecala (2012) found that themes in online discussions were often different from the

themes presented in the news coverage of an event. One important issue to note is that not all comments make it online and others may be deleted. Some online news agencies employee technology or people that read and approve what goes online, which may skew the perception of how their readers respond. Other online news sources also provide an option to report a comment that they believe is inappropriate resulting in the comment being removed. Because of this, those who want their comment displayed may adjust their language to what is deemed appropriate by the news source. Online communication through comment sections has the potential to allow for both honest and hostile remarks; either way, this type of communication has the potential for more open expression of beliefs and ideologies.

As noted by Hallett and Barber (2014), the digital methodological approaches have been slow to catch on; however, research utilizing narrative analysis is becoming more widely used. For example, Keim-Malpass and Steeves (2012) examined online narratives of cancer through illness blogs, Fleischmann and Fleischmann (2012) studied online narratives of adults with ADHD, Gulbrandsen and Just (2013) looked at the construction of contradictory organizational narratives, and Robinson (2009) examined the changing narrative as a news story went from traditional media to online. Each of these used different methods of gathering and examining online narratives. Because my narrative research focused on social and dominant narratives, rather than just individual narratives, the internet became an ideal location for examining the maintenance, construction, and challenges of dominant narratives. As boyd (2009) explained, the internet has become entwined in our lives as both an imagined space and architected place (p. 26). It is in this online space and place where one can study what Eichhorn

(2001) calls “textual communities.” She defined these communities as places where people are brought together through shared text(s) or writing practices. These communities have the ability to link individuals across geographic boundaries. While Eichhorn’s (2001) research focused on ethnography, I suggest that research on social narratives can also been done in online environments. The internet has changed the way we interact and communicate. The internet textual communities are also associated with online news sources. Through the internet, we can get our news, allowing people all over the country and world to interact in an online space to see and share news they would have traditionally missed. Through comments, blogs, and social media sites, we can communicate in these textual communities about issues we find important. But, we can also hide behind the internet and “flame,” that is harass others in these communities if we do not like what they have to say. I see each of these online news sites as textual communities. Throughout and between these communities we can create digital narratives.

As Cresswell (2013) noted, narrative studies can benefit from having a collaborative feature where information is drawn from a variety of sources. In this research, I am drawing data from three different sources, their images and videos, and their reader responses. I am not only looking at the text of the article, but also the images, videos, and comment sections. I specifically chose online news sources for their ability to reach larger audiences. Additionally, the online comments contribute to the overall meaning and understanding the general public or general readership of each source has regarding the subject. The content of the news article proper, the images, and the comments create both consensus and dissensus between the readers and the article and

the commenters. It is through this give-and-take that stories develop into narratives. Sometimes the narrative focuses on the specific individual; other times it focuses on the socially constructed communities in which these individuals belong, and it can even focus on society as a whole.

By the nature of an artifact "going viral" there is an abundance of places in which to seek out information. I decided I must whittle down the potential sources of my information to create a more cohesive way to collect and analyze data. Because I am interested in the comments as part of the story, I focused only on those online sites that had comment sections. As the focus is on United States citizens and their narratives, I focused on U.S news sites. Further, I chose to focus only on those news sites that featured stories and comments about each of the men in my project, thus I could compare like sources. Finally, I chose to focus on established national media, rather than new blogs or sites that do not have an established national name. This eliminated the vast majority of online news sites and left me with the *Huffington Post* (huffingtonpost.com), the *New York Daily News* (nydailynews.com), the *New York Post* (nypost.com), *National Public Radio* (npr.org), *The Grio* (thegrio.com), and *USA Today* (*usatoday.com*). However, as I began to collect my data, the *Huffington Post*, the *New York Post*, and the *New York Daily News*, which were rich sources of comments and images, changed their comment policies and effectively removed that content from their websites before I was able to collect it. Because of my desire for the comments, my research focused on the online content of the *National Public Radio*, *The Grio*, and *USA Today* news sites. These three sources provided rich content including the stories, comment sections, images, and videos, which provided a substantial source of data for my analysis. Prior to explaining

the procedure to collect and analyze data, I will provide a brief overview of each news site and the content within.

National Public Radio

National Public Radio (*NPR*) was incorporated in 1970 and hit the air in April of 1971 to provide national news programming (*NPR.org*). *NPR.org* reports 30.6 million unique visitors per month, and it is both a privately and publicly funded nonprofit membership media organization. According to a 2012 Pew Research report, *NPR*'s audience tends to be highly educated, equal in terms of the sex of listeners, have high incomes, and the audience is moderate to liberal. The website suggests that *NPR* has embraced the power of technology, launching an iPhone and Android news app. The website also has over two million Twitter followers and Facebook friends. Because of its adaption of these social media technologies, it is engaging young listeners.

USA Today

Founded in 1982, its mission is "to serve as a forum for better understanding and unity to help make the USA truly one nation" (*USAToday.com*). Located in McLean, VA., *USAToday.com* launched on April 17, 1995, provides visitors with a variety of types of news, and is updated 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As of December 2015, the *USAToday* site reports having nearly 81 million unique visitors and 1.2 billion page views. *USAToday.com's* digital profile reports that it has an audience of over 23 million readers with approximately 56% male and 44% female; 44% of its readers have at least a bachelor's degree, approximately 20% are identified as upper- or middle-level

professionals, and about 46% of its readers have a household income of $100,000 or more. According to the Alliance for Audited Media, *USAToday.com* is third in digital editions, behind the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, with an average digital circulation of 249,900 (auditedmedia.com, 2013). Additionally, the site showcases interactive features and multi-media functions with free RSS feeds. Finally, *USAToday.com* delivers news via email and to various mobile devices (*USAToday.com* marketing).

The Grio

TheGrio.com, whose name is based on "griot," the term used for a West African story teller, is an independently owned "video-centric news community site devoted to providing African-Americans with stories and perspectives that appeal to them but are underrepresented in existing national news outlets" (*TheGrio.com*/about). It was launched by NBC in 2009 and *MSNBC.com* shares content partnership with *TheGrio.com* relating to breaking news and politics. According to a promotional video by *TheGrio.com*, it works with *Essence.com* and is the news provider for the National Urban League (*TheGrio.com*). From November 2011 to November 2012 the total number of visitors increased approximately 76% to nearly two million unique visitors. *The Grio's* 2015 marketing overview notes that it has just under seven million unique visitors per month and over 19 million page view per month. The audience is predominantly female and African American, and the average age of readers is between 25-44. Sixty-four percent have advanced degrees, 74% are considered politically engaged, and 64% have an income greater than $50,000 (*TheGrio* Media Kit, 2015). Additionally, *TheGrio.com*

reaches over four million unique viewers per month on its mobile platforms. (*TheGrio* Media Kit, 2015). *TheGrio's* editorial mandate is to "focus on news and events that have a unique interest and/or pronounced impact within the national African American audience" (*TheGrio.com /about*).

Data Collection

In order to gather the articles in each online news source, I used the search function on each site. First, I focused on the main individual in each of my cases. Second, I utilized the related story function that came up on most of the sites. Finally, after retrieving some of the stories, I re-searched the news sites for other key individuals in the stories. This was particularly relevant in the Hillman case, as he had not been identified in the initial articles relating to the viral image. For example, I utilized the name of the identified officer, Lawrence DePrimo, to conduct additional searches.

Once I identified the various stories, I attempted to print and download the content in its most complete format. In some cases, the site provided a print button that allowed me to download the story in a PDF format; however, some of the visual content was lost. Because of this loss, I also used an online screen capturing program (http://ctrlq.org/screenshots/) that allowed me to take complete shots of the website that I could download. My goal was to capture the story, images, videos, and comments for analysis. One issue that I had was capturing the entire comments section in a usable format. In several cases I had to copy and paste it into a Word document, then I manually went through it to format it the same way as on the site. I wanted to ensure that both the individual comments and those that were in dialogue with each other could be easily

discerned when I went back to review them. The biggest challenge was that there were several videos embedded within the stories, but I was unable to download or save those. Therefore, I took copious notes in the event that the video was removed or I was unable to access it. All content that I was able to download was saved onto my computer and a backup was saved on the University of Utah's Box cloud storage so that I was able to access it from any computer with internet access. Ultimately, I gathered a total of 48 stories, 17 images, 26 videos, and 1,764 comments. See Table 4.1 for a breakdown of data per each individual case and Table 4.2 for a breakdown by online news sites.

To enhance the methodological validity, I sought to triangulate the data sources and the data itself. Drawing upon multiple sources and viewpoints results in a more complete representation of the phenomenon being explored. As Cresswell (2013) explained, triangulation helps to validate the research by tapping into a variety of sources of information.

Where Do I Begin? Analyzing the Data

According to Cresswell (2013) and Riessman (1993), narrative research presents the least structured procedure with no single method for analysis. Riessman (1993) explained that narratologists draw insights from semiotics, hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and textual approaches to documents, but the approach is known for its "interpretive thrust" (p. 5). Because I am interested in the construction of digital narratives, I am concerned with both what is being told and how it is being told, as well as how these stories spread. I utilize Shenhav's (2015) approach to analyzing social narratives because the creation of digital narratives is a shared endeavor. It is also an

iterative approach (Tracey, 2013) that encourages both emergent readings of the data and existing theories and literature. Shenhav employs Rimmon-Kenan's (2002) traditional narratology triplet of story-text-narration and adds a fourth element of multiplicity. Although Shenhav presents these four components, he stated that they do not all need the same emphasis, and that the research question should drive which elements the researcher chooses to emphasize.

The story in social narratives is what is being told as well as the characters involved. However, unlike traditional narratology, in the study of social narratives there is an expectation that the story being told is recurring in multiple different texts (Shenhav, 2015). In analyzing social stories, one can evaluate the similarities and differences in the stories embraced by groups, individuals, and institutions. Finally, one of the most important aspects of shared stories "is their ability to carry forward information and beliefs from past generations" (Shenhav, 2015, p. 23). My analysis of the story is a basic technique of reconstructing the story from the narrative, by removing the textual and narrational elements to reveal the events and characters (Shenhav, 2015). A basic table was created for each story that included the author and lists of the main events, time periods, characters, and observations. Appendix A provides an example of this process. This basic analysis focuses on similarities and differences within the stories for each case.

Narration in social narratives highlights both the process by which the narrative is told and "it invokes the agents who are inherent in the communicative acts of producing, consuming, and reproducing narratives" (Shenhav, 2015, p. 47). According to Herman and Vervaeck (2005) narration encompasses all of the factors that go into storytelling.

This includes visual communication as well. In a way similar to how the story was analyzed, a basic table was created to examine the type of narration such as textual or extratextual, the type of narrators, again textual or extratextual, and the anticipated audience.

My analyses of the text and multiplicity were more dynamic and thick in their scope due to the focus of my research questions. In order to analyze the text, I utilized Saldana's (2013) coding manual for qualitative research and used manual coding methods. The texts in social narratives include the written word, as well as any type of visual or oral storytelling, including pictures, videos, cartoons, and even the physical space and place where the story is told. I first began by reading the articles and comments and viewing the videos and images utilizing memoing to identify patterns within and between the stories and comments (Saldana, 2013; Tracey, 2013). In my next pass through the texts, I utilized open coding that allowed me to look for distinct concepts or categories present in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For example, words such as "GOD," "BLESSINGS," "ACCOUNTANT," or "BROKE" were first-level codes that described words or idea that appeared in the text. This allowed me to break down the data into segments to be interpreted. I then utilized axial coding to further define the themes that were present such as "RELIGION AS A CAUSE OF ACTION," "RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT," OR "FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT." I used specific coding to identify instances of microaggressions and highlighted them as microassault, microinsult, or microinvalidation. Coding helped to inductively find the microaggressions. It was used find patterns within the articles and comments in order to suss out microaggressions. Appendix B illustrates an example of coding for microaggressions. Many of these were

drawn from the prior microaggression themes outlined by Sue et al. (2007) that were introduced in the prior chapter. Because the original model primarily focuses on race, to enhance the unique experience of homelessness, I attempted to situate the emergent themes in the context of the racial microaggression categories to extend the original taxonomy. However, not all microaggressions fit into these categories, so new themes were created. For instance, in my coding of comments in one of the stories, I identified an initial concept that suggested one of the men was blessed. Further line-by-line coding of the comments revealed a pattern of religious endowment. Through the use of axial and selective coding I was able to elucidate a microaggression suggesting that the man was not acting on his own agency but at the hand of God.

Finally, in order to examine multiplicity I looked across and between the narratives to see if there were core elements at play, such as language, images, and coverage. Additionally, I examined if the narrative employed well-known stereotypes of race or class. By doing this, I was able to draw upon historic stereotypes of Black males as they are being subtly recreated through the online articles, images, and comments.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of this study's research methodology. A multicase qualitative narrative study was done to explore how online publications and their comments reinforce master narratives through textual and visual microaggressions. My research sample included stories focusing on homeless Black males that had gone viral. I selected three online news sources to collect my data sources. Each of these sources was selected as they included stories, images, videos, and user comments related

to each subject. Unlike traditional qualitative research, my participants were the online article authors and online commenters, who voluntarily posted information to public sites. This was done as anonymous posting can allow for more candidness. The data was reviewed against the themes within the literature and within the scope of the theoretical framework.

Additionally, I provided a literature review focusing on narrative analysis, my conception of digital narratives, master narratives, and social narratives to provide a conceptual framework for the design and analysis of the study. The intent of this study is expand the research on microaggressions from a purely interpersonal concept to a more societal concept with an understanding of the greater impact microaggressions have on society.

Table 4.1: Breakdown of data collected based on each individual case.

Source	**Total Articles**	**Total Images**	**Total Videos**	**Total Comments**
NPR.org	14	5	8	769
USAToday.com	18	5	6	898
TheGrio.com	16	7	12	97
Total	48	17	26	1764

Table 4.2: Breakdown of data by online news sources.

Ted Williams				
Source	**Articles**	**Images**	**Videos**	**Comments**
NPR.org	9	3	6	296
USAToday.com	10	2	5	55
TheGrio.com	10	7	7	4
Total	29	12	18	355
Jeffrey Hillman				
Source	**Articles**	**Images**	**Videos**	**Comments**
NPR.org	4	1	1	367
USAToday.com	6	2	1	616
TheGrio.com	3	0	2	37
Total	13	3	4	1020
Billy Ray Harris				
Source	**Articles**	**Images**	**Videos**	**Comments**
NPR.org	1	1	1	106
USAToday.com	2	1	0	227
TheGrio.com	3	0	3	56
Total	6	2	4	389

CHAPTER 5

A ONE-MAN MINSTREL SHOW: THE DIGITAL NARRATIVE OF TED WILLIAMS

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long?

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear
My inner cry?
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die?

—Langston Hughes, Minstrel Man,
The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes, 1994

In this first analysis chapter I examine the 29 articles, 18[5] videos, 12 images, and 355 comments related to Ted Williams, the Black homeless man with the "golden voice" who was "discovered" by *Columbus Dispatch* videographer Doral Chenoweth III. Chenoweth III stopped and asked Williams to earn his contribution by demonstrating his

[5] Some of the videos and images were the same or similar between the three sources.

gift of voice advertised on his cardboard sign. The interaction was recorded and posted on the *Dispatch* website and reposted on YouTube where it quickly went viral with over 4.5 million shares (Memmott, 2011a). The minute-and-a-half video includes the initial interaction and subsequent interview identifying the homeless man as Ted Williams and a brief background on how he ended up homeless. His honesty regarding a history of drug use, his humbleness, and his talent challenged many individuals' stereotypes of a Black homeless man, resulting in an outcry for a second chance. His unexpected voice and story caused an outpouring of requests and job offers for the former radio announcer, potentially providing him with this second chance. Five years past the initial article the media continues to follow the ups and downs of Williams' life.

In the following sections, I will (a) provide an overview of the data that I analyzed, (b) summarize the story and characters, (c) examine the stories, comments, and images for instances of microaggressions, and (d) examine the digital narrative that is constructed through the use of microaggressions to show how traditional stereotypes of Black males are invoked in today's online media.

From Where the Stories Came

Overview of the Data

The data that I used to analyze Ted Williams was retrieved from the following sources: *National Public Radio* (*NPR.org*) that featured nine articles, six videos, four images, and 296 comments; *The Grio* (*theGrio.com*) that ran 10 articles, seven videos, three images, and four comments[6]; and *USA Today* (*usatoday.com*) that ran nine articles,

[6] I made several attempts to contact *The Grio* to see if the articles I was looking at truly had no comments or if they had archived them. I never received a response.

five videos, seven images, and 55 comments. Additional information regarding Williams' background was gathered from other news sources to fill in the gaps left by my data set. None of the background data were included in my analysis.

From Rags to Radio

In October 2011, videographer Doral Chenoweth III decided to stop and engage with a disheveled homeless man who held a sign along the Hudson Street ramp off northbound I-71 in Columbus, OH. He stopped based on what the man's sign said: "I have a god given gift of voice. I'm an ex-radio announcer who has fallen on hard times…" (Joy, 2011). Pulling over, Chenoweth III told the man he is going to make him work for the dollar and requested that he says something in his radio voice. The homeless man complied in a deep baritone voice with "When you're listening to nothing but the best of oldies, you're listening to Magic 98.9!" (Joy, 2011). The video was later posted to the *Dispatch's* website on January 3, 2011 during a slow news week and reposted to YouTube, where it garnered millions of views. During the video, Williams admitted to a history of alcohol and drug use, noting that he had been clean for two years (Chenoweth III, 2011).

By the next day, Williams was doing local interviews and on January 5, 2011 he appeared on CBS's *The Early Show*, on January 6th, 2011 he was on NBC's *Today* show, where he did the opening, and on January 7th he was on *The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell* on MSNBC. He was also reunited with his mother after nearly 10 years on January 6, 2011 (Memmott, 2011c). During this time, Williams was getting numerous voice-over offers from the Cleveland Cavaliers, Kraft Macaroni & Cheese, MSNBC

(Memmott, 2011d), as well as ESPN and MTV (*theGrio.com*, 2011a). Even after revealing a lengthy list of arrests and prison time for theft and forgery, Williams became the voice of Kraft Macaroni & Cheese and was hired by MSNBC for voice-over work and continued to be pursued by the Cavaliers. During a stint on the *Dave and Jimmy* radio show on January 5, 2011, he received offers to come to Hollywood for several voice-overs and shows (The Dave & Jimmy Show, 2011).

While in Los Angeles, Williams reunited with his children. However, on January 10, 2011, Williams and one of his daughters were detained by the police after a loud argument in their hotel (Memmott, 2011e). On January 12, 2011, after a talk with Dr. Phil McGraw he admitted he had started drinking again and agreed to enter a private rehab facility (*theGrio.com*, 2011f). After just 12 days, Williams checked himself out (Duke, 2011). In early March 2011, he moved into a sober house in California, noting that "it was too much, too fast" (Oldenburg, 2011b). During February 2011, *TMZ.com* reported that Williams was working on a deal for a reality show called *Second Chances at Life*. By May, 2011 Williams reentered Origins in Texas, the initial rehab he attended following the Dr. Phil visit, for a 90-day program focusing on emotional support, not a drug relapse (Garvey, 2011). This caused Williams to take a break from the show and book contract he received (Garvey, 2011), and there was a report that he was no longer being considered for a position with the Cleveland Cavaliers (Finnan, 2011). Throughout 2011, Williams received a $375,000 advance to write his memoirs, a lucrative contract with Kraft Macaroni & Cheese, and some additional voice-over work (Chenoweth III, 2014), and became the official voice of the New England Cable News (Heslman, 2011).

Williams managed to stay in the news, appearing at least once a year relating to a

project or setback. In 2012, he became “The Golden Voice of Love” to promote Kraft Macaroni & Cheese in a YouTube campaign (Ivanovic, 2012). Starting in May 2012 he began promoting his co-written book detailing his life from successful DJ to crack addict, his 17 years on the street, and his YouTube rise to fame. He appeared on several talk shows, including *Filip & Fredriks Årskrönika 2011*, *The Wendy Williams Show*, *Huckabee*, and *Today* (Stump, 2012; *Ted Williams*, nd). In 2013, he was once again on the media circuit, noting that he was steadily employed as a voice-over artist by Kraft Macaroni & Cheese, promoting The Ted Williams Project he created with Kraft to raise money to help the poor in Columbus, and working on his strained relations with his children (Gosk, 2013; Stump, 2013). He also began doing promotional work for the documentary *Houseless* that he narrated (Spero, 2013).

By 2014, in an interview with Doral Chenoweth III, Williams revealed that he was broke. In the interview, Williams stated that he “should have been a millionaire by now,” but instead owns nothing. He claimed that he had people in his life that he should not have and he trusted the wrong people. Furthermore, he explained that his managers deprived him of residuals and payment. As he did not even have a car, his current manager drove him to his job. He did note that he had been clean and sober since August 6, 2011 and had the opportunity to give back through volunteering. Additionally, he talked extensively about his relationship with God over time, noting that God used him as a vehicle. By June 2015, once again Williams made news by announcing his bid for president (Calfas, 2015). Williams suggested if Donald Trump could do it, so could he (Calfas, 2015). However, by August 26, 2015 William’s Facebook page reported that he would not run for president because of how candidates were treating each other. On

January 4, 2016 Williams began his own talk show *The Golden Voice Show* on AM1580 WVKO. In the following few months he made appearances on the *Steve Harvey* show and the *Dr. Oz* show (Williams, 2015, 2016a, c). However, by April 16, 2016 Williams' Facebook page announced the show was going to be changing its time and location (Williams, 2016d); as of October 28, 2016, no announcement had been made of the new show. By October 22, 2016, Williams' story was once again revived with a feature called *Where are they Now?* on Oprah Winfrey's OWN network (Williams 2016b). Throughout all the media coverage, Williams continues to be a source of media fodder and entertainment for viewers.

Creating Williams' Digital Narrative Through Microaggressive Communication

In the case of Ted Williams, there were very few explicit verbal or nonverbal attacks on him or overt behavior that may be discriminatory toward his race or class. As such, there are no explicit microassaults. While there were a few comments relating to drugs and homelessness by choice, the vast majority of comments were overwhelmingly positive, even in the subsequent stories relating to police and rehab. This may be due in part to a couple reasons. In the initial video that went viral, Williams openly said that his situation was a direct result of alcohol and drug abuse and then went on to tell Doral Chenoweth III that he had been clean and sober for two years. This openness regarding his history of drug and alcohol abuse to Chenoweth III and in other forums may have been a type of stigma management communication (Meisenbach, 2010; Smith, 2007). By acknowledging drug abuse Williams may have been using a coping method to show he

was at ease with his past struggles (Goffman, 1963), he may have been trying to change public opinion relating to homelessness and drug abuse, or he may have been engaging in transcendence by suggesting that the stigma ultimately led to a valuable end (Meisenbach, 2010). Connie Boucher (2011) commented, "YOU GO TED WILLIAMS…your honesty and attitude are an inspiration!" Williams' openness on this issue appeared to silence those who tend to immediately suggest the overemphasized causes of homelessness: drugs, mental illness, and laziness. By admitting drug use, claiming sobriety, and suggesting he wants to work, he seems to have taken some of the power away from those who respond by filling in the blanks with their own beliefs and ideologies. However, in doing this Williams also reinforced the link between drugs and homelessness and, to some extent, makes living on the streets sound like a viable and noble way to get clean and sober.

It was not just his honesty that seemed to bring out the best in commenters, but also his apparent sincerity and appreciation when speaking to Chenoweth III. Several commenters even mentioned Williams' graciousness. For instance, Tai Muraki stated "Couldn't of [sic] happened to a more gracious man" (2011). Additionally, because of Williams' unexpected voice and articulate nature, rather than diminish him based on class status, people wanted him to be helped. Many individuals in the comments suggested that he needed to be given a job and a second chance. Zed Towers (2011) asked "NPR could've given him a job – right?...Didn't Juan Williams leave an empty seat?" According to a comment by Nimanae Pip (2011) Reddit.com had already had at least 100 job offers for Ted Williams doing voiceover work. Although it is good to see that there were limited overtly hostile comments, there are plenty of microinsults and

microinvalidations present. The next section will focus on microinsults.

Microinsults

As noted in the literature review, microinsults are the types of communication that convey either a rudeness or insensitivity that ultimately demean a person's identity. They are subtle snubs that are often unknown to the perpetrator, but ultimately convey an insulting or hurtful message to the recipient. In this section, I will examine two categories of microinsults: those that suggest Williams is a second-class citizen and those that suggest he is exceptional for his race and/or class.

Second-Class Citizen

Both the newspaper articles and the comments continually remind the readers that Williams is a second-class citizen. As noted in the microaggressions typology in Chapter 2, one is treated as less than another based on identity characteristics such as race, class, gender, etc. Within the category of second-class citizen, an individual may face stigmatization by continually being referred to as different than other citizens, they may lose their right to privacy by having their images, names, and stories shared locally or globally without their permission, and they may have different expectations placed on them than other citizens. In some instances, these second-class citizens lose the rights and privileges supposedly given to all United States citizens. The first way that this was done to Williams was through the constant reminder that he is or was homeless. Since this is the core of the story, all but one article features either a headline or first sentence identifying Williams as homeless or formerly homeless. This constant reminder, even

after he is no longer homeless, associates Williams with the stigma and stereotypes of homelessness. For example, the headline from the January 6, 2011 article in *theGrio.com* reads “Homeless man with velvety voice becomes star” (*theGrio.com*, 2011c). A 2015 headline from *USAToday.com* stated “Former homeless man with ‘golden voice’ enters presidential race” (Calfas, 2015) and a subsequent headline from a 2016 article on *NPR.org* noted “Formerly homeless man with ‘golden voice’ back on the airwaves” (Domonoske, 2016). Additionally, text from the articles also remind us of Williams’ status. “Williams and his compelling tale became an online sensation after *The Columbus Dispatch* posted a clip of him demonstrating his voiceover skill while begging by the side of the road” (*theGrio.com*, 2011c). The articles clearly want to remind the readers that Williams is a second-class citizen. The article in *The Grio* goes so far as to remind us that he is not just homeless, but also a beggar. In the *Today* show video featured on *The Grio* site, Kevin Tibbles referred to Williams as “just another beggar by the highway” (*theGrio.com*, 2011b). Additionally, in a 2013 video interview with Stephanie Gosk featured on *theGrio.com* (2013), when describing Williams during his discovery by Chenoweth, he referred to him as “a dirty bedraggled beggar with the most unlikely of gifts.” Even though Williams quickly became known as the man with the golden voice, both the articles around the initial “discovery” of Williams, as well as articles four and five years later, still continue to connect Williams and homelessness. As Bourdieu (1984) explained, our individual conditioning leads us to permanently identify others based on their social class, thus impeding social mobility. Even though Williams gained both economic and social capital, what viewers know about him becomes constantly regurgitated, effectively keeping him in his place.

His second-class status was not only established by reminding the readers that Williams was homeless or had a past infused with drugs and alcohol; the articles also began reporting his personal situations. Williams right to privacy was clearly invaded. Most White, middle and upper class citizens would never have a story written about them for a disturbance that did not result in an arrest or actual violence. A few days following the initial media blitz, Williams and his daughter were reportedly taken in for questioning for a disturbance call at the Renaissance Hollywood Hotel and Spa. Both *theGrio.com* (2011f, g) and *NPR.org* (Memmott, 2011e) ran articles regarding the incident. The articles pointed out that the pair were released, and both *theGrio.com* (2011e) and *NPR.org* (2011e) noted that there were no signs of physical abuse. However, *USAtoday.com* ran a story after the fact, noting that there was a physical altercation (Oldenburg, 2011a). Running these types of stories parallels the research emphasizing Black males as violent or brutish (Enck-Wanzer, 2009; Hardin, et al., 2004; hooks, 1994; Moorti, 2001). Additionally, it implies emotional immaturity by being unable to handle emotionally charged moments with grace. By adding these comments, both articles illustrate underlying stereotypes connecting Black people with lower class status, crime, and violence. After this event Williams made an appearance on the *Dr. Phil Show* in which he volunteered to enter a rehab facility. Again, reinforcing the connection between Black people and drugs.

Reader comments also illustrate Williams as a second-class citizen. Some of the reader comments in the initial articles expressed surprise that a homeless man could have a golden voice. Jennifer Stammers (2011) noted, “Why is this guy homeless? He’s well-spoken, articulate and obviously personable. Then came the explanation of drugs and

alcohol." Other commenters focused on his addictions, suggesting they will be with him forever. "One day when Ted is crooning on some far away radio show with his bottle of Grey Goose he will fondly remember the days when he was able to just relapse with oblivion on some desolate highway" (Christopher Kouloris, 2011). Comments in the later stories that have featured his ups and downs are a bit harsher. Ryan Thomas (2013) noted that Williams is "pan handling [sic] some type of book at a local mall in Columbus Ohio." As Williams had recently published a book it is possible that he was doing a publicity tour. This comment alludes to the fact that Williams still does not have a "real" job, effectively equating him selling his book with standing alongside the road asking for money. Following the article that he is planning a run for president, Cloyce Shannon (2015) stated, "Still out of money, huh Ted. I guess America will vote for you over more qualified candidates because you have the "Golden Voice.'" By connecting no money and the golden voice, Shannon suggests this man was nothing more than a one-hit wonder who could not seem to make it work out. No matter Williams' success or failure, he is continually reminded of his less-than status. The second-class citizen status is perpetually illustrated through the ongoing coverage and comments Williams receives.

Ascription of Exceptionalism

The second theme within the category of microinsults is the ascription of exceptionalism. Within this category, certain individuals in marginalized groups become the exception to who we would normally find within this group. This is similar to ascription of intelligence by Sue et al. (2007) and Sue (2010), where intelligence is assigned to a person based on his or her race or gender. Typically, homeless and/or Black

men are not thought of as talented, articulate, or kind. However, Williams is frequently described with terms such as talent and articulate, which make him an exception. For instance, in a 2011 interview with Matt Lauer and Meredith Vieira, we hear Williams use the terms sir and ma'am referring to Lauer and Vieira. Lauer also makes the comment "Despite your hard times, there is this civility to you. There is this kindness. There is this grace about you" (*theGrio.com*, 2011b). Williams explained that this is how he was brought up by his family. This deference is significant when you consider that at the time of this interview Williams was in his 50s and his mother was 90; he and his parents would have experienced segregation. During this part of history and into today, in order to get by Black individuals were and still are expected to show deference to White individuals. Additionally, this deference may be used as a form of capital to navigate and/or play the hegemonic order. These comments suggest that somehow Williams is better than or different from other Black homeless males. This fails to take into consideration that those who have experienced poverty or racial discrimination are not bad individuals, but rather experiencing a bad situation. The idea of exceptionalism is at the core of this story. Because of this, it is not just that microaggressions happen in the story, they constitute the story.

Additionally, this category borrows from the notion of the "exceptional Negro." As social science scholar Paul Butler (2013) explained, exceptionalism is a rhetorical and social term measuring difference as a social indicator. Because Whiteness and White experiences are normalized in the United States, those who are "raced" face many challenges in society. As such, when Black individuals transcend certain racial stereotypes they become "exceptional," distinguishing them from the "typical"

underachieving Black individuals. Even the "exceptional Negros" are not protected from racism. Many White individuals can be resentful and look for ways to remind them of their status in the United States, as is illustrated by the category of second-class citizen. For instance, two comments related to the Calfas (2015) article regarding Williams entering the presidential race referred to President Obama as "the current idiot" in office (Mathew Wegener, 2015; Rudy Katt, 2015). By the nature of this story going viral, there is a strong suggestion that Williams is not your "typical" Black, homeless man – he has God-given gifts of a voice that must be unleashed. However, through the articles and comments we are reminded his race and class make him somehow deficient.

The sheer amount of coverage Williams received is the first way the media reinforces the ascription of exceptionalism. This is also somewhat similar to research that suggests homelessness is covered if it is a high-profile event (Campbell & Reeves, 1989; Shields, 2001). These types of news events focus on the event or the character, rather than the issue at hand. As noted in the beginning of the chapter, Williams made his rounds on local and national media outlets, getting such opportunities as opening the *Today* show and receiving job offers on the phone while he was a guest on the *Dave & Jimmy Show*. According to Memmott (2011a), the *Dispatch* had already received extensive calls, media inquiries, and job offers relating to Williams. As *theGrio.com* (2011c) wrote, "He's America's hottest – and most improbable – star" and a few paragraphs later they noted it is a "shocking turn of events" for a man who had been living in shelters and with family and friends. They also described several organizations trying to contact him for work and provide him with a second chance. There was overwhelming surprise at his level of talent, even though Williams stated he had gone to

school to develop the voice and had a successful job on the radio prior to his descent into a life of drugs and alcohol.

It was not just the media that spread the story of "golden voiced" Ted Williams, but the number of views and shares the story received suggested this was something unique that must be shown to others. Like the media, those who commented seemed taken back by Williams' talent. For instance, Susanna Hartigan (2011) explained that she "didn't expect to hear that voice coming from the guy on the side of the road." This notion suggests he is some sort of exception to what she expected a homeless Black male to sound like. Additionally, Poker Diva (2011) was surprised at his politeness when she made the comment, "He said 'Thank you very much' when that young man videotaped [sic] him... And I am sure many people saw that and said 'WOW' give this man a chance!" This underscores the assumption that he is somehow not like the other homeless men on the street because he is polite and articulate, the exception of those living on the street. Finally, P. Wells' (2011) comment "Good luck Ted! America is rooting for you!!" This suggests that unlike other homeless and/or Black men, we want the one with the talent to succeed. As Entman and Rojecki (2000) suggested, individuals often use prototypes to appraise others. The prototype of a Black homeless man certainly does not include being talented and articulate. The insensitive representation of Williams as a second-class citizen or an exceptional character is just one of several ways in which Williams is belittled. The next section focuses on microinvalidations that subtly erase the experiential reality of Williams.

Microinvalidations

Unlike microinsults that convey stereotypes and insensitivity that demeans a person's identity, microinvalidations are the communications that negate thoughts, feelings, and experiential reality of marginalized individuals (Sue, 2010). In this section, I will identify two forms of microinvalidations found in the content of the materials associated with Ted Williams: divine assistance and significant absences.

Divine Assistance

The first theme in the microinvalidation category relates to divine assistance. In the online portrayal of Ted Williams' story, God moved Williams from homelessness to housed. While Williams himself often thanks God or credits faith for his will to move forward, the articles strip Williams of his own talent by failing to consider the role of opportunists in his sudden change of fortune. While a handful of the articles quote Williams making comments such as "I just hope everyone will pray for me" (*theGrio.com*, 2011c), "the Lord didn't take my voice away" (*NPR.org*, 2011), and "God has truly blessed me" (Memmott, 2011f), in most articles there is not huge credit to God for his second chance, this came in the comment sections. Again, this type of language may be a function of stigma management communication. Although Williams talks about his redeveloped faith in God, he also credits going to school for his voice and a background in radio (*theGrio.com*, 2011h).

Even with limited acknowledgements to a higher power in the news articles, there are many commenters that attribute his second chance to God. For instance, Yvonne Collins-Myers (2011) suggested, "When God delivers you from drugs and alcohol you

have been given a second chance... He gave God the glory and now Ted Williams will do and be what he says he will." Dominique Dove (2013) wrote, "The God of second chances is smiling right now." Additionally, James A. Entrocaso (2013) stated, "That is awesome praise God!" While none of these comments are intended to insult or demean Williams, they take away other internal and external factors that led to Williams' second chance, such as genetics and training. I certainly do not discredit the power of faith, but I do suggest that focusing only on this undermines other significant aspects resulting in Williams' change in circumstances. It also does not explain why other faithful individuals in similar situations never seem to find their way out of homelessness or poverty. These comments also fail to consider where God was when Williams was struggling and living on the street. This suggests that Williams is responsible for his failures, but not his successes.

The other question is would Williams even have gotten a second chance if he did not have this voice? The only reason Chenoweth III stopped was to see if Williams' sign was truthful. Had Williams not had the voice he does, would the second chance have happened? What about others who have gifts of teaching, craftsmanship, or mechanics? These are not quickly demonstrable talents that can benefit others, like that of a voice or athleticism.

It is also important to consider the opportunism that occurred at the expense of Williams. Individuals and organizations were clamoring to hire Williams, even with his questionable background of drugs and alcohol. Did anyone consider the effects this attention would have on him or did any of the offers come with recovery help? Williams became an object of the consumer, as a moneymaker or form of entertainment. While not

covered in my data set, in a 2014 interview with Chenoweth III, Williams claimed that he was financially "under the weather" and had ongoing problems with management who took advantage of him causing him to "own nothing." Was this loss of fortune also an act of God? While having faith and accepting what you have are great character strengths, it is also important to consider the other factors at play in shaping Williams life since his "discovery."

Significant Absences

As noted by scholars Entman and Rojecki (2000), television news fails to explicitly address causes and consequences of poverty. Rather, symptoms of poverty are illustrated through implicit discourse. The absence of information, coupled with implicit discourse and images, serves to construct the public's understanding of the social problems of poverty and race (Entman & Rojeck, 2000). What is particularly problematic with the absence of information on homelessness in this situation is that Williams has become a strong advocate for homeless issues. Not only has Williams written a book about his experiences on the street, *A golden voice*: *How faith, hard work, and humility brought me from the streets to salvation* (2012), he also narrated the documentary *Houseless* (2013), and started a foundation with Kraft, the Ted Williams Project, that provides necessities to the poor in Columbus, OH (Stump, 2013). However, the four stories that came after these dates either failed to mention anything about Williams' work with homelessness (*theGrio.com*, 2013); stated that he wrote the book and narrated a film about the harsh realities of life on the street, but did not talk about either project (Ready, 2013); talked about him publishing a book, including the title, but focused on his

presidential bid (Calfas, 2015); and mentioned he wrote a memoir (no mention of the title) and that he had nothing left from the $395,000 advance he received for it, but went into some depth on his new job as a radio cohost (Domonoske, 2016). One of the videos linked to the article showed where he lived in a tent or pointed out his spot for panhandling (*theGrio.com*, 2013), but not a single article in the data set mentioned anything about issues relating to poverty or homelessness. This is similar to prior research illustrating how the voice of the homeless is marginalized when it comes to homeless issues (Campbell & Reeves, 1989; Reynald, 2006, Torck, 2001; Whang & Min, 1999). Rather than providing homeless people with a voice relating to homelessness, Williams' voice is used emphasize the story the reporter or news agency wants.

The problem with this deficiency in coverage is that it is coupled with stories about his time in and out of rehab, domestic issues, his successes and failures, and ultimately his new job. Failing to discuss the causes or even the consequences in this case results in the public seeing the social problem of homelessness as an individual issue with an individual cure (Entman & Rojeki, 2000; Iyengar, 1991). Additionally, the focus on alcohol and drugs as the cause of Williams' problems coupled with the failure to discuss other issues relating to race and homelessness reinforces the stereotypes connecting race and homelessness to drugs and alcohol.

Another issue prevalent in this absence is the misunderstanding of readers assuming that Williams somehow lifted himself up and that living on the streets for 17 years was not really a big deal. It also does not illustrate the connection between race and poverty. Emily Thynne (2011) wrote, "He's an inspiration…Not only did he manage to climb out of the gutter of drugs and alcohol abuse, he managed to stay afloat…"

Additionally, LuAnn Barr (2011) stated, “This is a powerful example of the power of positive thought and intention…Listen up homeless people and drug addicts…determine to change YOUR life for the best and then don’t give up…it will happen if you don’t give up…” Both of these examples fail to consider that Williams had help, he did not get these offers because he sought them out, he was fortunate that he had a talent and it was arguably exploited for a news story. Barr’s comment is particularly concerning because s/he clearly sees homelessness as an individual issue caused by drug use and assumes that it is simply a matter of positive thought to get back on one’s feet. Finally, Zachary Ford (2011) noted, “He’s [Williams] so happy and so thankful for these opportunities, some should take a lesson from Williams and stop having such a miserable outlook on everything.” Of course Williams has a positive outlook; he literally went from standing alongside the road asking for money, to *Today* and being courted for numerous job opportunities. The vast majority of Black homeless individuals, or almost anyone for that matter, will never have this type of opportunity.

Because the articles fail to talk about the issues relating to homelessness and race, the stereotypes associated with race and homelessness continue to be perpetuated. As research by Iyengar (1991), Gilens (1999), and Entman and Rojecki (2000) have illustrated, White individuals see race and poverty intertwined and suggest it is encouraged by media coverage. White people also hold Black people more accountable for their own poverty than they do other White people (Entman & Rojecki, 2000). By failing to include information relating to the structural sources of Black homelessness, the news both allows White people to deny any racial discrimination and suggests that poverty and homelessness is a Black issue. As critical race and microaggression scholars

would suggest, these absences allow the dominant groups to impose reality on marginalized groups and individuals (Bell, 1980; Lorde, 1992; Matsuda et al., 1993; Solórzano, 1998; Sue, 2010; Yosso, 2005). Of course it is not just through words that microaggressions can be experienced; images also reflect microaggressions.

Visual Microaggressions

As noted by a report from The Opportunity Agenda, a social justice communication organization, all media collectively presents a distorted representation of the lives of Black males (2011, p. 21). This is true in each of the case studies examined. The visual imagery of Ted Williams included the photographs in the articles and the linked videos. The initial 1:37-minute video featured videographer Chenoweth III in a car narrating the video. In his narration, he talks about homeless people asking for change at the freeway and that he has recently seen a guy with an interesting sign saying that he has a "God given gift of a great voice" (Joy, 2011). The video shows the car pulling up to Williams, who has unkempt hair, several days of facial hair growth, dental issues, and a camouflage jacket over a light gray hoodie (Figure 5.1). Chenoweth III tells Williams he is going to make him work for his dollar and asks him to say something in his radio voice. Williams complies with several examples and then he thanks Chenoweth III. The video cuts to Chenoweth III interviewing Williams outside. Williams provides his history of getting interested in radio and developing his voice, and then subsequently turns more serious, explaining how drugs caused a downward spiral. Staying serious, he goes on to note that he has been clean for two years and that he is trying hard to get his life back together. He says he hopes that someone from media will stop and say they need some

voice-over work (Joy, 2011). Within a day of the video being put up on the *Columbus Dispatch* website it garnered millions of views (Joy, 2011). Additionally, someone had copied it to YouTube, where it was viewed more than 4.5 million times (Memmott, 2011a).

When Chenoweth III did not just give money freely and asked Williams to "perform" to earn his dollar, it was a form of exploitation. There is no evidence as to whether Williams was asked if it was ok to put the video online or to share it worldwide. If he was not asked, this was a case of the exploitation of a homeless man for entertainment purposes. Similar to Huber and Solórzano's (2015) use of 40 years of representations of Mexican banditry to illustrate visual microaggressions, many of the images and videos illustrate stereotypes of race and homelessness. Following the viral nature of this video, various media began running stories about Ted Williams. As the stories are web-based, they frequently include both photos and video. While there is nothing highly egregious with any of the images or videos, they do tend to reinforce stereotypes associated with Black individuals and/or homeless individuals. The first image that is presented to us either through video or photo is that of Williams standing alongside the road holding his sign. This image was taken during Chenoweth III's original interview. Although the image itself is a representation of what Chenoweth III saw, it reinforces both the racial connection with homelessness or poverty, as well as the idea that homeless people are lazy and just want handouts (NCH, 2009). The constant use of this image or the video associated with it not only serves to reinforce stereotypes, but also is a constant reminder that Williams is a second-class citizen.

Research has illustrated that Black individuals are frequently overrepresented in

stories relating to poverty (Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilens, 1996a, b; Iyengar, 1991; The Opportunity Agenda, 2011) and stereotypes relating to crime (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, b; Entman, 1990, 1992; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Escholz, 2002; Gist, 1990; The Opportunity Agenda, 2011). Because the text in many of these stories refers to Williams' past drug use and arrests (McCarthy, 2011; Memmott, 2011b; *theGrio.com*, 2011b) it also reinforces the stereotype that most homeless individuals are on drugs or criminals, which is not factual (NCH, 2009). This is also emphasized with a photo run by the *Grio.com* (2011f) that uses an unflattering image of Williams smoking a cigarette with the headline "Homeless man turned radio star briefly held by LAPD." Based on what he is wearing in the image, it was taken on the day he was on various media shows and was reunited with his mother, which was highly captured by the media. As such, there were numerous other images that probably could have been accessed.

A second way that visual microaggressions are invoked is through another set of images and videos that put Williams behind the microphone or capture him on various morning news shows. The Opportunity Agenda (2011) explained that while positive associations with Black in the media are limited, when they are shown it usually has to do with some form of entertainment. One image that was used in the stories featured Williams behind a microphone doing voice-over promotions for MSNBC's "Lean Forward" campaign. This image showed up in at least one article from each online news source. In addition, he was recorded while doing the opening of *Today*, which was shown in multiple NBC stories (Figure 5.2). In both cases, Williams was wearing the camouflage jacket from the original photo but had gotten a haircut and shave.

The use of this image and the videos serves as a constant reminder of Williams'

ability to entertain us, both with his talent and by appearing on these shows. These relate back to the idea of exceptionalism; if it were not for his talent he would not have attained this sort of fame. Because he has this talent, he now has to entertain the dominant culture with his voice and stories. These images harken back to a time when Black people were objectified for their entertainment value, often in blackface minstrel shows that did not portray Black people in a positive light, but as frequently dumb and lazy or with an exploitable talent for music or dance. Research has shown that Black bodies have been used as a source of entertainment for centuries (Bogle 2001; Harman 1997; Lhamon 1998; Lott 2013). While this may not be as overt as in the past, there does seem to be an ideology suggesting Black people are entertainment (hooks, 1992).

This entertainment notion is reinforced through a video that is linked to stories on each site (McCarthy, 2011; Memmott, 2011d; the Grio.com, 2011a) featuring a reunion between Williams and his mother. Instead of a quiet moment for the two who had not seen each other in more than 10 years (Memmott, 2011d), they were subject to cameramen and photographers capturing and recording their meeting for all to see (Figure 5.3). The two were then guests on several morning talk shows revealing some more personal background. Williams also was publicly reunited with his family on Dr. Phil regarding an altercation with his daughter. Again, rather than a private discussion about this with family, it became entertainment for the masses. Clips of this show were parts of news montages shown on several news sites (Oldenburg, 2011; *theGrio.com*, 2011f). In these particular cases, Williams and his family not only become our entertainment, but deficit images are shown continually associating Williams with homelessness, needing help from the likes of Dr. Phil, or even including pictures of his

various mugshots. The reinforcement of these stereotypes is an example of visual microaggressions (Huber & Solórzano, 2015).

As noted by numerous scholars, words and images are used to create particular messages or public understandings (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2011; Entman & Rojecki, 2000, Hariman & Lucaites, 2003; Mitchell, 1994; Gee, 2011). By continuing to visually construct Williams as a homeless or formerly homeless man, show him as an object of entertainment, or visually represent racial and class stereotypes, the media enacts institutional racism. This along with the other microaggressions shapes a discourse about race and class, without considering the dominant power behind the text and images.

Williams' Digital Narrative: A Modern Minstrel

I began this chapter with the poem "Minstrel Man" by Langston Hughes. The poem explores the stereotype of the minstrel slave – the happy-go-lucky character with a big smile and dancing feet, regardless of his circumstance. Through the textual and visual microaggressions, Williams seems to be portrayed as a modern-day minstrel. Although we do not specifically see Williams singing, dancing, and playing the fool as in traditional minstrel shows, because of his talent and ongoing revival in the media he becomes a form of entertainment or a minstrel. His smiling face and good natured personality, even in tough times, hide the pain of homelessness and addiction. Whether this is true personality or a way to use his "golden-voice" talent and agency to challenge the hegemonic hierarchy, the results are the same. Through the above microaggression typography, we begin to see his role as a minstrel emerge. Audiences are accepting of Black males in this role of entertainer (Campbell, 1995; Hacker, 1992).

Through the original minstrel shows, abject othering of Black people allowed White people to racialize and color class (Lott, 1995). The theme of second-class citizen parallels this idea, as no matter what Williams does, he continues to be seen as a second-class citizen. He cannot escape his race and class. Similarly, just as audiences wanted the Black performers to reenact the white-created stereotypes in minstrel shows (Toll, 1978), the authors of the articles create the narrative for Williams around stereotypes of race and class, being drawn to articles about his entertainment value and his personal challenges. There is also a constant reminder that Williams is or was homeless.

Additionally, there seem to be no boundaries between the media and Williams. He is followed and recorded in the most private moments of his life, like being reuniting with his mother and family. His personal challenges are recorded, including his ongoing battle with addiction, family friction, and loss of money. However, his real contributions, like his work related to homelessness, are hardly noticed. This suggests Williams is nothing more than a spectacle for the dominant culture's entertainment. This is similar to the Black minstrels who had to stay in character off stage, perpetually smiling (Toll, 1974).

The change from blackface minstrelsy to Black minstrelsy brought with it a notable change in that religious themes were added to performances that were typically left out of White minstrel cast minstrel shows (Toll, 1974). We see this aspect through the divine assistance theme. Williams himself openly discusses his faith and credits God with his change in fortune. However, this aspect is hardly broached by the White media[7] who are there to tell his story, similar to the Interlocutor who directs the actions of the

[7] Although I do not know the racial makeup of the Grio authors, almost all of the *NPR* and *USA Today* reporters appeared visually White when I looked them up. Additionally, all of the interviews linked to the stories were conducted by White individuals who work on the morning shows.

minstrel characters. It becomes left to Williams and his mother to discuss how he sees religion shaping his life. One of the stories appearing in the religion section of *USAToday.com* even discusses the rarity of religious testifying being put in the spotlight and that God is frequently minimized or removed from the public sphere (Grossman, 2011).

Another way we see Williams emerge through a minstrel narrative is in his personal and physical transformation we see presented in the visual microaggressions. We see him essentially transform from the slave to the dandy or Zip Coon, a Black man focusing on "flirting, fun, and fashion" (Toll, 1978, para. 20). When we are first introduced to Williams he is what Gosk described as a "dirty, bedraggled beggar" (*theGrio.com*, 2013). He is unkempt, dressed in old jeans and a camouflage jacket, and panhandling for money. Using his talent, he puts on a smile while performing for Chenoweth III, but then also becomes subservient as he shares his story. As he becomes a media sensation, we next see him with a nice haircut, clean shaven, and nicer clothes, although he is still wearing the familiar camouflage jacket. While he is friendly, his demeanor is still reserved and respectful, seeming to take everything in. We eventually see him with new teeth and glasses. In the later videos and interviews we see him in nice suits and ties, a leather jacket, jewelry, and even a hat. His demeanor has also changed to that of a very fun, friendly, and boisterous man (Memmott, 2011f; Ready, 2013; *theGrio.com*, 2013). This seems to mimic the range of characters presented in minstrel shows from the happy plantation slave to the pretentious city slicker (Toll, 1978). Between these extremes, when he struggled with rehab, family, and financial issues, as well as his short-lived run for president, we got the buffoon character whose behavior

seemed to be a source of amusement for others. Through this transformation, we see what Toll (1974) described as stock characters of racial stereotypes, allowing White people to view themselves as socially and culturally superior.

Toll (1974) suggested that because minstrel shows provided an acceptable version of slavery, minstrels allowed audiences to satisfy their curiosity about slavery. The glorification of Williams seems to function similarly, suggesting race and/or homelessness are not serious issues. As the categories of significant absences and the myth of meritocracy illustrate, none of the articles talk about the specifics of or issues related to homelessness and/or race; therefore, the audience is presented with a rags-to-riches story that discounts the realities of Williams's situation. Comments like "Talented guy stops being a loser when he stops acting like a loser" (RE Imlay, 2013) placed individual responsibility, without considering other factors at play. Additionally, comments suggesting all people need is hope and prayer to improve their lives reifies the notion that homelessness is an easily fixable problem if individuals are more positive. While Williams himself acknowledges it was drugs and alcohol that caused his downward spiral, we also need to consider how difficult it is to get out of the cycle of poverty and drug abuse without the help of family and friends, as well as without treatment. In Williams' case, it is not as simple as stopping acting like a loser. This reinforces the presentation of homelessness as an individual issue, which becomes acceptable because the dominant culture does not see it as a function of societal structures.

The articles and the comments present an easy exit from homelessness (prayer and hope) and a society willing to give second chances (providing one has a marketable

talent). These concepts are presented through the themes of divine assistance and exceptionalism. However, the reality seems to be more of an exploitation of Williams' talent. As Toll explained, "American popular culture would exploit and manipulate Afro-Americans and their culture to please and benefit white Americans" (1974, p. 51). Because Williams takes the blame for his situation in a convivial way, we see him with a smile and we discount his less than pleasant reality of homelessness. Therefore, Williams becomes a minstrel by providing an acceptable version of race and homelessness that satisfies the curiosity of the general public.

It is also important to note that Williams himself is not necessarily a pawn or victim in this story. In fact, his acts of deference, his collegiality, and his capitalization of his exceptionalism may be acts of agency. It is quite possible that he played and continues to play the system in order to find success. However, while this may work on an individual level, these actions still play into the hegemonic structure. He succeeds by playing a role that is acceptable to the White, dominant population. This role sets particular standards that other Black, homeless males cannot meet or choose not to engage in. Whether his character is a victim or agent within this narrative, the results are still the same – he is a minstrel.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have illustrated the textual and visual microaggressions within the stories, comments, and imagery. While there were no microassaults, I identified two microinsults relating to being a second-class citizen and the assumption of exceptionalism. There were also two microinvalidations identified, those of divine

assistance and significant absences. In the final section, I used these microaggressive themes to demonstrate how our narratives draw from the historic minstrel shows and to illuminate how Williams becomes a one-man minstrel for the dominant cultures' entertainment. Instead of following in Williams' footsteps of using his new-found fame to highlight the realities of homelessness, the articles focus on Williams' personal issues that reinforce several of the stereotypes of race and homelessness such as addiction, failure to manage money, and family struggles. The digital narrative created for him presents him as an entertainer. This actually tells us more about how we think about and treat marginalized individuals, than providing real information about Williams. Rather than consider the plight of poverty and homelessness, we see this as an individual issue that with some hard work or talent, one can easily overcome. A Black homeless man with a "discoverable" talent becomes an object for exploitation, instead of a subject in need of help. Just as Black actors have historically been limited to minstrel-defined roles to appease White audiences, the same is true for Williams, who has made homelessness more palatable to the domiciled and dominant culture.

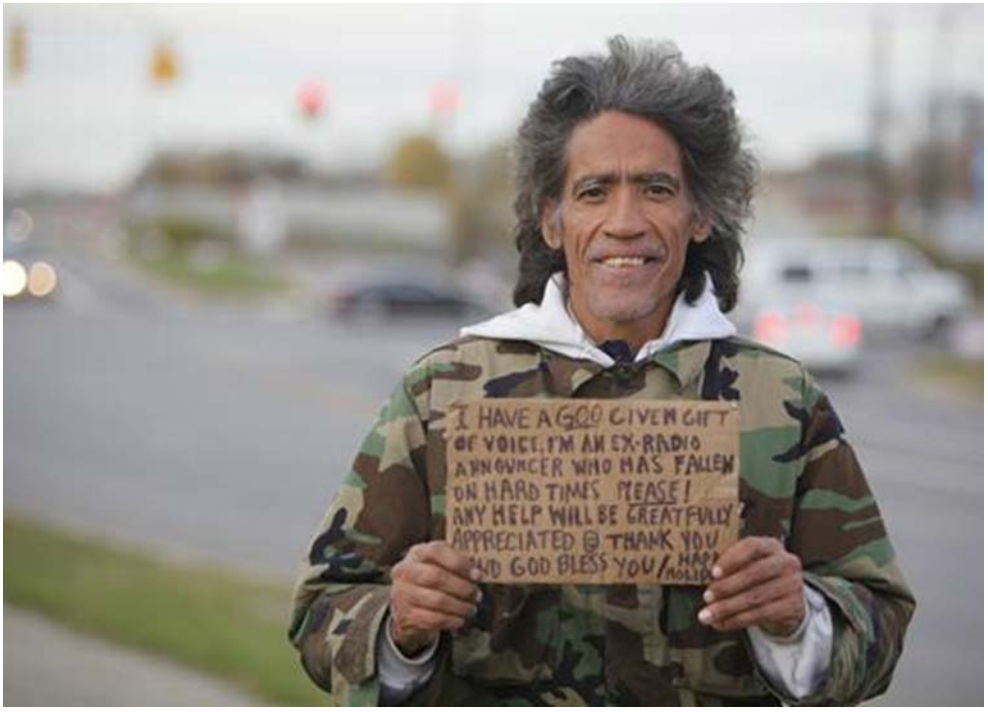

Figure 5.1: Image of Ted Williams by Doral Chenoweth III. Photo courtesy of Doral Chenoweth III and the Columbus Dispatch.

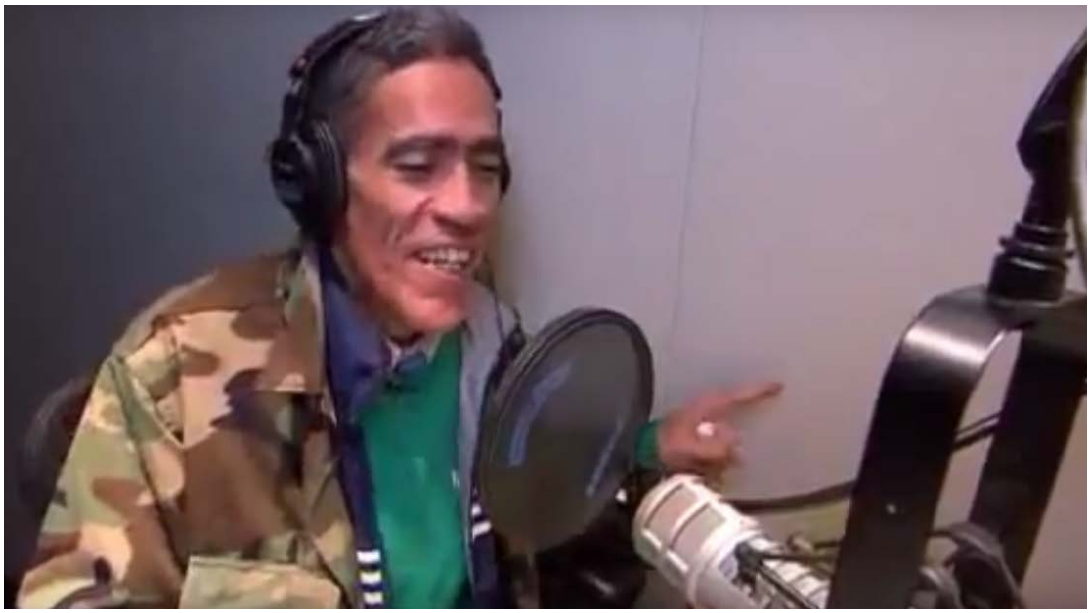

Figure 5.2: Screen capture of Williams doing the opening for Today on January 6, 2011.

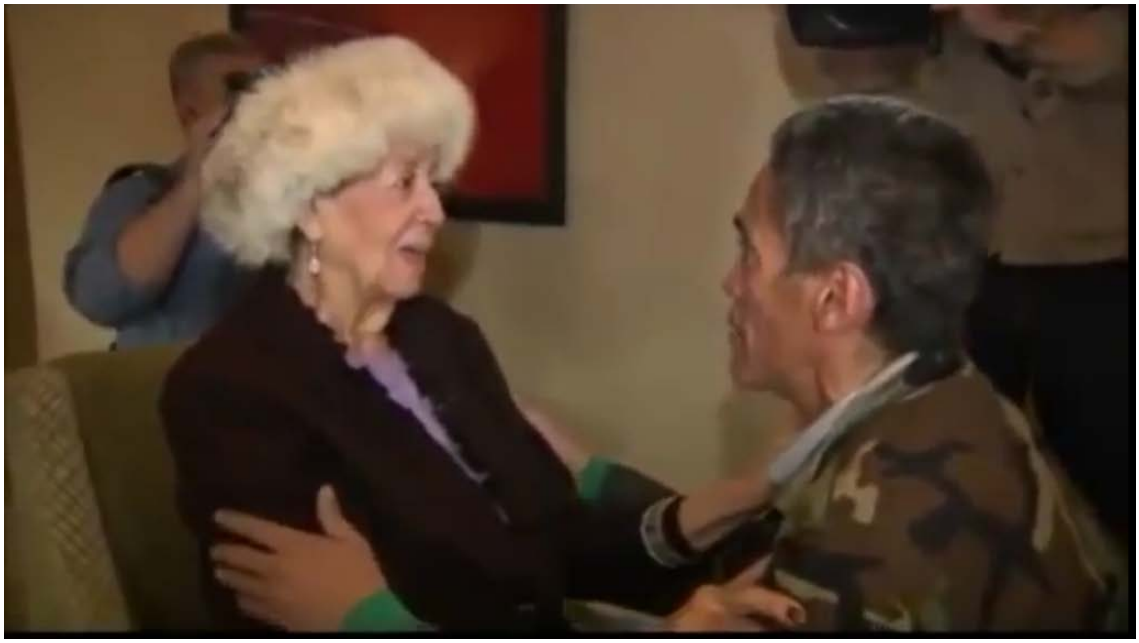

Figure 5.3: Screen capture of reunion of Williams and his mother Julia on January 6, 2011. You can see two of the many camera men and photographers present at the reunion.

CHAPTER 6

STEPIN FETCHIT OF THE STREETS: THE DIGITAL NARRATIVE OF JEFFREY HILLMAN

> It's all right to tell a man to lift himself by his own bootstraps, but it is a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps.
>
> —Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," March 31, 1968

This second analysis chapter examines 13 articles, four videos, three images, and 1020 comments related to Jeffrey Hillman, the Black homeless man who was given a new pair of boots by a police officer who saw him sitting barefoot against a storefront window in New York City in November, 2012. The image was captured by a tourist and, after being posted to Facebook, quickly went viral. While the police officer was heralded as a hero, the actions of Jeffrey Hillman resulted in him being villainized by the media and others when they once again saw him walking barefoot. Hillman's choice to hide the boots rather than wear them caused individuals to assume the worst resulting in the emergence of the most negative stereotypes related to race and homelessness.

In the following sections, I will (a) provide an overview of the data that I analyzed, (b) summarize the story the story and characters, (c) examine the stories, comments, and images for instances of microaggressions, and (d) examine the digital

narrative that is constructed through the use of microaggressions to illustrate how traditional online media invokes historic stereotypes within the narrative.

From Where the Stories Came

Overview of the Data

The data used to analyze Jeffrey Williams was retrieved from the following sources: *National Public Radio* (*NPR.org*), that featured four articles, one video, one image, and 367 comments; *The Grio* (*theGrio.com*) that ran three articles, two videos, one image, and 37 comments; and *USA Today* (*usatoday.com*) that ran seven articles, one video, three images, and 616 comments. Additional information regarding Hillman's background was gathered from other news sources to fill in the gaps left by my data set. None of the background data were included in my analysis.

From Invisible to Infamous

A shoeless man sat on the sidewalk leaning up against a building on a cold November night in New York City in 2012. A young police officer, later identified as Lawrence DePrimo, momentarily stopped to talk with him and then disappeared into a nearby shoe store. He returned with a brand-new pair of $100 Skechers boots and a pair of socks (DiBlasio, 2012). The officer knelt by the man and helped him get his bare feet shoed. Unbeknownst to the officer and shoeless man, Jennifer Foster, a tourist from Arizona, captured the event on her cell phone camera. After returning home from her trip, Foster contacted the New York Police Department to share the story of what she saw. The police department gained permission from Foster to post the photo on their Facebook

page, neither identifying the officer nor shoeless man. The photo quickly went viral as it was shared hundreds of thousands of times in a matter of hours (Peralta, 2012) which quickly led to the identification of the police officer. For several days in November, the story and image were not only shared, but became national and international stories. The officer was heralded as a hero for his act of kindness, but what of the shoeless man?

Several days following the initial post, the *New York Times* identified the shoeless man as Jeffrey Hillman, who was once again wandering the streets barefoot (Memmottt, 2012a). The focus of the one-time feel-good story about Officer DePrimo's action immediately changed to why Hillman was again barefoot. Articles began to emerge identifying Hillman's successful brothers, his veteran status, his apartment, and his government benefits. Also, parts of a short interview with the *New York Times* were interspersed into the stories with short quotes like "Those shoes are hidden. They are worth a lot of money" (Memmott, 2012a) or that Hillman wanted "a piece of the pie" because his photo was used "without permission" (DiBlasio, 2012). These stories painted a much different picture of the situation, reinforcing the worst stereotypes related to race and homelessness. It should be pointed out that Hillman never identified himself as homeless; the assumption was made by reporters and/or media outlets. Unfortunately, the vast majority of stories, including the ones in this study, failed to address issues of race or homelessness, letting this one incident define this one "homeless" man, as well as homeless people in general.

The initial story about the kind act resulted in numerous positive comments in the articles examined. Most focused on the officer and the importance of giving back and helping. Very few of the commenters addressed the issue of homelessness, except to

express peripheral comments, provide advice about giving, or share their own giving stories, and there was not a single negative comment directed at homeless people. However, as the stories began to focus on Hillman, the officer's act became less commented on as individuals suddenly began to focus on Hillman and homeless people in general. Additionally, the fewer the details in the article, the more comments. In fact, the last story written about Hillman in the *USAToday.com* (Makin, 2013) provided details of his experiences and life but received zero comments, although many could have used this story as a validation of their beliefs. While this could suggest the story is no longer relevant and worth commenting on, it may also suggest that when individuals can no longer affect the narrative they become disinterested in the story.[8] Although the articles that I examined ran between November 29, 2012 and January 14, 2013, additional media coverage continued into March 2013 attempting to reveal details of Hillman's life.

Creating Hillman's Digital Narrative Through Microaggressive Communication

Similarly to Chapter 5 on Ted Williams, I continue to extend the previous taxonomy and themes to consider the intersectionality of social status and race as a category in which to examine microaggressions. Seven microaggressive themes were found throughout the stories, comments, videos, and images: waging stereotypical attacks, asserting harm or violence, second-class citizen, deviance in earnings or criminality, and intellectual inferiority, assumption of sameness, and significant absences.

[8] Research by the Engaging News Project found that the top five reasons to comment were to express an emotion or opinion, to correct inaccuracies or misinformation, to take part in the debate, to add information, and to balance the discussion (Stroud, Van Duyn, Alizor, Alibhai, & Lang, 2016).

Microassaults

As noted in Chapter 2, microassaults are one category of microaggressions that include conscious and deliberate race- or class-based beliefs that are communicated to marginalized groups through environmental cues, behaviors, and language (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Sue, 2010). Microassaults are meant to hurt the target. With today's condemnation of overtly racist, sexist, and classist language, Sue and Capodilupo (2008) note that most perpetrators of these acts do so in protected or anonymous places, such as graffiti, anonymous postings, or within an organization or with people having similar views. As such, online discussions, with true identities that are often masked with avatars and pseudonyms, have become common ways for individuals to invoke microassaults. Under the category of microassaults, two themes emerged within the articles and comments: waging stereotypical attacks and assertion of harm or violence.

Waging Stereotypical Attacks

This theme directly reflects Sue et al. (2007) and Sue's (2010) microassault category as we see the use of stereotypes that demean and humiliate based on identity, whether it be race and/or class. The initial stories focused on the act of the officer, his kindness, how the photographer knew this was a special moment, and that the officer did not consider how much the boots cost. Even the quotes used had positive connotations toward the shoeless man from the officer and photographer. However, once articles emerged about Hillman seen again without the boots, the tone and focus of the articles and comments changed, frequently drawing upon stereotypes of Black and homeless individuals. One of the first issues that became prevalent under this theme was the

assumption that Hillman was using drugs and alcohol. Two of the articles written alluded to issues of drugs and alcohol. In Memmott's article, he wrote "This story reminded us of the tale of Ted Williams, the homeless man in Columbus, Ohio, who in January 2011 got national attention for his golden voice... He also, though, went in and out of rehab" (2012a). Not only did Memmott refer back to another Black homeless man, but also linked them both to drugs and alcohol, even though there is no other information in this article stating Hillman is or was an addict. Also, his use of "us" is interesting as we do not know who "us" is. The use of "us" suggests an implied author or speaker who is not an actual person, but rather a set of constructs "understood as the values, beliefs, and norms conveyed" by the speaker or author (Shenhav, 2015, p. 51). The use of an implied author or speaker suggests a strategic move by the writer to convey certain messages to reinforce specific narratives, in this case the link between Black, homeless men and substance abuse.

USAToday.com also attempted to make these stereotypical connections. In DiBlasio's (2012) article, she used quotes from the NYC Commissioner of Homeless Services, Seth Diamond, to draw connections between Hillman and substance abuse. At one point Diamond is noted as saying, "…he is not engaged in a healthy lifestyle…" and a few sentences later Diamond addresses the initial problems of homelessness "…mental health, substance abuse, physical issues, employment" (DiBlasio, 2012). Although Diamond does not specifically state that Hillman is mentally ill or using drugs and alcohol, by noting he does not engage in a healthy lifestyle and then referring to substance abuse as a primary cause of homelessness, that connection is easily drawn as it plays on the stereotypes to which most individuals have been exposed. Note that at this

point in the articles readers have no explanation as to why Hillman is homeless. However, economics has been cited as the number one cause of homelessness among Black people, not substance abuse (Rosenheck, Leda, Frisman, & Gallup, 1997). Although for some substance abuse can lead to homelessness, the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCFTH, 2009) pointed out the substance abuse is often the result rather than cause of homelessness.

Unlike the articles that make indirect connections between Hillman and drug or alcohol abuse, those who comment are much more direct and vocal in making this connection. In a response to a commenter who said Hillman may have sold or traded the boots for money or food, Tim Rodgers (2012) responded, “More like alcohol or drugs.” Tony Mathis echoed similar sentiments when in a response to another s/he noted, “Judge,judge,judge [sic] is what would've kept me and many others from giving this guy anything he could sell for more drugs or alcohol” (2012). Multiple individuals referenced the boots being “smoked.” For instance, Chris Montgomery (2012) suggested, “Hhmmm.....those boots got smoked.” Not everyone assumed drugs, but there were also many references to alcohol. For example, John Foreskinsky (2012) feigned a laugh while stating “HAHA 100 dollar boots. He traded them for a bottle of booze” and Charlie Eschler (2012) countered, “My guess would be cheap wine.” John Terrones (2012) not only insulted Hillman, but lumped all homeless people together as drunks by noting, “I have been approached by homeless people panhandling and they smelled of booze…” All these commenters assume that Hillman is nothing more than an alcoholic or drug abuser, without knowing any facts about him.

Other commenters were much more aggressive, like Chrissy Crunch (2012) who

stated, “Yes, nothing helps psychotic drug users quite like national media attention” and Vincent Green (2012) who referred to Hillman as a “Dope feind [sic]!!!” Again, as there was no information about why Hillman was wandering the streets, these comments simply draw from one’s own habitus and doxa.

Of course, not just issues of substance abuse emerge in the articles and comments, but also issues of entitlement, which frequently invoke racial stereotyping. As Smith and Reddington point out, Ronald Reagan labeled a poor Black mother as a “welfare queen” during his 1976 presidential campaign (2010, p. 277). The characteristics of laziness and greed have since become embedded in the stereotype of those receiving any type of entitlement, especially Black individuals. Rather than let the image and story be about the officer’s action, media coverage continued tracking and uncovering various details about Hillman. *The New York Times* article provided enough information about Hillman that by the next day the news was rife with stories that discovered Hillman was not truly homeless. Hillman himself never claimed to be homeless; rather, the news articles labeled him as such, with headlines like “Homeless Man Given Boots By NYC Police Officer Chooses to go Barefoot Again” (Memmott, 2012a) and “NYC Homeless Man Shoeless Again Despite Boots” (Associated Press, 2012). In fact, he had been receiving services from the Department of Homelessness since 2009 and had lived in an apartment through Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing since 2011 (DiBlasio, 2012). These stories implied that this one-time perceptibly needy individual was no longer deserving of the boots. Rather than own to the fact that newspapers made an error in assuming Hillman was homeless and dropping the story, the tables were turned to focus on Hillman as someone undeserving of the boots, which ultimately could serve to harm other homeless or

impoverished individuals.

The comments in the stories were rampant with stereotypical assumptions associated with entitlements and the earnings of those living on the streets. One of the biggest misconceptions of those who panhandle is that they get or make huge amounts of tax free dollars while living on the streets. While some panhandlers can make more money, a study by Bose and Whang (2002) in Toronto reported that the median daily income from panhandling was $30 and monthly income was $300. When monthly income from other sources was added in, the median monthly income rose to $638. Similar results were reported by a study from GLS Research in San Francisco that found approximately 60% of panhandlers made $25 or less per day and 27% earned up to $50 per day (Knight, 2013). Marion Josey Baker (2012) feeds into the narrative that homeless people who panhandle earn substantial income when she wrote, “I have heard of people begging on the streets & living in $400,000.00 Apts [sic] in N.Y. ? Pulling in over $80,K a year begging, TAX FREE ?” Calonie Johnson (2012) echoed this belief that homeless people fare better than others when s/he wrote, "This man gets more funding than many who WORK! He gets all this government & vet help…, help from family AND former classmates …, got $100 boots from the cop…” Calonie Johnson does not consider that public funding is not a great amount, and just because his family and friends say they offer help in a newspaper article, does not mean it is true or is even enough to survive on. Additional comments suggest the homeless populations in the United States “have it made.” Andrew Miller (2012) suggested “Our poor live like royalty compared to the world, and more is asked for” and Steven Jackson (2012) responded to him noting “Usa [sic] homeless get $40k a year…” Again, this assumption that those who are homeless or

living in poverty are surviving just fine goes against the national statistics. As explained by Kylyssa Shay, a former homeless individual turned activist, homeless individuals risk assault, parasites or disease, separation from family members and pets, lack of privacy, and danger of theft (2016).

While the vast majority of commenters did not assume Hillman was making huge profits, many did assume he was abusing and not deserving of public funds and donations. Forrest Steele (2012) and Alex Strewing (2012) both suggested that there are too many handouts causing some to forget what it is like to earn money while taking away from those who really need help. One of the most hateful comments related to entitlement issues came from Evan Rees (2012) who wrote "TYPICAL!!! ANother [sic] good deed that is done to an ENTITLEMENT MAGGOT!!! NOW he wants cash so that he can finish his pathetic life off, GIVE HIM PAYMENT IN HEROIN!!!" This sentiment does not consider the fact that some of the entitlement money that is provided is limited and does not always cover things like clothing, access to transportation, a healthy diet, or other items that those with money take for granted. Additionally, his call to give Hillman heroin so he can finish off his life not only ties into the assumption above that he abuses drugs, but also ties into the next theme of violence toward homeless people, discussed shortly.

Stereotypical attacks are waged not only about homelessness, but also about race. While there are not egregious racial remarks, there are many that link race, homelessness, and politics. This link was clearly established during the Reagan administration in the 1980s with Reagan's rhetoric on race and changes to the mental health and social services funding (de Costa Núñez, 1996; Smith & Reddington, 2010) As Christy Shaw Steadman

explained,

> I will not be dropping money into the red kettle this year. The people who are most often "helped" by it are now being serviced by their "savior" Obama... I, for one, am tired of seeing moms, grandma's and auntees signing the same child up to multiple registries and cleaning up at Christmas...they want the Obama safety net, they can have it... (2012)

This comment links homelessness and race by referencing Obama as “their savior” and saying “he bought their vote” which references Black voters as well as drawing on the stereotype of the welfare queen. This writer will not give to charity as it only helps poor people of color, who are clearly undeserving based on this one man. Also referencing President Obama is Robert Kelly who wrote, “He's [Hillman] damn lucky that a white cop felt sorry for his cold, bare feet & bought him $100 boots!...Let Obama buy him some $20 K-art/Target [sic] boots made in China!” Noting that the cop is White and then immediately mentioning Obama draws specific racial divides. It is fascinating as Obama has nothing to do with this story, yet he is used to draw connections to this particular plight. By continuing to link President Obama, commenters invoke cultural racism, suggesting that our Black President and his policies are a direct cause of homelessness and entitlements.

But it is not just references to Obama that connect race, homelessness, and politics. Robert Kelly tried to connect Hillman to Joyce Brown, a Black homeless woman in New York who was involuntarily placed in a mental institution under Ed Koch. Although there was no reference to Hillman behaving in an improper manner or specifically needing mental health assistance, he was immediately connected to another Black homeless person from a newsworthy event that happened almost 30 years ago. Brown made news when she fought involuntary commitment as a way to get many

homeless people off the streets. Through his comment, it appears that Robert Kelly is trying to link Brown and Hillman, making Hillman another crazy, Black person needing to be removed from the streets. Several comments, including one from article author Mark Memmott (2012a), make connections between Hillman and Ted Williams. These types of linkages continue to perpetuate the link between race, homelessness, and laziness or entitlements, rather than considering other causes for the higher percentages of homeless black individuals. It also gives the sense that all Black individuals are the same, a theme that will be touched on later.

Assertion of Harm or Violence

A second theme under the category of microassaults is a theme of violence against Hillman. While the theme of waging stereotypical attacks fits within Sue's (2007) initial concepts of microassaults and the findings of Clark, et al (2011), the assertion of harm has not yet been identified as a theme within microaggression literature. This is a particularly important theme as this attitude that individuals are so devalued that they can be physically harmed or killed may directly lead to the macroaggressions such as the recent violence between police and Black males and the hate crimes and violence experienced by homeless populations (NCFTH, 2016).

Although there are no references of harm toward Hillman or other homeless individuals found within the actual articles, Hillman is quoted as saying "he could lose his life" because of the value of the boots (Memmott, 2012a); however, the comments have multiple examples of violence toward Hillman. The comments under this theme are particularly egregious as they imply that this man, as well as other homeless individuals,

are so devalued that their lives do not matter. This invokes Fiske's (2007) prejudicial responses study that found images of homeless people failed to cause a brain response, suggesting that homeless people are not even perceived as human beings. A first layer of these violent comments makes light of the realities of life of the street. Mark Benninger (2012) seemed to realize that living on the street can be dangerous if you have new items when he wrote, "Out on the streets, he has a bull's eye on him with those sketchers [sic]. Need to scuff them up and rub some feces on em [sic]. He'd probably still get capped for them." While this comment is not a particular threat, it seems to matter-of-factly lack any concern at all for Hillman or others. It also takes on a racial connotation with the particular use of the word "capped." The term "capped" is an urban slang term meaning shot (urbandictionary.com, n.d.). The term is often used in movies and associated with gangs and men of color. None of the other online dictionaries define capped as a synonym for shot.

Building on the first layer of violent comments, a second layer of comments emerges that appear to be more of a direct threat toward Hillman. These comments refer to the forcefulness of removing the boots from Hillman's feet. Frank Westminster (2012) wrote, "Yeah. If he had chosen to wear the boots, they'd probably find him with his feet cut off and them [sic] AND the boots gone." As the NCFTH (2012) explained, violence within homeless populations and violence directed at homeless individuals is a real problem. This type of comment mocks this serious issue and discredits a very realistic concern expressed by Hillman. A second comment by John Soriano (2012) directly suggests harming Hillman when he penned, "'I once complained that I had no shoes until I saw a man with no feet'. What I'm saying here is: Let's take his feet!" Other comments

continue on this thread and one even suggested that the officer kill Hillman and get a refund on the boots (Darryl Thixton, 2012). Even if these comments may have been in jest, to suggest violence against Hillman reifies racist and classist attitudes to the poor and working-class populations as being unworthy of help or support.

A third layer of violent language is the most deplorable as it actually advocates violence against Hillman and other "ungrateful" individuals. Ron Thiem (2012) stated "This guy deserves to get ran over by a truck!" and Iam Maicaw (2012) suggested "… thinning the ungrateful part of the herd…" Both of these comments tie together issues associated with entitlement and violence, which suggests that those who seek out help and support should be grateful for whatever they are given or else be punished. In sum, these layers of violence suggest that those who are less fortunate are less significant and therefore disposable. Most of these violent comments remained unchallenged by others. While there are multiple reasons for this – agreement, not wanting to engage in that type of discussion, or assuming it is meant to be humorous – it suggests this type of communication is not harmful. However, with the recent election of Donald Trump and the increase in hate speech and crime, we can see that this type of communication may be the first step leading to violent actions.

Throughout this category of microassaults, the themes of stereotypical attacks and violence highlight the ways in which those who comment demean, defile, and impair homeless individuals, especially those of color. These types of comments are deliberately meant to hurt the victims through name-calling and other forms of discriminatory action (Sue et al., 2007; Clark et al., 2011). This also represents Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence, the imposition of meaning and symbolism upon lower class groups, accepted as

legitimate (1998). Through these comments, homeless people are portrayed as the cause of their own problem. If we got rid of them, the problem of homelessness would go away. The lack of challenges to these comments validates the stereotypes and suggest that this man is deserving of violence or even death.

Microinsults

The next three themes reflect the category of microinsults. Microinsults are often unintentionally rude, insensitive or demeaning to a person's identity (Sue et. al., 2007). Within this category, the themes of second-class citizen, deviance in earnings or criminality, and inferior intelligence are present.

Second-Class Citizens

The first theme in this category is that of the second-class citizen. This theme revolves around the idea that Hillman is less worthy or a lesser being, that he causes problems, and that homeless people are all the same. The stigma of homelessness serves to unfairly exploit Hillman's rights and privileges as a United States citizen. Thus, allowing the media and citizens to track him, post information about his life and family, and make public judgements and assessments of his health and intelligence. One of the most problematic actions that the newspapers take in relation to making Hillman a second-class citizen is simply continuing to research and publish information about his life. Officer DePrimo was made a hero after giving Hillman boots with positive articles and images. These included DePrimo formally receiving awards, participating on talk shows, or on duty. He is described as young and handsome, and he is visually White.

Several of the stories referred to comments like he "really didn't think about the money" (Kim, 2012), he keeps the receipt in his vest "to remind me that sometimes people have it worse" (Peralta, 2012), and that he credits his grandfather for the good deed (DiBlasio, 2012). All of this information paints DePrimo in a very positive light. There is nothing in the stories and the photos that seem to look into his background or second-guess his actions. Additionally, he is given a voice in the stories about his actions.

Unlike DiPrimo's background, Hillman's background was thoroughly investigated. First, there was no need to find out and report on who Hillman was. The gesture captured on film was enough to create a positive holiday story; readers did not need to know who the recipient was. Second, for the newspaper to track him down when he was not wearing the boots to find out why is an invasion of privacy. We do not know why Hillman lives the life he does and for his image to be shared and identified could potentially put his well-being in danger. Third, for the papers to investigate his background and report on it has little to do with the initial story. Whereas *TheGrio.com* ran one follow-up story once Hillman was seen without the boots, *NPR.org* ran three and *USAToday.com* ran five stories and a video ranging from December 3, 2012 to January 14, 2013. Each paper had a systematic process for covering details of this story, but made no effort to gather first-hand information from Hillman. This illustrates embedded racism and/or classism within these media outlets. Because none of these stories provided any content designed to help give readers and viewers an understanding of homelessness, the personal nature and lack of context reified stereotypes associated with race and homelessness. Finally, with the exception of the January 14, 2013 video and story by *USAToday.com*, Hillman is given very little voice. This is consistent with findings by

Campbell (1995), Roberts (1975), and Rubin (1980) that note both Black individuals and homeless individuals are often silenced in articles regarding their own situations. Each of the sources examined has a modified version of the same Associated Press story originally posted on *NYTimes.com* on December 2, 2012. At some point each source utilizes the same soundbites from Hillman noting some version of "Those shoes are hidden. They are worth a lot of money," "I could lose my life," and "I was put on YouTube, I was put on everything without permission. What do I get? This went around the world, and I want a piece of the pie" (Santora & Vadukul, 2012). To further marginalize a homeless person by repeatedly running nonessential articles about him illustrates that he has been made a second-class citizen without the same respect that was given to the officer.

Additionally, the stories in *USAToday.com* enhance this notion that somehow Hillman and others are second-class citizens by suggesting compassion towards homeless people may result in more harm than help. The article writer, Michael Medved, explained that the "boots did nothing to spark redemption or renewal" for Hillman. He went on to say that this type of giving compassion for sidewalk beggars "only encourages their ongoing pattern of self-destructive behavior" (2012). Medved suggested it is better to give to organizations rather than individuals, as unconditional giving "only makes it easier for them to survive on the streets" (2012). Medved's comments suggest that homeless individuals have chosen this life on the street, that there are more than enough resources, and that homeless individuals are undeserving of individual compassion. While there are a number of agencies designed to help homeless individuals, the NCFTH stated that a lack of employment opportunities and a decline in public assistance are two

factors that account for increased poverty and contribute to homelessness (2015). In a 2014 report, the NCFTH addressed additional challenges as some local and state governments are trying to restrict and criminalize groups and individuals from food sharing. Additionally, the NCFTH found that cities are banning encampments for homeless populations and forcibly removing them, causing the loss and destruction of personal property including documents, valuables, and medications (2016). Because of the shift in funding priorities to permanent supportive houses over emergency and transitional housing, there are currently more people experiencing homelessness each night than there are emergency and transitional beds (NCFTH, 2016a). Saying that individuals living on the street do not deserve compassion and outreach clearly casts them as second-class citizens.

The reader comments continue to perpetuate Hillman's second-class status as well. In many cases, the notion that he could be hurt or killed is mocked by commenters, while others suggest he should be given used or old clothes to prevent personal harm. For instance, Sam Lange wrote, "Now that this story has gotten out, possibly someone will get Mr [sic] Hillman a pair of used tennis shoes or other shoes, that look "less attractive" to others who would kill for them." The idea of giving itself was also challenged. Rob Cardosi implied personal giving is pointless, "… And the homeless man , [sic] has traded what should have been gratitude and warmth for cold and despair. Helping these people is best servred [sic] in soup kitchens etc [sic] so you know their [sic] getting fed etc [sic]." This comment suggests that homeless individuals need nothing but a warm meal to get by. All of these comments imply homeless people have no desire to change, therefore they do not need the same type of things as working, domiciled individuals. There seems

to be the assumption that wearing those boots would somehow change Hillman's life. So, by not wearing them he becomes an ingrate. Wearing those boots would not put food in his belly, a roof over his head, or garner him a job. Rather, Hillman panhandles and collects and sells the shoes to supplement the entitlements he frequently refuses (Makin, 2013). Even though Hillman has found a creative way to live without many of the entitlements, he is still considered "less than" as he lives an unconventional lifestyle.

Assumption of Deviance and Criminality

Paralleling the idea that Hillman is a second-class citizen and abuses entitlements is the idea that his way of receiving income is a scam, deviant, or even criminal. A follow-up interview and article by Bob Makin in *The Home News Tribune*, which was run in *USAToday.com*, noted that he had a drug problem and police record in the past (2013). It also explained that Hillman would rather panhandle than take his medicine and work, further noting that he would often place fresh food in a garbage can and pull it out so he appeared to be eating spoiled or tossed out food to garner more contributions. While the article said Hillman is reversing his behavior by doing a better job at taking his medicine and taking advantage of his disability check and subsidized apartment, it still portrayed him as criminally deviant within the vast majority of the article. While showing that his life is riddled with difficulties, it does nothing to tackle why homeless individuals make the choices they do relating to earning cash or other necessities.

The comments also illustrate this theme of earning money in a deviant or criminal way. According to Charlotte Farofalo (2012), "[Hillman] is a known scammer in Times Square who NEVER has on shoes. Poor rookie got duped out of $100 by a confirmed

crack head." David Williams (2012) suggested "The lack of boots is his schick [sic], how he makes his money." These comments propose that those who give have been duped, rather than actually helping. In a report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), it was found that on one particular night in January there were more than half-a-million people living on the streets, in cars, in shelters, or in transitional housing (2015). It is possible that this number is higher as many are beyond the reach of the survey. While it is easy to find any number of stories about homeless scams, consider also that Hillman and other homeless individuals are forced to or choose to earn money in what most would consider unconventional ways. Because an individual does not use a gift in a way that the majority would expect does not mean that it was a scam or that it was used "inappropriately." As Hillman explained, he often collects shoes and sells the surplus (Makin, 2013).

This idea of deviance is reflected by comments failing to consider the sacrifices and health risks many homeless individuals undertake in order to survive. Several commenters suggested that the scam is that once individuals receive certain items they hide them in order to get more (Yogurt Head, 2012; Observe Reason, 2012). Many commenters' own perceptions, coupled with out-of-context quotations in the articles, serve to reinforce these negative perceptions of Hillman, rather than challenge them. Some commenters even state that is it easy to sit out in the cold. For many this is not a choice they make, but rather they are forced to just to earn enough in a day or week to get by. Not to mention, the idea of subjecting one's body to some of these temperatures is by no means pleasant or healthy. As explained by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), health care bills are a major cause of bankruptcy, which leads

many into homelessness. These physical and mental health issues become exacerbated by life on the streets (NAEH, 2016).

Finally, many individuals use Hillman's comment about "wanting a piece of the pie" against him. While some point out there really is no piece of the pie as it is social media and no one is profiting, they fail to realize that the newspapers are profiting by taking advantage of this man. Additionally, Officer DePrimo and Jennifer Foster (the photographer) were honored, interviewed on television and in magazines, and garnered respect from those around them. While there may not have been direct profit, Officer DePrimo was later promoted in conjunction with this event. We also need to consider that Hillman was essentially being stalked by individuals and reporters trying to find out where the boots were and why he was not wearing them. This type of behavior by journalists and citizens may have hindered Hillman's ability to garner contributions, causing a negative impact on his life.

Commenters like Sharon Bowers (2012) mentioned that "If he's smart enough to want a piece of the pie, he is smart enough to work." While Jack Murtaugh assumed,

> [Hillman] has some functioning mind more than many... to pursue royalities [sic] on his picture released nationally. That's the stuff of a well groomed business entrepreneur, not a down and out poor soul...Then he seems to be working the system well, with gov't agencies falling over each other to accommodate [sic] his needs. (2012)

These comments suggest that Hillman is smart enough to work, but instead chooses to scam the system. While it is possible Hillman is capable enough to hold a job, it might be difficult for him to get one because of his background. In addition, the likelihood of him getting a job that pays him well enough to afford his own housing and medical care is probably unrealistic. He is certainly not going to get a high paying business gig like Jack

Murtaugh implied he has the skills for. As the NCFTH (2009) addressed, low wages, less secure jobs, and fewer benefits continue to erode the opportunities to emerge from homelessness. Unlike Ted Williams, in the previous chapter, he has not demonstrated a particular talent or persona that is drawing positive attention from others. As such, Hillman, like other homeless and Black individuals, is likely trapped in a cycle of homelessness. This concept of deviance in earnings or criminality assumes that a homeless person and/or a Black person is somehow a criminal based solely on his social status.

Intellectual Inferiority

The final theme under the microinsults category focuses on the assumptions about why individuals end up homeless. The majority of those who commented on why Hillman was homeless fall into two camps. One believes that Hillman is mentally ill. The other asserts homelessness by choice or bad decision making. Both of these concepts suggest that somehow Hillman and other homeless individuals have some deficit of intelligence, either mental illness or the inability to make good decisions. As noted prior, mental illness is found in about 25% of homeless individuals (SAMSHA, 2011; NAMI, nd) and economics (un- and underemployment and lack of affordable housing) are the top reasons for homelessness (NCFTH, 2009).

Some of the articles touched on mental illness (DiBlasio, 2012; Medved, 2012; Simon, 2012) citing comments from the Department of Homeless services, but only one article (Makin, 2013) took the time to talk to Hillman about this issue. Another article by Makin (2012) quoted several of Hillman's childhood friends making comments about

Hillman being full of life and coming from a good family. While none of these directly suggested mental illness, there is an underlying assumption there must be something wrong with him to end up this way. None of these articles made any effort to address the issues associated with mental illness and homelessness; this lack of information ultimately supports the belief that mental illness is a primary factor relating to homelessness. In fact, as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI, nd) reported, about 26% of homeless individuals suffer from mental illness and 46% live with mental illness and/or substance abuse. That suggests over 50% of homeless individuals have other reasons for being homeless. Both the suggestion of mental illness and the failure to talk about it allows the misinformation of mental illness as a leading reason for homelessness to be perpetuated. This serves as a microinsult because it provides a mechanism to keep homeless Black males in a helpless and inferior role.

The comments further perpetuate the connection between homelessness and mental illness. For instance, T Bacon (2012), challenged “Lets [sic] also consider the possibility that the reason he is declining the boots for fear of being beaten is symptomatic of mental illness.” Additionally, Lincoln Shepherd (2012) asked, “What person in there [sic] right mind would be sitting in the cold with no shoes??? Yeah a mentally ill person.” Finally, Richard Torres further reinforces the assumption that most homeless people have mental illness when he explained, “This goes to show that most of these homeless people are mentally ill and not lazy or down on their luck.” Although Richard Torres attempted to challenge the notion that homeless people are simply lazy or going through a rough patch, he ultimately reinforces another stereotype. By attributing mental illness as a cause of homelessness it absolves those in White dominant society

from having to face that racism and discrimination are actual factors that lead to homelessness. Rather than recognize the various causes of homelessness and work toward real solutions, many commenters seem to be content with placing the blame and the responsibility of finding solutions on families and government.

A second issue under this notion of intellectual inferiority has to do with poor life and lifestyle choices. For instance, J.G. (2012) asserted that "I am still going with my assertion that most impoverished are impoverished because of their own poor choices in life." Even more cynical is Frank Westminster (2012) who stated, "The reason is because the poor continue to do that which got them poor in the first place and the rich continue to do that which made them rich." This comment is particularly offensive because it assumes that everyone has equal choices and chances with their education, jobs, and experiences and that some people just choose poorly. It does not take into account what Bourdieu (1986) called cultural capital, which allows those in a higher status to have more opportunities within society. The repercussions of choices are often based on privileges and power that are not equally distributed across society. Those who have power do not often recognize the lack of power or choices experienced by others.

While some claim poor choices resulted in homelessness, others believe that some choose homelessness. As Joni Butler (2012) explained, "In my experience from knowing and meeting a handfull [sic] of homelss [sic] people over the years, chronic homelessness appears to be mostly the result of choice." Oscar Myer (2012) was less compassionate when he wrote, "Some people choose to be homeless just like others choose to take heroin or go into debt. Just because we choose to do stuff that others deem bad for us is not necessarily an indication of mental illness." While it may be a choice to take drugs,

we do not always know what led an individual to that decision and to assume people chose to go into debt is a complete fallacy. Although some individuals do have poor money management skills, the biggest causes of debt are job loss, medical bills, divorce, and underemployment (Bucci, 2012; homeaid.org, nd; NAED, 2009), not choice. While there may be some subcultures who choose homelessness as a lifestyle, most homeless individuals are not there as a first choice.[9]

Physician Amitha Kalaichandran (2015) noted that individuals make the best choice presented to them based on the knowledge they have at that moment. For some the best option for them is to sleep on the street away from violence found in homes or shelters; for others the street is the only viable option. As former homeless individual and current writer and political activist Tanene Allison (2007) explained, the myth of choice is used to relieve the cognitive dissonance caused by the "disconnect between the success we believe is possible and the existence of homelessness" (p. 254). These assumptions about homelessness allow those in privileged positions to ignore their own privilege and power and adhere to the idea that anything outside their "ideal" or "normal" living situation is caused by some type of intellectual deficiency impairing decision making.

Within the microinsult category, the themes of second-class citizen, deviance in earnings/criminality, and intellectual inferiority illustrate how those who write the articles and comments serve to keep homeless people, especially those of color, in less powerful positions. These types of comments may not be deliberate, but they hurt the victims by blaming them for their situations (Sue et al., 2007; Clark et al., 2011). While there are

[9] Although there were a few online news articles stating that less than 6% of the homeless in the United States are homeless by choice, none of them cited the source. Additionally, none of the national agencies reported statistics or facts about homelessness by choice.

some challenges to these comments, the vast majority of them support the stereotypes and assumptions associated with race and homelessness.

Microinvalidations

The final category of microaggressions are microinvalidations. These are the types of communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the reality of the marginalized group. Along with the microinsults, these are less obvious and the individuals perpetuating these acts do not realize they are being offensive. There are two themes within this category within the context of the articles and comments. The first is assumption of sameness that suggests all homeless people are the same. The second relates to the significant absences within the articles and comments.

Assumption of Sameness

The first theme associated with this category makes all homeless people seem to have similar experiences or connect homeless individuals in some way. This theme draws from Sue's (2010) myth of meritocracy, but extends it beyond simply asserting that race or class do not play a role in life successes by connecting race as a common denominator. One of the first ways that assumptions of sameness appear is through the articles. Memmott (2012a) drew connections between Hillman and Ted Williams (from the prior chapter) because they both got national attention and both went in and out of rehab. Drawing the connection between these two Black homeless men as gaining national attention is not problematic, but the addition of the comment, "He also, though, went in and out of rehab" (Memmott, 2012a) implies Hillman also has a substance problem, even

though there is nothing in the article about it.

A column by Michael Medved (2012) reinforces this idea of sameness by arguing that many homeless individuals suffer from addiction or mental illness so giving them money only "encourages their ongoing pattern of self-destructive behavior." He further suggested that giving them money makes it easier for them to survive on the streets. These ideas harken back to the microinsult notion that for some reason individuals are choosing to live on the streets rather than getting jobs or staying in shelters, when that has been repeatedly cited as inaccurate. As previously cited from NAMI, NCFTH, and other sources, homelessness is caused by a multitude of situations and there is not always safe and/or available housing for those on the street. For some, the change that you give them might be the difference in being able to get access to shelter or food.

Within the comment sections, the assumption of sameness takes on a similar notion with David Oswald who wrote, "Homeless people are all the same,HOMELESS ![sic]" Some even made the connection like Mark Memmott to "the homeless dude with the 'voice'…who threw it [job and house] all away again…" (Rick Dunay, 2012), assuming that both Hillman and Williams, like other homeless people, simply throw their chances away. As noted earlier in the chapter, another commenter associated Hillman with Joyce Brown from 30 years ago. This connects race, homelessness, and mental illness without taking into consideration these were vastly different situations, as Joyce Brown was forced into a mental institution. These comments serve to connect race as a unifying factor of homelessness. They also illustrate how the media stories often focus on race for their most uplifting or most deviant stories (Larson, 2006). As noted in the literature review, scholars have found that stories regarding homeless people emphasize

the otherness that allows people to assume that those who are different than the White, dominant culture are deviant and that is why they are in the situation in which they find themselves (Buck, Toro, & Ramos, 2004; Lind & Danowski, 1999; McNulty, 1992).

Some commenters suggested that homeless individuals are simply playing the system. Forrest Steele (2012) wrote, “Whatever [Hillman’s] problems he is emblematic that throwing money at them is a waste. I have long realized that there is a stratum of our society that fares far better on government benefits.” Other individuals connected homelessness in the United States to other countries. Ronna Goldstein (2012) reflected “My mom went to guetamala [sic] with. [sic] Friend [sic] who was adopting a child from there [sic] they saw a freezing little boy gave him a coat the next day he didn't have it, his mom sold it for smokes…” The first question is, how does this person know what the boy’s mom did? Secondly, how does that relate to Hillman? These comments draw from the worst stereotypes to come to conclusions that all those who experience homelessness are the same type of people. These comments serve to devalue the varied experiences of homeless individuals and disregard the connection between race and homelessness by not recognizing the role that race and class status plays in life successes.

Significant Absences

The final theme relates to what is left out of the articles and comments. This theme dwells on what we do not hear about, as well as what information is heard and who provides that information. This is significant because microinvalidations function to nullify the reality of those in the marginalized group. By not hearing from them or about their situation, we silence their experience. One of the first items that we notice in the

stories is the lack of information provided about homelessness. The focus is on the person, either Officer DePrimo or Jeffrey Hillman. Not a single story addressed any of the causes of homelessness, with the exception of a few comments related to mental illness or abuse. With the exception of a commentary piece by Scott Simon (2012) that mentioned homelessness as a complicated issue and the opinion article by Michael Medved (2012) that advocated our compassionate giving may hurt homeless people, none of the articles take on the complicated nature and causes of homelessness as a societal issue, but rather blame homeless people. This is similar to Whang and Min's (1999) research findings.

Another way the articles had silences was by muting the voice of Jeffrey Hillman. Although many of the articles used soundbites from Hillman, they pulled them from an AP news article and provided little contextualization for them. This is similar to Reeves' (1989) findings that the media covering homeless people use discourse that makes homeless individuals sound incoherent, and the finding by Schneider, Chamberlain, and Hodgetts (2010) that a small percent of words quoted were from the homeless subjects. The only reporter who gave voice to Hillman was Makin (2013) who actually interviewed him. While the text has Hillman's voice, the accompanying video makes Hillman sound incoherent and focused primarily on Hillman's white friend (see the next section on visual microaggressions). Aside from the article authors, the only other voices we hear are from experts or supportive friends relating to Hillman's care and needs. As noted by Cress and Snow (1996) and Greenberg, May, and Elliot (2006) this creates an us-versus-them relationship between those with and without a home, resulting in the domiciled not really having to think about homelessness.

This significant absence is also seen in the comments. Just like the reporters who rely on “experts” and “friends” to tell us about Hillman, many of the commenters suggest they are the experts. This allows them the ability to narrate Hillman’s story, rather than allowing Hillman to have a voice in what caused his homelessness. For instance, on multiple occasions Danny DeGuira (2012) asserted his expertise with such comments as “You are talking to a person who lived on the streets. Since I have been there and done it…I'll refrain from telling you that you have no idea what you are talking about. I have also had a mental problem…” Several others who identified as formerly homeless asserted their convictions that homelessness was by choice. These people seem to suggest they know why Hillman is homeless based on their own situations, rather than considering Hillman’s experiences.

Other experts explain how they were homeless and handled it better. Michael Callaway shared “I have walk [sic] in Mr. Hillman's shoes the difference being I got nothing from the system. I had 3 friends that carried by butt for 5 years.” Robert Kelly explained that he “used to be homeless-for 2 years..[sic]I was hooked on gambling...but, I never begged even ONCE!!” Because of their own homeless experiences, these individuals feel the need to express that somehow Hillman is deviant in his life by begging on the street or being granted entitlements.

The silences of the issues and Hillman’s voice, coupled with the presence of other experts, allow a specific narrative to be told, rather than actually understanding Hillman’s own story. Similar to prior research findings, members of the domiciled population are sheltered from the real stories of homelessness preventing them from truly understanding the issues associated with it. The failure of the media to cover the realities of

homelessness, or giving a glossed over version of homelessness, should challenge us to question what is the role of the media in the hegemonic order? Additionally, readers should question the expectations and responsibilities of reporters and newspapers to the general public. The silencing of both the realities of homelessness and the marginalized individual, coupled with the stories from other experts, allow the dominant population to create or retell the dominant narratives. Of course, it is not just the text that is important; the visual images go a long way to support the narrative.

Visual Microaggressions

The visual imagery of Jeffrey Hillman was presented through photographs and video. The initial image that went viral shows Jeffrey Hillman sitting on the ground, leaning against a store front window. His pants are torn, leaving his bare calves and feet exposed. Hillman appears to be holding socks in his left hand. Officer DePrimo, in full uniform, is kneeling down next to him with the new boots placed between himself and Hillman (Figure 6.1). Within 24 hours of being posted to the New York Police Department's official Facebook page, the post had been viewed 1.6 million times and had garnered 275,000 likes and 16,000 comments (Goodman, 2012). The image continued to spread through other social media sites, online newspapers, television coverage, and various blogs and online forums.

Following the viral nature of this photo and the identification of the men in the image, multiple news sources began running stories. While *NPR.org* and *TheGrio.com* stuck only to the viral image, *USAToday.com* ran several stories that contained two additional images and a video. These stories and images were not the original reporting

by the newspaper, but rather reprinted stories by Bob Makin of *The Home New Tribune* from East Brunswick, NJ. Makin's stories focused specifically on those who knew Hillman (2012) and Hillman himself (2013). The 2012 story contained an image of Hillman from his high school yearbook. This black-and-white image shows Hillman and his senior classmates goofing off on a playground. Hillman appears as a young vibrant man having fun with his peers. The second image appears in the 2013 story and video and shows a current image of Hillman with one of his peers, Reverend John Graf, Jr., from the playground photo. This image shows a shaven headed Hillman, with a large smile and missing teeth, but a somewhat dazed look in his eyes. Additionally, the video (Figure 6.2) focuses on a conversation between Hillman and Graf, Jr. in what looks like a cafe, with Graf, Jr. having the primary dialogue.

The visual microaggressions present in two ways. First, there are power differentials within the images and how they are handled, as described below. Second, similar to visual microaggressions described by Huber and Solórzano (2015) that illustrate the link between Mexican banditry and public perception of Latinas/os, in these images there is a linkage between imagery of the Black male slave with current images chosen to represent homeless Black men. Additionally, I suggest that when images are selected, we utilize our historic understanding of race or class when picking them. For instance, images used in an article may unconsciously be selected that represent historical stereotypes. As such, present people are being made to fit into the stereotypes from the past. This cultural unconsciousness is part of how Lyotard (1984) suggested we maintain master narratives. Additionally, this aligns with Bourdieu's notion of our habitus. These images are so ingrained in us that we fail to challenge what we see.

The publicizing and sharing of images of marginalized individuals can serve to reinforce deficit or negative views of the other, constituting a visual microaggression (Huber & Solórzano, 2015). There are definite power differentials between the subject of the image, the person who took the picture, those who publicly posted it, and those who made it go viral. While the initial viral image can be considered representative of what the holiday season is supposed to look like (helping others), once the subject of the image is identified and tracked, the meaning changes. Hillman moves from subject to object who is followed, questioned, and vilified for no real reason. It also becomes acceptable for others to post further images of his past to show what he used to be like. At no point does anyone post images of a young officer DePrimo or even images of him without his uniform. This suggests that Hillman's race and/or low class status gives those with more power and privilege the authority to post whatever images they deem appropriate.

These images simultaneously perpetuate ideologies of White supremacy, specifically the White savior, as well as a history of White officers policing African Americans. In both Figures 6.1 and 6.4 — the image, video and the text associated with them — the visually White individuals have the power. In the initial image, Officer DePrimo is in his uniform and Hillman is in tattered clothing. This in itself shows the power dynamic between the two individuals. Visuals throughout history have repeatedly portrayed Whites in uniform creating "order" out of unruly Black individuals (consider the 1964 Selma march). Unfortunately, more recently we have also seen images of White officers overlooking Black bodies that have been shot by other police officers (Sean Bell, Tamir Rice, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, etc.). Although DePrimo engaged in a perceivably kind act for Hillman, the image still evokes historical images of a policing of

Black bodies.

Officer DePrimo and Reverend Graf are portrayed as working to save Hillman, providing him boots or other support and friendship. The 2-minute video on the *USAToday.com* website starts out as if to give Hillman a voice in this story, but it features only 30 seconds of Hillman talking. The video is edited to make Hillman sound stammering and incoherent, similar to findings by Reeves (1989). The video then cuts to Reverend Graf talking and spends the next one and a half minutes focusing on him. Graf tells Hillman about finding out it was him and that he is there to support Hillman and help him make connections. The video ends with Hillman tearing up and Graf wrapping his arm around his shoulder. While Hillman is reduced to a somewhat childlike state, the White male becomes the hero of these visual narratives. These types of images portray Hillman as needing White individuals to lift him out of his own despair.

A second way visual microaggressions are present is seen in how the images that are publicized today are reminiscent of historical representations of Black males in the media. In the initial image (Figure 6.1), we see Hillman's legs and large feet sticking out of his tattered pants. This type of barefoot image is similar to a postcard of a slave mourning the loss of his master (Figure 6.2) and cartoon portrayals of the lazy slave (Figure 6.3). While Hillman's tattered clothing and lack of shoes are related to poverty, not race, because he is a Black male it is hard not to see connections between him and the stereotypical imagery of the lazy, good-for-nothing slave. Figure 6.4 further emphasizes this point when we now see Hillman sitting in a slouched position in a chair, with a shaved head and a bewildered look on his face. His image in this picture seems to represent a modern-day version of Stepin Fetchit (Figure 6.5), a film caricature of the

quintessential coon stereotype.[10] These cartoons and movie characters represented Black males as lazy, stupid, and genetically deficient (Pilgrim, 2012).

While the photographers had no control over what Hillman was wearing, how he was sitting, or how he wore his hair, the images that are presented are so visually similar to the historical caricatures focusing on Black homeless males as lazy, unintelligent, shifty, and criminal that they easily (re)produce racist discourse rather than focus on the issues associated with homelessness. James Gee (2011) utilized the phrase "multimodal texts" to describe words and images that are designed to communicate particular messages. By continuing to reprint this image along with negative stories and additional images related to Hillman, these news sites enact institutional racism. The dominant discourse shapes the messages portrayed by these visual microaggressions. Through our own privileges of race and/or status and the belief in "postracial" discourse, we fail to recognize the White supremacy behind the taking, posting, and sharing of these images.

Hillman's Digital Narrative: The Outcast Coon

Using a critical race lens, we can begin to see that the digital narrative created for Jeffrey Hillman through the textual and visual microaggressions mirror those characteristics commonly found in the coon caricature. As sociology professor David Pilgrim (2012) and cinema historian Donald Bogle (1994) explained, the coon is one of the most insulting and degrading anti-Black caricatures. Coons are considered subhuman, self-demeaning, lazy, and inarticulate**.** While we do not often see the most egregious

[10] Stepin Fetchit was the stage name of Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry. He started as a vaudeville actor and later became America's first black movie star, appearing in films and television shows between 1925-1976.

stereotyping of the coon caricature today, it continues to subtly emerge in mainstream media. For instance, the character Jar Jar Binks from the 1999 *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* was highly lambasted as a modern day Stepin Fetchit character (Pilgrim, 2012). More recently, two Transformers identified as Mudflap and Skids from the 2009 *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* were highly criticized and referred to as "Little Black Sambots" for the illiterate language they used, the way they moved, and their physical characteristics (Authentic History.com, nd.). These subtle portrayals could be considered environmental microaggressions. While we may not see this type of character portrayed as overtly as in the past, it is clear that the coon stereotype is still within our culture's consciousness and shapes the way individuals view Black and/or homeless individuals. The microaggressions found within the context of the stories, comments, and visuals demonstrate how individuals draw upon stereotypes when dealing with race and homelessness.

As previously noted, the coon character is dehumanized, devalued, lazy, unintelligent, and portrayed with exaggerated features (Bogle, 1994; Pilgrim, 2012). As we begin to review the microaggressions present we see these exact characteristics articulated though both the text and visual imagery shaping Hillman's digital narrative. One of the ways in which Hillman is dehumanized is through the assertion of violence and threats. Comments suggesting Hillman should be harmed serve to dehumanize Hillman. The phrase "thinning the herd," cited earlier in the chapter, suggests Hillman is not even human, just as the word "coon" suggests an animal. Additionally, wishing violence upon another also dehumanizes him/her. As Pilgrim (2012) explained, the coon character was frequently racially demeaned and abused physically and verbally by White

characters during minstrel shows, television, and movies. The comments found in these stories not only verbally assault Hillman, but additionally wish or project harm on him as if his existence has no real value. The NCFTH (July 2016) has reported that violence, including hate crimes, is a real problem for homeless individuals. These crimes are overwhelmingly committed by housed, White males under the age of 30 (NCH, 2016, p. 1).

Similar to the coon character, we see Hillman devalued in a number of ways. The texts and visuals make Hillman into a second-class citizen, starting by identifying him after the photo went viral and continuing to track his whereabouts. Hillman did nothing wrong, and for him to be questioned and harassed over why he was seen later not wearing the boots, or questioned as to where the boots are, is judgmental. Many people have received gifts they did not wear, or that they returned, regifted, or shoved in the closet, yet they are not questioned as to why. Once the gift of boots was given to him, it was up to him to do with them as he pleased, just like the rest of us. This is also reminiscent of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence related to capital. As Bourdieu (2000) explained, reciprocity is used to build partnerships. He also noted that gift giving is also used to achieved dominance over another, by keeping that person indebted to you.

Along with this, why did the general audience need to know his story or background? The initial story was simply about the officer doing a good deed for a citizen. Whether through media desire or audience demand, there was no reason to try and determine if Hillman was worthy of the gift of boots, yet it seemed that was what was being done. As Becky Frazier Cline (2012) wrote, "This guy is back on the streets barefooted. He isnt [sic] homeless and never was… Jeffrey Hillman is looking for a free

ride, never cared about the kind act the officier [sic] done on his behalf. Shame on you Hillman !!!!!" Because Hillman was later seen without the boots, many newspapers chose to write about it and to paint Hillman as ungrateful. Even though Hillman explained he hid the boots because wearing them could cause him physical harm, individuals continued to disbelieve him. For instance, Keith Richards (2012) thought "He hid 'em alright -- in a cloud of smoke. Those boots were traded for a 10 within 30 minutes, guaranteed." Research shows that crime on streets and in shelters is a real and ongoing problem (Nepean, 2015; Snow, Baker, & Anderson, 1989; Wenzel, Koegel, & Gelberg, 2000).

Additionally, the assumptions that all homeless people are the same, are intellectually inferior, and are silenced play a role in devaluing the homeless population. These assumptions both silence the homeless individuals and create a silencing effect on the topic of homelessness that ignores the experiential reality and the greater social issues. With the exception of one story, Hillman was barely given a voice to talk about his experience. And, when he did speak, his quotes were taken out of context and to some extent used to make him sound crazy. Stories repeatedly used the quote about him hiding the boots for fear of being killed over them. His remark could have easily been put into context by the newspapers by noting this is an issue that homeless individuals face. But rather than doing that, the papers present Hillman's reality as that of a crazy person, which many of the comments support. All of these things work together to devalue Hillman, just as the coon caricature's life and experiences are devalued.

Within the stereotype of the coon caricature is the notion that he is lazy and unintelligent. These themes also appear in the microaggressions found in the stories and

images surrounding Hillman. As noted previously, the video on *USAToday.com* makes Hillman sound incoherent: He seems to stumble with his thoughts, he is looking around, and Reverend Graf helps guide the discussion. With the limited voice he is given in the articles, the reader/viewer is left with the impression that Hillman is not very educated. Additionally, one of the quotes that was repeatedly run in the newspapers noted Hillman as saying that his image went around the world and he "wants a piece of the pie." Through the comments there is the general assumption that either Hillman wants something for doing nothing or is too dumb to realize that others did not benefit from this image. What those who commented fail to grasp is that what resulted from this image going viral is a constant barrage of reporters and strangers monitoring and interfering with Hillman's life. While no one got rich from this image, it may have cost him greatly both in receiving funds from panhandling or having to deal with people trying to interfere with his life. As Pilgrim (2012) noted, the "master desired to obtain from the slave the greatest labor, by any means; the slave desired to do the least labor while avoiding punishment" (np). This same impression is left by comments like that of Sharon bowers (2012) who suggested, "If he's smart enough to want a piece of the pie, he is smart enough to work." Comments like these suggest Hillman should be out working, although there is no suggestion as to how he could get a job or if he could survive on minimum wage. As Gilens (1999) found, White individuals assume that their tax money is being used to support lazy Black people.

The last attribute of the coon stereotype is his appearance. Donald Bogle (1994) noted that part of the coon caricature was his physical appearance as shown by Stepin Fetchit. He explained that the coon was tall, skinny, and often bald. His clothes were too

big and looked as if they had been passed down to him. In addition, he had a large grin, widened eyes, and large feet (1994, p. 41). The similarities between the images, especially Figures 6.1 and 6.4, represent each of these characteristics. From the ragged and torn clothes with large feet sticking out to the bald head, missing teeth, bulging eyes, and wide grin, we see all the physical characteristics that make up the coon stereotype. While it could be argued that the original photo enhanced our emotional vulnerabilities toward the homeless man, the photo and video run in Makin's 2013 article serves only to highlight the similarities between Hillman and the coon character, rather than challenge them. The selection of the still photo of Hillman with a large, toothless smile on his face and eyes bulging only enhances the coon imagery. The photographer could have taken any number of photos that could have more poignantly shown the relationship between Hillman and Graf. The digital narrative created for Hillman has certainly presented him with all the characteristics of the coon character.

Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter I illustrated the textual and visual microaggressions within the stories, comments, and imagery. Two themes of microassaults emerged. The first is similar to what Sue and Capodilupo (2007) identified as waging stereotypical attack. This theme clearly showed verbal assaults in the forms of name calling and making stereotypical assumptions relating to laziness, mental illness, and addiction. I identified a second theme that emerged as assertion of harm. Within this theme, individual commenters directly suggested violence and death directed at Hillman. I also identified three microinsults: second-class citizen, assumption of criminality/deviance,

and intellectual inferiority. Similar to Williams, textual and visual microaggressions presented Hillman as somehow less than others. Along with this, assumption of criminality or deviance assumed that Hillman engaged in some type of deviant lifestyle by living on the streets. He was also portrayed as being less intelligent than others through the belief that he made bad choices or had a mental illness. There were also two microinvalidations that emerged: the assumption of sameness and significant absences. Several of the articles and many commenters drew connections between Hillman and other homeless individuals or other Black individuals, creating an understanding that race and homelessness is the same for everyone. Similar to Williams, there were many absences left out of the story.

In the final section, I used those microaggressions to demonstrate how our narratives draw from the historical coon stereotype and how they recreate Hillman as a modern-day Stepin Fetchit based on misinformation, the perspective associated with our habitus, and covert or overt discrimination. Instead of using the articles to illuminate the bleak realities of homeless individuals, the worst stereotypes and assumptions are made about Hillman and black homeless individuals in general. While Hillman may indeed have a mental health issue as alluded to in some of the stories, the digital narrative created for him tells us much more about how we think about and treat marginalized individuals than it does about Hillman. The overall message is not about how society treats and could help those in poverty, with mental or physical issues, or battling other challenges, but rather it paints homelessness as a personal problem best solved by harming, ignoring, or institutionalizing those who find themselves in the worst possible economic situation.

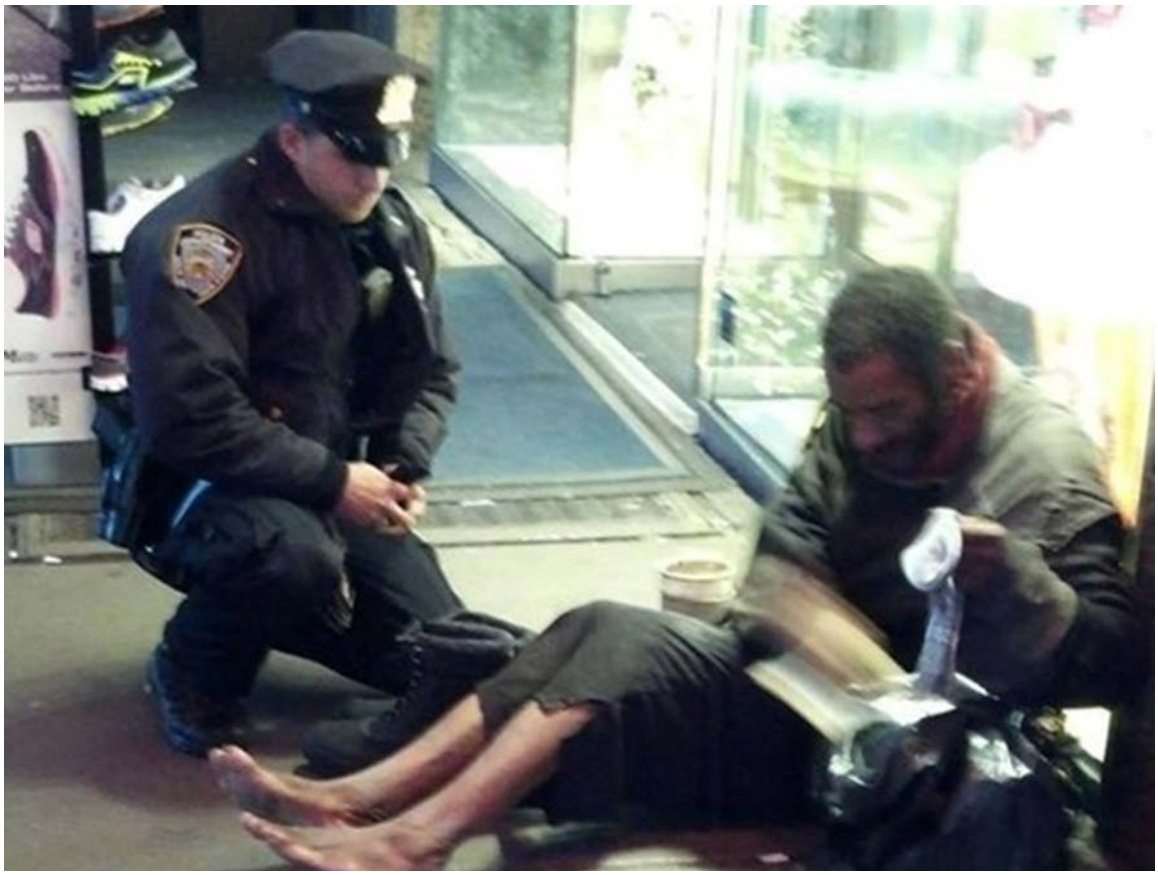

Figure 6.1: Original image taken by Jennifer Foster in November 2012 and posted to the NYPD Facebook page that subsequently went viral.

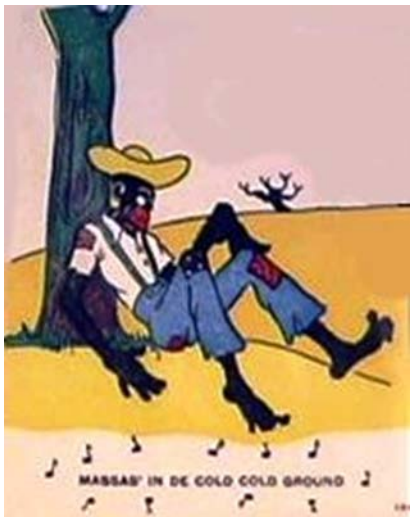

Figure 6.2: Postcard of a slave singing Stephen Foster's 1852 minstrel song.

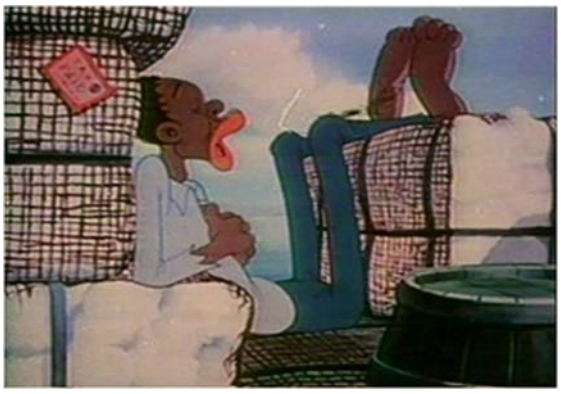

Figure 6.3: Cartoon still from "Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat" Universal 1941.

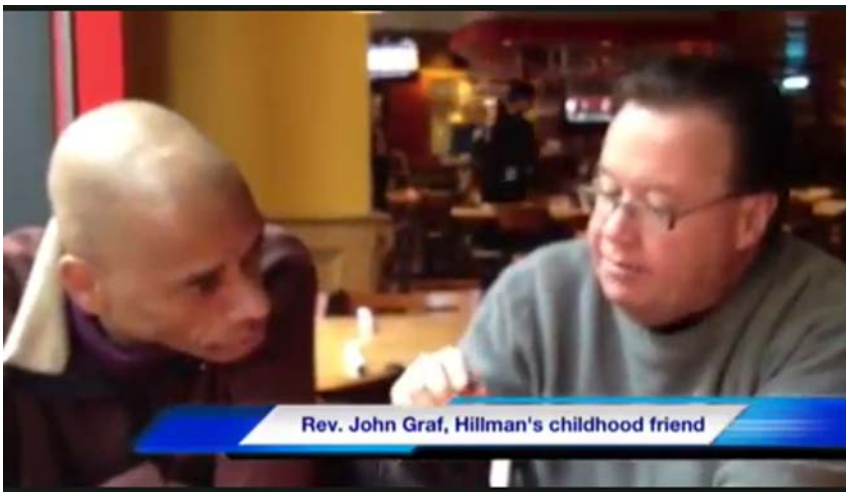

Figure 6.4: Screen capture of Jeffrey Hillman and childhood friend, Rev. John Graf Jr., from video and interview by Bob Makin.

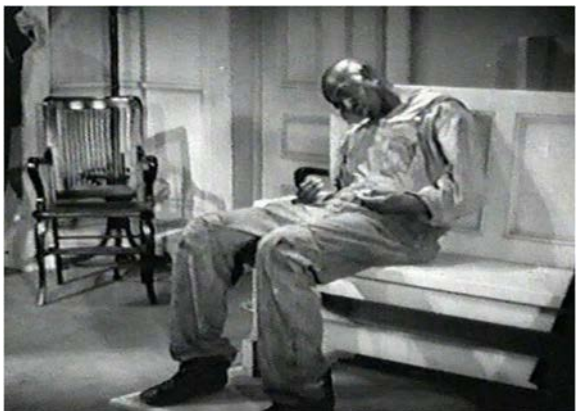

Figure 6.5: Movie still of Stepin Fetchit in Judge Priest Fox Film Corporation 1934.

CHAPTER 7

FROM HOMELESS TO HOUSE NEGRO:[11] THE DIGITAL NARRATIVE OF BILLY RAY HARRIS

> Every little black child grew up seeing that getting along with white people meant grinning and acting clowns. It helped white people to feel easy about what they had done, and were doing, to Negroes.
>
> —Miles Davis, "Interview with Alex Haley," 1962

In this final analysis chapter I examine six articles, four videos, one image, and 389 comments related to Billy Ray Harris, the black homeless man who returned a valuable engagement ring accidently dropped in his collection cup. While Harris simply engaged in an honest act, a friend of the woman who dropped the ring was so inspired she shared the story with the local newspaper. Additionally, the owners of the ring set up a GiveForward.com account to help raise funds for the homeless man. The story caught the attention of national media and it was featured on local and national television and newspapers, resulting in more and more donations pouring in. Harris' honest action gained a nation-wide hero-like response resulting in more than $190,000 in donations as well as reconnection with his family. The articles about Harris ran between February 25, 2013 and September 3, 2013, detailing his action, his family's efforts to contact him, and

[11] Malcolm X equated the term house Negro and Uncle Tom, noting that the house Negro worked hard to be like the master, often at the cost of relations with other slaves.

how he spent the money.

The following sections provide (a) an overview of the data analyzed, (b) a summary of the story that includes the characters, (c) an examination of the stories, comments, and images for instances of microaggressions, and (d) the digital narrative that is constructed through the use of microaggressions to illustrate how traditional online media invokes historic stereotypes within the narrative.

From Where the Stories Came

Overview of the Data

The data that I used to analyze Billy Ray Harris was retrieved from the following sources: *National Public Radio* (*NPR.org*), that featured one article, one image, and 106 comments; *The Grio* (*theGrio.com*) that ran three articles (two were written by *Today* writers), three videos, and 49 comments; and *USA Today* (*usatoday.com*) that ran two articles, five videos, two images (one was a stock photo of a ring), and 227 comments. Each of these stories had links to various social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn and some had options to email the story, which allowed viewers to share.

From Homeless to Housed

On a chilly day in February, Billy Ray Harris sat on the corner in Kansas City's Country Club Plaza holding his cup out, hoping passersby would contribute funds (Associated Press, 2013). Sarah Darling walked by, casually grabbed change from her coin purse and dropped it into Harris' cup. Unbeknownst to Harris or Darling, along with her change she also dropped her engagement ring that she had removed earlier in the day

and put in her coin purse. By the next day, Darling realized what she had done and Harris had discovered the ring and had it appraised by a jeweler as being worth $4,000. Although the ring was worth a lot of money, Harris decided to hold onto the ring to see if its owner would return, noting that "My grandfather was a reverend. He raised me from the time I was 6 months old and thank the good Lord, it's a blessing, but I do still have some character" (Associated Press, 2013).

Darling returned to the site where Harris was and squatted down beside him to tell him that "she might have given him something valuable" (Memmott, 2013). "Was it a ring?" he questioned. "Yeah," replied Darling. Harris said, "Well I have it." Darling believed this to be a miracle as she never thought she would get the ring back (Memmott, 2013). In Darlings' gratitude, she gave Harris all the cash in her wallet. Later, she and her husband Bill Krejci launched a GiveForward page to collect money for Harris to raise at least $1,000 to get him back on his feet, but hoped for $4,000 to cover what he was offered for the ring. As this story of a homeless Black male doing the "right thing" made headlines, donations poured in, eventually reaching over $190,000 (Marcus, 2013). But it was not just financial gain as a result of doing the right thing, it also led to a family reunion and new friendships. After seeing the story in the paper, Harris' sister Robin, who lives in the family's home town of Wichita Falls, Texas, reached out to a reporter to track Harris down and help her make contact as he had been missing from their lives for the last 16 years. After connecting with his sister, plans were made to have a reunion in the summer. Hearing of this story, *Today* contacted Harris, Darling, and Krejci to invite them to the program and give Harris "his very own surprise" (Workneh, 2013). *Today* invited Harris' sister Robin and three other siblings to reunite the family with their long-

lost brother. The family reunion was on national television.

Six months later, Harris' life had changed. He no longer lived on the street, but had purchased a car and put a down payment on a house. He was working towards a relationship with his family, many that he never knew existed (Marcus, 2013). Additionally, he regularly visited Darling and Krejci in their new-found friendship. He thanked God that his past was over and he "feels human now" (Marcus, 2013). Since that fateful day when Darling dropped her ring in his cup and helped raise money for him, his life completely changed. Harris noted "this is what they call the American Dream" (Marcus, 2013).

The story told above is a compilation of the six stories examined in *NPR.org*, *TheGrio.com*, and *USAToday.com*. Each of the articles paints a human-interest story of how an act of honesty resulted in overwhelming gratitude leading to fortune, friends, and family for this one-time homeless man. The surprise hero in this story is Billy Ray Harris, a homeless Black male living on the streets of Kansas City, Missouri, yet when faced with the opportunity for financial gain, he chose instead to do the "right thing" that resulted in even greater financial gain. Not to undermine Harris' action or the feel-good story that could potentially shed light on issues of race and homelessness, it is important that we read this story with an eye towards how it reproduces other narratives.

Creating Harris' Digital Narrative Through Microaggressive Communication

I continue to extend the previous taxonomy and themes to consider the intersectionality of race and homelessness as a category in which to examine

microaggressions. This section will highlight six microaggressive themes, followed by the visual microaggressions identified within the content of the online articles.

Microassaults

Microassaults are the more explicit racial or class-based derogations characterized by their overtly demeaning tone. In the particular case of Harris, messages in this category are explicity designed to communicate to the recipient that they are subhuman (Sue, 2010, p. 28). Compared to the lack of microassaults found in the Williams data and the overwhelming microassaults found in Hillman's data, just a few issues of microassaults emerged in Harris' data.

Waging Stereotypical Attacks

As explained in Chapters 2 and 5, this theme directly reflects the Sue et al. (2007) and Sue (2010) microassualt category as we see the use of stereotypes that demean and humiliate based on identity. The first instances of stereotypical assaults are directed at Harris based on race and class; however, of particular interest are the microassaults directed at his family. Since the family is not homeless - in one video we see Harris' sister in her home - race is the target of these assaults (Dastagir, 2013). I will return to the family shortly. This theme can be found in the story, the comments, and the imagery used.

Some of the common stereotypes that emerge directed at Harris are those of dishonesty, laziness, and drug/alcohol abuse. These stereotypes are common to both homeless and Black individuals (Buck, Toro, Ramos, 2004; Clawson & Trice, 2000;

Gilens, 1999; McNulty, 1992). There are no specific racial slurs; however, this is something that can be addressed through concepts of color-blindness and racial coding as we no longer need to identify by race, but rather other terminology, to make racial connections (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, 2014; Feagin, 2000; Myers, 2005). For instance, articles noted that he was asked why he did not keep the ring (Memmott, 2013). There is an implication here that a homeless Black male would instead keep the ring, rather than attempt to return it to the owner. The assumption that he would keep the ring is a negative stereotype associated with Black people in poverty as criminal or dishonest (Entman & Rojecki, 1992; Clawson & Trice, 2000; Larson, 2006).

USAToday.com (AP, 2013) stated that Darling was “horrorstruck” when she realized her ring was gone. Additionally, that story and the *NPR.com* story (Memmott, 2013) both used a statement from Darling exclaiming, "It seemed like a miracle. I thought for sure there was no way I would get it back." While these are not egregious statements focused at Harris, they are enough to reinforce stereotypes associated with both race and homelessness. The idea Darling was at first horrorstruck and then claimed it to be a miracle that she got her ring back suggest that notions of race and homelessness are synonymous with dishonesty, thievery, and criminality (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2014). This illustrates that most individuals do not have a clear understanding of the homeless population. Additionally, the hyping of Harris’ return of the ring after having it appraised could be considered a microassault. While it illustrates Harris’ honesty, it focused the attention on the stereotype that individuals in this situation would not typically act in this way. The true act of a homeless person returning the ring sounded so extraordinary that people responded with an outpouring of help and donations. What

we fail to consider is how infrequent this type of situation is and how unlikely it is that someone who made a similar mistake would go back to the person and find out if he had the ring it and then report it to the news. It was not Harris' act of honesty that was rare, but rather the impossibility of the situation itself that was rare.

There are also textual microaggressions that focus on laziness. Throughout the articles there are references to panhandling, spending days on the streets asking for change, and dropping money in the cup. While these references may be an accurate representation of what Harris is doing, at no time do any of the stories discuss homelessness as an issue in Kansas City or what happened to cause Harris to become homeless or a panhandler. This is important as panhandling and homelessness are related, but they are not the same thing. The use of this word presents a highly selective picture of homelessness as a personal responsibility, rather than caused by societal factors. The language used help create an overall narrative that reinforced the stereotypes of laziness, mental illness, or possibly even drug and alcohol addiction.

The most explicit microassaults directed at Harris came from the comments sections and focused on drugs and alcohol. For example, Val Burgett wrote, "Why give this crack head anything. He will end up the same. He will not change" (2013). Linda Poncier (2013) added, "The sad part if all this is that pior [sic] man don't [sic] even see why everyone is making a big deal out of this he just knows he did the right thing how many crack heads would of keep it until the next day ????" Additionally, comments simplify statistics related to homelessness, such as Joshua Palmer (2013) when he emphatically stated "90% of the homeless are on the streets for less than TWO WEEKS. The rest that are on the streets for an indefinite length of time are typically victims of

substance abuse or psychological disorders that keep them in poverty." While substance abuse and mental illness are prevalent among homeless populations, often substance abuse is a result rather than cause of homelessness (NCFTH, 2009). Additionally, economics is cited as the number one cause of homelessness among Black people (Rosenheck, Leda, Frisman, & Gallup, 1997). Lack of well-paying jobs, underemployment, divorce, and lack of health insurance are major factors resulting in homelessness (NCFTH, 2009). These comments present outdated and exaggerated notions of homeless people and fail to consider how social structures can lead to homelessness, especially for racially marginalized individuals (NCH, 2009; Rosenheck et al., 1997). In all of these stories and comments common stereotypes are used to further demean or misrepresent the actual realities of homeless Black men, creating and reinforcing the notion that Black people and homeless people are second-class citizens.

Some of the most egregious microassaults found in the comments are not directed at Harris but rather at his family. Several of the articles noted that his sister Robin was able to identify and find Harris after a 16-year absence from his family. The articles mentioned how she saw his picture in the paper and contacted the reporter to see if he could put her in touch. There were multiple comments suggesting that the family only appeared after Harris came into money. What many individuals failed to consider is the difficulty of finding a homeless individual living in a different city. It is quite possible that this story was the only real information the family had received to help find Harris. While the articles themselves tell a nice story, the comments paint a picture of a greedy family out solely for Harris' money. For instance, Debra Hamilton exclaimed, "185.000 [his family] will all be gonewhen [sic] the cash is gone. Hell [sic] be homeless in a year

and there will be a story on it. Mark my words" (2013). This suggests that Harris' family does not really care about him and Harris himself is not intelligent enough to realize this or manage his money. Mike Smith insults Harris' family when he wrote, "Amazing...he gets over $175K & all of a sudden his family is back in touch w/him. Maggots! I tell u [sic] just like the Bible says: 'The Love Of Money [sic] Is The Root Of All Evil'" (Duerson, 2013). These comments suggest rather than a loving family trying to reunite with a long-lost family member, this Black family is greedy and uncaring. Because of the intersections of race and class that make up Harris' identity, the microassaults serve double duty by demeaning both Black people and homeless people.

Microinsults

Whereas microassaults are the more overt words and actions used to demean an individual based on identity, microinsults are the covert or unintentional snubs that can convey equally insulting messages to their target. In this section on microinsults three themes emerged: decentering the subject, ascription of exceptionalism, and intellectual inferiority.

Decentering the Subject

The first microinsult theme focuses on the role of dominant populations helping or improving the life of the "other." There are two subthemes within this category (the savior and one's own acts of kindness), both of which refocus attention from the subject to the person or group who "saved" the subject or back on oneself. The first subtheme is that of the savior. Although not previously identified by Sue et al. (2007) or Sue (2010),

this theme is somewhat similar to their theme of second-class citizen, which suggests certain groups are less worthy and deserve discriminatory treatment. Instead, this subtheme illustrates how certain members of marginalized groups are worthy of being saved or elevated by those in the majority. The focus of the story becomes that of the savior, not the saved or societal factors associated with their marginalized position. Because Harris did something kind, he became someone worth saving. The articles and comments repeatedly highlight the good work of the saviors while overlooking the particular circumstances of their actions. This is a microinsult because Harris was virtually unnoticed until he did something "unexpected." At that point he became worthy of saving and Darling and Krejci, along with thousands of others, became his saviors. The actions of these saviors decenter Harris' own story as the reporting constantly reminds the readers of what led to the event, why Darling and Krejci decided to raise money, how much money was raised, or how he was reconnected with his family.

Although it was Harris' act of returning the ring that garnered media attention, it is always linked back to Darling's accidental dropping of her ring and Krejci setting up the fundraising campaign that ultimately led to Harris being saved from his life on the street. According to Melissa Firmes-Ray, "I'm inspired by this couple. What a beautiful gift they gave. When she dropped change in that man's cup, she changed his life. We can all do this for each other" (2013). Additionally, Dastagir (2013) wrote that Harris reflected on "how much he's gained since Darling's ring clinked in his cup." These comments perpetuate this decentering by giving credit to Darling and Krejci for improving Harris life and failing to acknowledging Harris' invisibility prior to this. The comments and stories do not consider how societal structures or personal circumstances

may have lead Harris to become homeless in the first place.

Darling's happiness and relief with having her engagement ring returned are understandable; however, her continued actions for thanking him are uncommon, changing the focus of his kind act into her kind act. Each article mentioned that not only did she give Harris all the cash in her wallet, but also set up an online giving account so others could give. Setting up this account suggests that somehow Harris is the lone exception to all those other questionable Black homeless males. Although the act of appreciating Harris is important, why only give back to him when many others could have benefitted from the money raised? He becomes the chosen one for the white dominant society to save by showing that White individuals and/or the middle class really do want to reach out and help, as long as the other proves him/herself.

Within the savior category are the actions taken by *Today* to create a surprise reunion for Harris and his family. The stories and video report that Harris had spoken to his sister and they planned a reunion in the summer; however, *Today* decided to move that up and feature a televised reunion (Workneh, 2013). While the video from *Today* suggests Harris' family knew about the reunion, it was a complete surprise to Harris. While it is possible that he suspected it, it is insensitive to Harris at the very least to assume he was ready to be reunited with his family after 16 years away. This surprise meeting suggests there was doubt that Harris would truly meet with his family. This doubt is insulting to Harris. Since we do not know why he left home and stayed away so long, it is possible that he needed time to process and prepare for the reunion. It is also demeaning to him, taking away his private moments with his estranged family and putting them on national television. This reinforces the savior theme by making *Today*

appear to be continually saving Harris from himself by ensuring the reconnection with his family. This also illustrates the power differential between the television show and Harris while the show hosts perform their saving act.

A second subtheme focuses on the savior notion emerging within the comments. Not to be overshadowed by the act of a homeless Black man, there are multiple comments making referring to one's own acts of kindness. For instance, A HK (2013) wrote, "While there are those who take advantage of others misfortune, there are plenty of us who will go out of our way to return lost treasures." Others draw comparisons between their acts and Harris' such as Joe Leichtnam who stated, "I was able to do the same thing last year. I found a wedding ring in a parking lot and was able to have it returned to the young lady who had lost it…" (2013). Vickey Elam Waldo (2013) penned multiple paragraphs on what a big heart she has because she once helped a 17-year-old homeless girl. While some commenters talked about how they have helped others, several mentioned how they had helped Harris. This particular action serves as a microinsult as it tries to decenter the focus of attention from a marginalized individual to oneself, suggesting that ones' own action is just as noteworthy as Harris'. By focusing the story onto the saviors or other supporting characters, the authors and commenters turn Harris from the subject of the story to the object saved by the dominant population. Rather than truly helping to resolve the issue of homelessness, these decentering tactics seem to be more about making those who are more privileged feel better (Lind & Danowski, 1999; Snow, 1996).

Intellectual Inferiority

Another microinsult assumes that homeless and/or Black individuals have no understanding of financial responsibilities. It is often overlooked as to how easy it is to become homeless and how difficult it is to get out of the cycle. Many individuals are one illness or one lost income away from becoming homeless, regardless of their ability to manage money (NAEH, nd). Several of the articles made sure to note that Harris is getting financial help (Marcus, 2013; Memmott, 2013). *TheGrio.com* explained that Harris is working with a lawyer to set up a trust (Marcus, 2013) and *NPR.org* reported that Krejci spoke with Harris about his plans for the money. Comments related to finances suggest that homeless and/or Black individuals are not only financially illiterate, but that they also need the help of someone in the white dominant class or savior individual to make decisions. Marcus' (2013) article noted that since Harris worked with a lawyer he was able to buy a car and put a down payment on a house that he can fix up. As further evidence, *Today* provides images of the house and car, seeming to prove that he was able to accomplish his goals with this help. While this is factual reporting there is the underlying implication that he may not have chosen to spend the money this way without help.

While the microinsults within the story are subtler, those within the comments sections relating to finances are more overt and condescending. Many commenters suggested there is a need for Harris to have financial guidance and protection with that much cash. For instance, Steve O (2013) wrote "This man now has an opportunity to change his life, but there is a probably a list of reasons why he is homeless and unable to provide himself a shelter or to lead a normal life. At this point, he needs guidance most of

all." Jeanne Siracuse (2013) noted "I trust that the donations are protected for his use." Comments like these suggest that Harris is not only incapable of managing that kind of money, but he is also too unintelligent to realize family and friends might take advantage of him. These types of comments imply that homeless and/or Black men are not financially aware.

Finally, within this theme are those individuals suggesting appropriate ways for Harris to spend or invest his money. There is an extensive dialogue in the Memmott (2013) article and some additional comments in the Dastagir (2013) article debating if he will be taxed and how he should spend the money. This includes comments with specific details outlining the hierarchy of needs, buying a house, going to school, and giving back. Some argue that the amount of money, $150,000 at that time, will barely cover the basics for very long and others believe the government will take a huge chunk of the money. Referring to a comment about the IRS, Anita Brewer (2013) wrote, "Yeah, they'll add up all he 'owes' and take most, if not all of it" (2013). In a related vein, S Ray (2013) stated, "Well, even if he doesn't have to pay tax, that's still only another 3 or so years of poverty-line living…" Additionally, Barbara Wolfe Jr. (2013), responding to a comment that Harris could go back to school asked, "Why should an older man go back to school and get a job? …HOW can an older man go back to school and then get a job when millions of people … with college educations can't find one?" On a more positive note, Mike Change (2013) encouraged him to "… invest in himself, whatever it is he loves to do. some [sic] school maybe, books, music. buy [sic] a small house, small job a community center seems fitting for such a cool old timer." While Mike Change tries to take a positive spin on the comments, he unfortunately reinforces stereotypes when he said "…homeless

people are not just ‘lazy criminals’, rather people with problems that need help too. mental [sic] illness is a big factor in our homeless community.” This illustrates the subtlety of microinsults. In this case, while trying to challenge some of what others are saying, he both adds to the dominant discourse as to what Harris should do and reinforces the stereotypes of homeless as lazy, criminality, and mentally ill. What this microinsult does is to say that there are other more capable individuals that need to help him make decisions. This does not necessarily just include those educated in finance issues, but domiciled individuals. Even when these commenters have no understanding of tax laws or experience living at poverty levels, they present themselves as still knowing more than Harris.

Ascription of Exceptionalism

A final theme within the category of microinsults is the ascription of exceptionalism. Within this category, certain individuals in marginalized groups are somehow the exception to who we would normally find within this group. This is similar to Sue et al. (2007) and Sue’s (2010) ascription of intelligence, where intelligence is assigned to people based on their race or gender. In this particular case, Harris is frequently assigned honesty or morality that is not normally considered within Black and homeless populations. Stereotypes of Black males and homeless individuals have long portrayed them as dishonest, lazy, and even criminal (Dixon, 2000; Entman, 1990, 1992, 1994; Lee, Link, & Toro, 1991; Lind & Danowski, 2009). By the nature of this story going viral, there is a strong suggestion that Harris is not your “typical” homeless man – he has feelings, values, and good character. As each article reports, Harris had the

opportunity to pawn the ring for $4,000 but rather chose to hold onto it and return it to its owner. It is reported that he is asked why he did not keep it (Memmott, 2013). Would this question be asked to someone who is not Black or homeless? It is also interesting that none of the reporters or commenters asked why he did not turn it into the police, but rather held onto it in hopes the owner would return. Questioning why he kept and returned the ring, rather than questioning why he did not turn it into the police, allows the papers to promote Harris as exceptional in his actions. This line of questioning by authorities is one of the ways master narratives are maintained. Rather than consider that he was hoping the woman would return, the assumption is made he was planning to keep the ring for his own personal gain. Again, with the history of policing of both Black and homeless bodies, it is possible that Harris held on to the ring not for profit, but because he was wary of how it would be perceived by the police.

The comments are rife with the opinion that Harris is somehow the exception. Gladys Davis (2013) explained "This goes to show that every homeless person is not just looking for a handout," despite the fact that Harris was doing that by holding out his cup for change. A handout is also what he received by having people give donations because of his honest act. However, it seems that Harris becomes the exception because unlike other Black homeless males, he did not keep the ring, that is, the quick money. Again, this reflects the idea behind the master narrative that Black people are seeking rewards from the master. Roselyn Tufi (2013) realized "He Was Not Only Homeless But Smart [sic]." This suggests that homelessness and intelligence are mutually exclusive and Harris is a rare individual who is both. While these comments seem positive, they still infer the connections between homelessness and laziness and/or unintelligence, thus suggesting it

is unusual for Black and/or homeless males to have these attributes.

Within this theme, there seem to be individuals who understand that certain characteristics are not based on race or social economic status, but fail to make the connection between how culture and society oppresses marginalized groups. Brandi Carey noted “There is a lot of good in this world. We as ‘Human beings’ look in the wrong places to find it. it [sic] is where we least expect it. We need more Mr. Harris' in this world...” (2013). Most individuals will never find themselves being recognized in this way for returning something that is not theirs. In many cases, we are told not to give to homeless individuals, but rather donate to shelters and services that help them (Brown 2016; Ryan, 2014). This further creates a division between the haves and have nots by discouraging interaction that could potentially raise awareness about the plight of homelessness. Li Anne Taft (2013) posited “There still are good people in this world and funny thing…some of them don’t have much worldly possession but THYE [sic] HAVE something that we all need…CHARACATER [sic] AND HONESTY.” This comment recognizes that character is not inherent to specific races or classes of people, but fails to move beyond this recognition. This exemplifies Harris by making him appear as a token homeless person, whom others should aspire to become. These comments recognize marginalized individuals as having all the same characteristics as those in the dominant classes, but fail to consider how they became homeless or that they may need help. So rather than make them seem exceptional individuals through their actions, they seem to see them as exceptional for accepting their position in the social economic hierarchy. The microaggressions in the above themes work by subtly conveying insulting messages that serve to unconsciously demean those in marginalized groups.

Microinvalidations

The next two themes directly address the category of microinvalidations, or communication or environmental cues that fail to consider experiential reality (Sue, 2010). These include the theme of divine assistance, which takes Harris' actions and credits them to a higher power and the theme of significant absences which addresses what is not talked about in the article.

Divine Assistance

Similar to that of Ted Williams, divine assistance is credited for the change in Harris' life. Divine assistance relates to ascription of exceptionalism, yet strips Harris of his own character by attributing his actions to that of divine guidance. Comments, illustrated below, suggest that Harris' action happened because God is working through him. As a homeless Black male, stereotypes suggest that Harris is clearly not moral on his own because his actions reflect those of God. While Harris noted that he had a religious upbringing (Memmott, 2013; Workneh, 2013), there are no other references to religion within the stories. However, the vast number of comments in several stories specifically made reference to some type of divine guidance leading to his actions (Dastagir, 2013; Marcus, 2013). For instance, Toccara Duplessis (2013) wrote, "He was really blessed and a good head on his shoulders cause he could've sold it but god has took over him and he did the right thing tho [sic]..." Elder Taalib El Amin (2013) stated, "Its [sic] the God in the people who are doing what is right. And the people are not always good, even though God resides within them." These comments suggest that God is moving Harris, even though he might not be a good person. These types of comments

take away Harris' agency and upbringing. In one particular instance, Jenna M. Price West (2013) stated, "AMEN there are definitely angels on earth disguised in the most conspicuous ways!!! Never know when you come across one." This goes beyond divine intervention and suggests Harris is not human but instead an angel. This is a truly insidious comment as it completely erases Harris' reality. If the person that found the ring had not been homeless, would they have also been said to have divine powers behind their actions? This type of microinvalidation clearly suggests that homeless people need special guidance to do the right thing.

While God is credited for either guiding Harris' action or blessing Harris for his good deed, the circumstances that caused Harris to become homeless are ignored. The problem with the logic of divine intervention is when something comes out positive it is attributed to a higher power, but the negative situations are not considered, suggesting those are caused by one's own negative actions. These types of comments are problematic as they blame victims for their problems or situations, but credit something or someone else for their successes, ultimately allowing those in dominant positions to define marginalized individuals' reality by suggesting they are to blame for their problems.

Significant Absences

According to cultural studies scholar John Hartley (1982), it is important to look for what is suppressed or absent when analyzing a news story. In describing "significant absences," media scholars David Morely and Charlotte Brundson noted that "what is rendered invisible by this style of presentation is the relation of…human problems to the

structure of society…" (1981, p. 137). When authors and articles fail to include certain details, what is actually a social problem appears more of a personal situation that is more easily understood by most individuals. In this theme, authors and most commenters ignored the larger issues of race and homelessness, thereby covertly or complacently implying that Harris' situation is personal rather than a societal issue. This significant absence is demonstrated when articles fail to discuss or inform readers of the factors, including race, associated with homelessness. Failing to include this type of information denies the experiential reality of the homeless population.

Additionally, these absences are problematic as the stories focus on extensive help to one individual for simply being honest while completely ignoring all other homeless individuals. To some extent this parallels the notion of the myth of meritocracy by suggesting that every homeless person has an opportunity to be helped if they simply do "the right thing." This again ignores the experiential reality of race and homelessness. Thus, both Harris' failure to thrive and his successes are attributed to individual attributes because postracial, color-blind notions assume all people have similar opportunities. Even within the comments, few individuals commented on the issue of homelessness and none on race.

Along with no information on homelessness in general, we also get very little information on Harris himself. Although the articles and videos allow Harris a voice in the story, it is edited so we learn nothing of his homeless experience. We know he panhandles, but we are not told where he actually lives. The articles use quotations that state he was raised by grandparents (Dastagir, 2013; Memmott, 2013), but we are never told why. Both the articles and the *Today* videos also suggest that he had family in his

hometown, but in 16 years he never reached out to them or let them know he was okay. While it is possible that Harris did not want to talk about these issues, it is also possible that prior stories focusing on Black homeless males, such as Ted Williams and Jeffrey Hillman, took such negative turns these authors chose not to delve into more personal issues for fear of ruining this feel-good story. However, not providing more details about what Harris would say if he had the chance to speak or if he chose to speak hides the experiential truth of homelessness. While the Williams and Hillman stories probe extensively into personal details including family members, job histories, and arrests, these significant absences in Harris' story deny the experiential reality of what it is like to be a Black member of a homeless population. This type of microinsult is highly problematic as Sue (2010) explained, because it allows those in dominant groups to impose reality on marginalized individuals. As such, these actions make homelessness seem to be an individual issue rather than a societal problem. Additionally, the microaggressions and their respective themes serve to shape master narratives.

Visual Microaggressions

Unlike Williams and Hillman who had multiple images and/or videos, Harris had only one image (Figure 7.1) and the videos were all from the same source, *Today*, resulting in similar content. However, several instances of visual microaggressions were present. One of the first ways that visual microaggressions present is that every video continually reminds viewers that Harris was homeless and panhandling on the street. There are multiple images within the videos referring to panhandling, asking for change, and dropping money in a cup. The use of these images present a highly selective picture

of homelessness as a personal responsibility, rather than as a problem caused by societal factors.

When Harris found the ring, he was reported as being a 55-year-old man. Unlike other 55-year-old men who are still working, several of the images and videos simply show him just sitting on the ground with his cup out. You even see an image of him leaning against his bicycle that he referenced riding (Workneh, 2013). What this does is show a sympathetic older Black homeless man in a powerless role, making him look like a helpless victim needing assistance (Kahle, Yu, & Whiteside, 2007). These visual portrayals reify the connection between race and poverty. Similar to the prior images of Williams and Hillman, this image reinforces the connection between race and poverty or certain races wanting handouts rather than working and earning (NCH, 2009). This also illustrates Harris as a second-class citizen.

Another way we can see the visual microaggressions reflects on the white savior category. The video creates a reenactment of Darling coming back to Harris to get her ring, ending with her giving him a hug. The videos show Harris' appearance on *Today* with Savannah Guthrie, Darling, and Krejci. We also see video with Harris and Krejci hanging out, including hugging, and there is even a photo with the two of them together at a sports event. In one of the videos there is an interview with Darling and Krejci talking about how he is a solid guy and is probably going to make it. We also see clips of White individuals giving him change (Figure 7.2). While there is no problem highlighting these interactions, the only time we see him with other people of color is the clip where he is meeting his family and one where he is shaking hands with an unidentified Black man. This suggests his life was both saved by and now revolves

around White individuals. The extensive focus on Darling and Krejci in several of the videos also decenters Harris as the subject of the story.

A final way visual microaggressions are presented relates to his exceptionalism. Harris is shown as being a nonthreatening homeless person. This is presented by being surrounded by White people and young people. This is reminiscent of the how Uncle Tom was presented with Little Eva in the movies about Uncle Tom's Cabin (Figure 7.3). Through the videos of him being interviewed, he appears nervous, but confident. He displays the expected emotions when being reunited with his family after 16 years. We also see images of the house he bought, with the comment that he is looking forward to fixing it up. In the video, Harris talked about wanting to get a truck and painting supplies and starting his own business. We also see him and Krejci going for a ride in Harris' car. This imagery taken as a whole – he has a house, car, and ambition to work – reinforces the fact that he is unlike the other lazy homeless people and has ambition to change his life, not just gather governmental assistance.

As stated in the previous chapters, images are used to create an understanding of the world around us (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2011; Entman & Rojecki, 2000, Gee, 2011; Hariman & Lucaites, 2003; Mitchell, 1994). The construction of the image of Harris as accepting help and subsequently befriending his White saviors, resulting in an improved life, subtly suggests that if Black people were more like White people, their lives would improve. There is also an underlying assumption that it is easy to go from homeless to domiciled. Although the videos did mention the fundraising efforts, they did not mention how rare the act of raising over $190,000 for a homeless person is. By visually showing his life improving, without talking about the unusualness of this situation, the images

paint an unrealistic picture of what it takes to get off the streets.

Harris' Digital Narrative: Reviving Uncle Tom

The digital narrative that has been created for Billy Ray Harris through the stories, comments, and microaggressive themes reflects many of the characteristics of the Uncle Tom caricature as presented in the literature review. While slavery has long been abolished in the United States, the prejudice and stereotypes stemming from beliefs during this period still negatively affect Black people today. Similarly to Uncle Tom being portrayed as a humble, gentle Christian slave, Harris is portrayed as a humble, gentle, Christian homeless man. As the theme of significant absences points out, there is no discussion about homelessness in any of the articles. Thus, it appears homelessness receives little more concern today than slavery during antebellum America. There are also no comments as to why Harris was homeless, and it appears that he is content in his situation. Additionally, without voice about his own experience as a homeless person, he appears similar to what author Patricia Turner discusses when she writes about the change from Stowe's Uncle Tom, who was a proactive Christian warrior, to the reconstructed Uncle Tom as a passive, docile, and unthinking Christian (1994, p. 73). Within the comments sections of the articles, there were few comments relating to homelessness as a societal problem. In fact, one comment suggested it was more of a personal issue: "Sometimes it is by choice. I worked in homeless shelters and some ppl [sic] have given up on America and don't want to be traced tracked or identified so they live in camps "tent cities"" (Olivia Taylor, 2013). To some extent this belief suggests homeless individuals passively accept their fate, rather than actively challenging an

oppressive system.

Similar to other Tom characters, there is a strong connection between Harris and Christianity. Harris is repeatedly referenced as having a strong religious upbringing in almost every article as well as multiple comments referring to divine guidance relating to his behavior. According to Harris "My grandfather was a reverend. He raised me from the time I was 6 months old and thank the good Lord, it's a blessing, but I do still have some character." This quote was either present or referenced by each online news source, including the accompanying videos. Additionally, Harris was quoted as saying “I am not trying to say that I am no saint, but I am no devil either” (Marcus, 2013). Even in the worst of situations, the articles and comments focus on the religious nature of Harris or how God has blessed him, rather than how he ended up homeless.

Just as Stowe’s book often has passages in the form of sermons, you see similar sermon language in the comments. Jidna Nadif wrote “God is Good [sic] all the time... if you reap good things you will get good things.....” (2013). However, with the exception of a few comments, the writers and commenters were not seeing how it took a witnessed act of kindness before anyone was blessing or suggesting divine guidance of Harris. Those “good Christians” who are talking about how Harris’ life is now changed because he conducted a noticeably kind act should be asking how we accept homelessness in a society whose religion espouses taking care of the poor and weak. This disconnect is similar to Christian slave owners who were not seeing the conflict between slavery and Christianity, which is what Stowe was writing about in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Pilgrim, 2012).

Another characteristic of the Tom character is that he is nonthreatening to White

people. This has to do with his age, docility, and child-like qualities (Pilgrim, 2012). We see this presented in the stories and comments in several ways. One of these is the way Darling is described as returning to ask about her ring. In multiple stories the following description is given: “She went back to Harris, squatted beside him and told him that she might have given him something valuable” (Dastagir; 2013; Memmott, 2013). This visually evokes a motherly tactic used to get the truth. It also illustrates he was not someone she was afraid to approach and talk to. In the video we also see him sitting quietly leaning against a post with his cup out accepting change from passersby. There is even a comment by Robert Mccormick III that noted, “I remember giving this man money every night when I worked at OLD SPAGHETTI FACTORY,he [sic]never begged for money,and [sic] I had no problem giving it to him....” (2013). This comment along with several videos portrays him nonthreateningly, including one showing several young women dropping change in his cup, one showing Darling hugging him, and one showing Krejci getting in Harris’ newly purchased vehicle. Thus, both visually and textually Harris is shown as kind, docile, and nonthreatening.

One of the last attributes given to the Tom character is that of being loyal to or pleasing his master, that is, a White individual. Here we see the savior theme coming into play. It is stressed that Harris has become good friends with Darling and Krejci, coming over to their house and attending ball games and other events with them. Marcus stated “he has lifelong friends in the couple whose ring he returned” (2013, para. 8). No other friends, homeless or otherwise, were shown or talked about in any of the stories or videos. These stories stress a connection specifically with saviors, Darling and Krejci, while ignoring all other friendship relations. Additionally, the connection with his family

is portrayed as still developing. As noted by Marcus (2013), Harris is working on a relationship with his family. This is illustrated by his decision to stay in Kansas City, rather than moving closer to his family. While we do not know what Harris' past was like in relation to his family, the stories portray a man loyal to his White saviors, while possibly forgoing his kin. Finally, we cannot forget that in representations of loyal Toms of the past, the older, retired slave was presented with a cabin all his own (TheAuthenticHistoryCenter.com, nd), just as the contributions organized by Darling and Krejci helped Harris to purchase a home of his own.

Chapter Summary

Throughout this chapter I have illustrated the textual and visual microaggressions within the stories, comments, and imagery. Sue and Capodilupo's (2007) theme of waging stereotypical attack emerged as Harris' family became the target of verbal language suggesting they are only present because he came into money. I also identified three microinsults: decentering the subject, intellectual inferiority, and ascription of exceptionalism. Decentering the subject focused on how the stories often focused on the White "saviors" helping Harris, often rendering him the object of a good deed. Like Hillman, Harris was also portrayed as being less intelligent than others through the belief that he could manage his new-found wealth. Similar to Williams, Harris was also described as somehow being exceptional because he was honest. There were also two microinvalidations that emerged: divine assistance and significant absences. As Williams was often credited as being guided by a divine power, so was Harris. Denying both men agency in their actions. Similar to Williams and Hillman, there were many absences left

out of the story.

In the final section, I used those microaggressions to demonstrate how our narratives draw from historic stereotypes and how they recreate Harris as a modern-day Uncle Tom based on his kindness and devotion to his White “saviors.” Instead of using the articles to show the realities of life on the street or share Harris’ story, Harris is painted as someone who was content with his situation. Once he was helped, he became loyal to the White family that helped him, potentially at the expense of getting to know his family better. Thus, rather than stories challenging the dominant narrative of homelessness as an individual problem, these stories present White people as kind and giving to those marginalized individuals. With an overall message that homelessness is not really the problem we make it, and with some faith and loyalty you to have the possibility of moving up in the world.

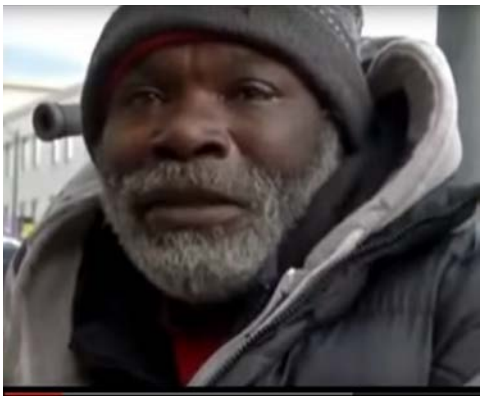

Figure 7.1: Screen capture close up of Harris. Similar image used in all articles.

Figure 7.2: Screen capture from Today on September 1, 2013 showing Harris panhandling on the streets of Kansas City, MO.

Figure 7.3: Photo card of Uncle Tom and Little Eva from Stetson's Uncle Tom's Cabin, ca. 1890s.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

> I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.
>
> —Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story,” 2009

This purpose of this multicase narrative study was to explore the phenomenon of online microaggressive expressions in order to interrogate how they impact master narratives. The subjects in this study were three Black males identified by the media as homeless. The conclusions from this study address the research questions and findings. As such, they focus on three areas: (a) how and what types of microaggressions are employed in online news articles; (b) how microaggression alter the stories and narratives being produced; and (c) how these microaggression reinforce master narratives. The following section discusses the major findings and conclusions drawn from this project, the limitations and recommendations for future research, implications for the findings and the researcher’s final reflection on this study.

How and in What Ways are Microaggressions Invoked Online?

Support of Prior Research

The first research question for this study examined how and in what ways writers and commenters are employing microaggressions within online news stories. Through this project, 11 microaggressive themes emerged, as well as visual microaggressions. Three important similarities between these findings and prior microaggression research can be found. First, the three broad categories of microaggressions (microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations) are relevant when looking at the intersection of race and class. Second, visual microaggressions are found within the content of the online microaggressions in the form of images and videos. Third, within these three categories, three themes emerge that are consistent with previous research: waging stereotypical attack, second-class citizen, and assumption of criminality. Within the articles and comments for each individual, there was at least one stereotype of mental illness, laziness, substance use and abuse, and/or entitlement. The worst microassaults were directed at Jeffrey Hillman, who was routinely talked about in terms of each of these stereotypes. Ted Williams and Billy Ray Harris also had similar comments directed at them, but they were limited and focused primarily on substance abuse. Of interest is that while Williams claimed to be a recovering addict, it was Hillman, whose background had not been disclosed, who was assumed to abuse alcohol and drugs.

Articles and comments conveyed rudeness or insensitivity through microinsults and microinvalidations. Each of these men was portrayed as a second-class citizen through the repetitive use of the word “homeless” and/or the use of images that continually referenced each man’s current or past homeless situation. Additional

microinsults focused on Hillman, as articles and comments frequently alluded to him as criminal or deviant because he was not wearing the boots or was living on undeserved entitlements. A conclusion that can be drawn from this is that race does indeed play a role in how homeless people are perceived and talked about in the articles, comments, and images. As each of these homeless men is Black, the perpetuation of racial microaggressions similar to those from prior research was not surprising.

Emergent Microaggressive Themes

Not only did this research support earlier findings on microaggressions (Table 4.1), but emergent themes extend these findings. Table 8.1 overviews the themes found in this research. Similar to Clark et al. (2011), this research was able to illustrate concrete statements written by both authors and commenters. The findings provided documentation of a variety of direct and indirect microaggressions. This is significant as historically, targets of microaggressions have been expected to substantiate their claims of racism or discrimination.

While some microaggressions found in this study were conscious microassaults, there were many that illustrated ignorance of the issues surrounding race and/or homelessness. Additionally, I was able to illustrate how attempts at positive comments can actually perpetuate stereotypes or invalidate the experiential reality of the target population. Given the interconnected history of Black people and homelessness, it was expected that microaggressions directed at Black homeless men would differ from the topology of racial microaggressions. Since evidence of work on microaggressions relating to class or homelessness is scarce, there is no baseline topology from which to

draw, requiring the creation of new types of microaggressions.

Microassaults

In the case of Hillman, a new category of microassaults was identified, the assertion of harm or violence. This category moved beyond the intentional oppression and discrimination of another as found in the category of waging stereotypical attacks, outlined by Sue et al. (2007) to an overt suggestion of violence toward an individual. Advocating violence against or wishing death upon another human who did nothing but fail to wear a pair of boots given to him is beyond egregious. Instead of taking time to understand why Hillman lived on the streets and why he was not wearing the boots, his humanity was stripped from him resulting in the notion it is okay to harm him and throw him away. The recent ordinances banning encampments and everyday activities of homeless individuals (panhandling, food sharing) has resulted in the criminalization of homelessness (NCFTH, 2016b). Homeless individuals have been the target of violence solely because they are homeless (NCFTH, 2016b). As such, this microassault may be the direct result of the criminalization of homelessness. Rather than being seen as individuals needing help, homeless people are portrayed as nuisances needing to be eradicated like any other pest. This type of symbolic violence is a form of power relation used by dominant classes to keep others in their place.

Microinsults

In the category of microinsults, three new themes emerged: intellectual inferiority, ascription of exceptionalism, and decentering the subject. For both Hillman and Harris,

the articles and comments alluded to some type of intellectual deficiency, either mental illness or lack of intelligence. Hillman was routinely assumed to be mentally ill, with the assumption that this illness was the only reason he would live on the streets. While Hillman may have had a mental illness, the perpetrators of this microaggression discounted the fact that those with a mental illness need treatment that takes money or insurance, two things Hillman may not have had. The articles also discussed his family, friends, and treatment providers, but there was no discussion of these as stable forms of support which would ensure that he was taking medicine or seeing counselors. These assumptions conveniently disregarded what it takes for someone to get help with a mental illness. In the case of Harris, there was extensive discussion around how he would manage all the money raised for him. Many of those who commented suggested Harris would burn through the money and be broke again, or provided suggestions on what he should do with the money, or noted that he needed someone to manage the money for him. These comments implied Harris was homeless because he was not capable of managing money. They also discounted other structural reasons for homelessness, thus suggesting homelessness is an individual problem.

Ascription of exceptionalism was a microinsult theme that was found for both Williams and Harris. According to the articles and comments, these two men were clearly exceptions to those who would "typically" be homeless. In the case of Williams, his voice talent, sincerity, and communication skills set him apart from other Black homeless men. For Harris, his honesty and morality seemed to contradict many individuals' impression of homeless people. This notion is not just based on class status, but emerges through the study of race. When Black individuals transcend certain stereotypes, they

become exceptional. These exceptional men should not be homeless. Because both men seemed to have talents or traits beyond what was expected, an outpouring of help came to them. While it is certainly positive to give money or offer a job to someone in need, when individuals do this only after someone has "proven their worth" it suggests there is a level of worthiness required in order to receive help. This is not to suggest that neither Williams nor Harris is deserving, but rather to question why these two men were flooded with offers and money, while others, like Hillman, were seen as nondeserving.

The final microinsult that emerged was specific to Harris. The idea of decentering the subject was prominent in his articles and comments. While Harris was always mentioned in the articles, the focus shifted from Harris to his "saviors." The reporting on these articles served more to remind the readers that Darling dropping her ring was what led to this situation, that Darling and her husband raised the money, that they raised a certain amount of money, or that the various news articles reconnected Harris and his family. These are all aspects of the story, but they serve to overshadow Harris. Additionally, those who commented often focused on the gift that Darling and Krejci gave Harris. There was no mention within the articles of how Harris became homeless or why he had not tried to reach out to his family. This could have been caused by the Williams and Hillman stories that took negative turns. By focusing on the "saviors," a positive story of kindness by those who were dominant toward a marginalized individual emerged. Many comments were also made that focused on the kindness of the "saviors" or acts of the commenter, rather than on issues related to homelessness. What results is an impression that those in the dominant culture constantly reach out to help those in need, when in reality there are many homeless people in need who do not get this kind of help.

Each of these microinsults conveys a rudeness or insensitivity to Black homeless individuals, as well as others, by demeaning their identity in a variety of ways.

Microinvalidations

Microaggressions also emerged in the category of microinvalidations. Three themes emerged: significant absences, divine assistance, and assumption of sameness. The theme of significant absences was present for Williams, Hillman, and Harris. This theme highlights how important or relevant information is left out of the articles and comments. The causes of homelessness, statistics related to homelessness, and resources for homelessness were all rendered invisible. This lack of information is similar to how Jay Rosen (2003) described the journalistic master narrative, as part of the press that eludes attention. As Mendelberg (2001) suggested that framing works best when the audience does not realize it. As such, this lack of information is more of a covert frame that results in microinvalidations as the voices and experiences of these and other homeless, Black men have silenced. Because these issues were not addressed, the cause of homelessness appeared to be specifically an individual issue. In some cases this was true. For example, Williams readily admitted drugs and alcohol were what caused him to become homeless. However, as noted throughout this dissertation, economic issues are the primary cause of homelessness. There were several other important issues that the articles and comments failed to discuss. Williams has been very active in homeless communities, but his book, film, and other contributions were barely mentioned and never discussed. There was also little to no information about how Hillman or Harris became homeless. In fact, Hillman himself was virtually silenced, only having a voice in

the very last story that was published in my sample. When issues of homelessness were talked about, they were primarily discussed by the "experts," not the men who were experiencing the realities of homelessness. This deficit coverage, coupled with comments providing stereotypical and incorrect information about homeless people, masked the realities of homeless people by reinforcing stereotypical assumptions.

Another microinvalidation that is present in the Williams and Harris narratives is that of divine assistance. This notion takes the positive aspects of these men's experiences, as well as their agency, and credits them to a higher power. Although both Williams and Harris expressed their own faith, the comments stripped away Williams' talent and work at sobriety and Harris' integrity and attributed these talents and traits to a higher power. For instance, commenters overlooked Williams' explanation that he went to school to develop his voice and attributed his golden voice to God. They also suggested God delivered him from drugs, rather than Williams' own actions in his quest for sobriety. Harris' honesty was attributed to God or angels working through him, not to his honest upbringing. This microinvalidation suggests that it was an individual act that caused the men's homelessness, but it was a higher power that delivered them from their homeless situation. This ultimately suggests that these men were somehow innately bad, and that only through God's grace were they able to succeed. This microinvalidation is an excellent example of people trying to be positive, but still actually diminishing another's personal characteristics.

The final microinvalidation was the assumption of sameness. This was found in the articles and comments relating specifically to Hillman. Both the articles and many of the comments linked Hillman with various other homeless people of color. Hillman was

linked to Williams, Joyce Brown, and a homeless Guatemalan mother, among others. In some cases they were linked by race and in other cases through the stereotypes of scamming the system, mental illness, and addiction. These types of linkages reinforce both racial and class stereotypes. The assertion that all homeless people are all the same fails to consider each individual's experience and to consider the structural barriers facing many individuals. What can be concluded from these findings related to microaggressions is (a) race does indeed play a factor in how these homeless individuals are perceived, (b) those in homeless situations face microaggressions that are unique to them, (c) through various microaggressions, homelessness is believed to be the result of individual actions, but escaping homelessness takes a "savior" or higher power, and (d) individuals use microaggressions as a means to differentiate themselves from those in marginalized groups, in order to maintain their position in the hegemonic order.

Visual Microaggressions

When the images and videos are analyzed across the cases, interesting findings emerge. The first is that there is a constant reminder that these men are second-class citizens. This is illustrated by the always-present visual reference to them panhandling and/or sitting on the sidewalk. The image of Williams holding his sign asking for help, the photo of Hillman sitting against the wall as the officer hands him boots, and the image of Harris sitting against a sign post where his bike was locked up are present in almost every article and video regarding each individual. Even after Williams and Harris were able to get off the streets, these images of them served as constant reminders that they were still somehow "less than" those in the dominant culture and of whom they were

prior to the help of the dominant culture. Also, there is a connection between historic imagery of Black men and the images that journalist use and audiences are drawn to. Once Williams took on "celebrity status" he was often pictured as the happy minstrel performing for the audience. He typically had a big smile and was routinely pictured behind a microphone surrounded by cameras or on an interview stage. Hillman's images were very reminiscent of the lazy coon character. He was photographed sitting on the ground and leaning up against a wall, wearing ill-fitting clothing. Or he was shown with a crazy bug-eyed expression as a White male talked to and about him. Harris' images portrayed a kindly looking older Black man with graying hair and a beard wearing warm, but tattered clothes. His pictures evoked the Uncle Tom images used in the books and movies.

A second visual microaggression that emerged was the visual connection between each man and a White "savior" figure. Williams was shown with Savannah Guthrie, Meredith Vieira, Matt Lauer, and Dr. Phil. Even when Williams reconnected with his mother, he was surrounded by White journalists, reporters, and camera men. Jeffrey Hillman's photos were with a visually White officer who gave him boots or with his White childhood friend Reverend John Graf, Jr. While they were not photographed together, there was also the connection between Hillman and Jennifer Foster, the White woman who took the initial photograph. Finally, Harris was constantly shown with Darling and Krejci. They, along with Savannah Guthrie, were even there when he was reconnected with his family. What these images do is two-fold. First, they disseminate and (re)produce a visual discourse connecting Black men with both homelessness and historical stereotypical caricatures, reinforcing Black individuals as second-class citizens.

Second, they create an illusion of White individuals as heroes stepping in and helping Black people out of their self-induced situations.

An overall conclusion that can be drawn from the above discussion on the microaggressions that emerged from the story is that microaggressions are present well beyond our interpersonal interactions and are becoming ubiquitous in our online interactions. Although there were almost no specific instances of overt racism, it is clear race is a lens that is used when discussing homelessness. These findings suggest that online microaggressions are used to maintain and legitimize ideologies of White supremacy.

How Microaggressions Alter the Stories and Narrative

The second question I sought to explore was how the use of microaggressions within the article and/or comments alter the narrative being produced by the stories. As noted at the very beginning of this dissertation, a story is a unit of an event that relates the who, when, where, and how. Each online article with its images and comments tells a story. Narratives are a system of stories (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005). For example, a narrative is created when we combine the stories about Jeffrey Hillman within the content of *USA Today*. This online content of the stories becomes Hillman's digital narrative. A social narrative is created when a similar story recurs in multiple different texts. This includes the varying texts in which Hillman is presented, as well as the varying texts we see discussing other homeless individuals. Microaggressions may consciously or unconsciously be used by the author that subtly alter the overall meaning of an article. Through the addition of the comment sections, microaggressions invoked by the

commenters can also alter the point of the article.

The articles that emerged for these three men all began as “feel-good” stories featuring a kind act done to them or by them. Not coincidently, all the articles emerged during winter holidays, potentially aiming to garner seasonal awareness of homelessness (Hodgetts, Cullen, & Radley, 2005; Lind & Danowski, 1999; Snow, 1996; Whang, 1993). Within the articles themselves, subtle negative references, the ongoing coverage (especially of Williams and Hillman), and the use of certain images change the “feel-good” nature of the initial stories to less-than-flattering narratives about homeless Black men. The subtle and not-so-subtle references to mental illness, drugs and alcohol, and lack of contact with their families adds even more negativity to the narrative. What is not being told in the story exacerbates the negativity of the story. By eliminating the voices of homeless individuals and not addressing issues relating to homelessness, narratives are created that suggest homelessness is an individual problem, rather than a structural issue. Finally, the constant textual and visual references to White savior figures reinforce the narrative that Black individuals are unable to succeed without the help of White individuals. Of course it is not just the authors of the articles who employee microaggressions that alter the stories and narratives.

By using microaggressive language, those who comment have the opportunity to reshape the story, and each story that is reshaped affects the narrative. It is also important to note that often readers skim the articles and then skip to the comments, thus some readers’ comments are based solely on other comments. There are several ways commenter microaggressions inform the stories and narratives. One of the challenges faced by online news sources utilizing comment sections is handling vitriolic comments.

For Hillman, when the stories took a negative turn after he was seen without boots, the microassaults ramped up from accusations of ungratefulness to accusations of addiction, and then comments advocating harm to him. This changed the story from one about a guy whose actions were not what "society" hoped for, to a guy who was so despicable that he should be harmed or killed. In a country that has a violent past and present in regards to the treatment Black individuals, this illustrates that individuals still carry with them deep-seated racial hatred. This is especially important in our current political climate. Our presidential administration has made this type of language appropriate and acceptable. Understanding the how individuals are using microaggressions and their effects are more important than ever.

Related to this, some microaggressions change the story through the comments related to entitlements, intelligence, mental illness, or addiction, especially when the articles do not reference any of these as contributing to the individual's homeless situation. These types of microaggressions point out individual deficits as major causes of homelessness, rather than societal structures. For many, references to welfare, laziness, and drug use are often coded language for discussing Black individuals. This suggests that some commenters are more focused on the race of the individual than his status as homeless, thus reinforcing stereotypes surrounding Black individuals.

Many of the commenters focus on the actions of the White saviors or credit a higher power to helping these men. This suggests that homeless individuals find themselves homeless through their own poor choices; however, when something good happens it is credited to someone else. These microaggressions decenter the homeless individual as the subject and refocus the narrative from an internal action by a homeless

man to the help provided by an external source. A significant conclusion relates to that implicit bias of pro-White and anti-Black sentiment. It appears that there can be no solely positive story related to a Black individual. There either needs to be something revealed that is negative, or White individuals need to play a positive role in the Black individual's success. This creates a narrative that Black people are somehow less than White people. Ultimately, no matter one's intentions, social conditioning instills within each of us ideas, beliefs, and stereotypes outside our awareness. So while many individuals consciously endorse equality, on an unconscious level they act in ways that impede equality. This research shines a light on this in hopes that by recognizing what we are doing, we can make positive changes.

Microaggressions and Master Narratives

The final question I explored was how the use and proliferation of online microaggressions reinforces master narratives. Master narratives are those narratives that have endured the test of time and become embedded in culture. They are the big stories that all other stories stem from. As noted above, microaggression are often conveyed by well-intentioned individuals, unaware they are harming or devaluing a marginalized group. While these microaggressions do not appear to be harmful on the surface, they have an impact on the psychological and physical health of the marginalized group or individual at whom they are aimed (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano; Sue, 2010). Microaggressions also reflect and express individuals' oppressive worldviews, thus exposing an individual's habitus or dispositions that have been shaped by past experiences and shape current practices and structures (Bourdieu, 1984). It is

through these microaggressions that oppressive or deficit worldviews are created, fostered, and reinforced. Most of this is beyond our conscious awareness.

When we look holistically at the microaggressions relating to each individual they recreate historic stereotypes: the entertainer, the lazy coon, and the devoted Uncle Tom. These caricatures emerge through the articles, comments, and images. What this suggests is that Black people are seen solely has entertainers and servers by the dominant culture. There was no reason to continue the articles focusing on Williams and Harris beyond the "feel-good" stories as they provided no newsworthy value. They were no longer uplifting stories that could inspire others, they failed to address real issues facing these and other homeless individuals, and they began to portray these men negatively. These stories were purely voyeuristic. Through a distorted lens, the dominant culture watches these men, who are subtly victimized by the racist and classist caricatures created through microaggressions found in the articles and the comments. Harris is portrayed as a man content with his life on the streets. With the help of the White saviors he becomes civilized and devoted to them. This parallels the portrayal of slaves in minstrel shows who were happy with their lot and life and needed the influence of slavery to keep them in check. Invoking these stereotypes and presenting homeless Black males in these ways, White people are able to view themselves as socially and culturally superior.

The final and possibly most significant finding in this project was how the microaggressions reinforce the master narrative of White people's superiority over Black people. This master narrative of the United States is based in colonialism and emphasizes European perspectives. Within this master narrative, White American history is presented in the most favorable light, often distorting or ignoring counter stories and narratives that

challenge this perspective. The current beliefs and stereotypes about Black people reflect caricatures of Black people that predate the abolition of slavery and were often used to entertain the masses through minstrel shows. This not only illustrates racial and class bias, it also suggests that our view of Black individuals is still being influenced by our preabolition beliefs about Black people.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study provides a unique contribution to microaggression research, there are several limitations to consider. First, because I had no contact with the subjects of this research (or other homeless individuals), it is possible that they do not or would not consider the images or what was written about them as microaggressions. Additionally, I have no idea how aware Williams, Hillman, and Harris are regarding the scope of the coverage they each received. This is not to imply they lack awareness, but simply to suggest they may not have had or taken the opportunity to research how many stories and comments were written about them. Future research could include working with homeless populations to examine their perspective on how homeless populations are covered and commented about in online news stories. This would also allow for more discussion related to agency.

Second, because this investigation only looked at viral stories of Black homeless males, future research must explore if these same themes would hold for a different demographic population of homeless individuals. Or, one could consider a comparative project focusing on similarities and differences between homeless men and women or homeless White and non-White people. It might also be relevant to focus on locally

bound stories. As this research looked at online news that has national and international reach, looking at local or regional online news and the comments may produce different findings. For instance, individuals who live in cities with larger homeless populations likely have different experiences and perspectives than those who live in communities with few homeless individuals, leading to different types of responses. Also, it might be easier to comment anonymously on a highly circulated online newspaper, as opposed to a local or regional online source.

A third limitation is using online comments. Although this type of research potentially allows a fuller range of microaggressive expressions than other types of qualitative research, it also prevents gathering of demographic information. While some individuals may have used their real names or pictures in their postings, there is no way of knowing for sure. Even though there is a demographic of readership provided by each online news source, there is no way of breaking down gender, race, age, or other important aspects to see who is saying what in the comments. Future research could develop simulated sites to obtain this demographic information, but provide for anonymity in posting.

Finally, this qualitative approach was used to explore and uncover trends in thought to provide a deeper understanding of the use and effects of microaggressions. To provide more transferable data, a multimethod project could be useful to quantify online attitudes and behaviors relating to microaggressions. This would allow us to quantify the total number of perpetrator microaggressions and the number of microaggression per theme, and to examine emergent themes in the data.

Despite these limitations, this study answers the research questions and adds to

the existing literature on microaggressions and online racism, by illustrating that microaggressions need to be considered beyond interpersonal acts. The findings suggest a continued need to explore how individuals are publicly communicating messages that subtly perpetuate dominant, white supremacist ideologies.

Implications and Reflection

Results from this study suggest several implications for both education and news media. With the election of the current president and his administration, we have seen a great influx in both overtly hateful and covertly oppressive language and the study of microaggressions will become even more important. If we begin to understand the underlying meaning of some of the covert language being used, we can challenge it. One of the best ways to tackle issues of microaggressions is through education. Educators at all levels need to bring examples of how we use covert or unintentional language to the forefront and create dialogue that allows students to explore their own understanding of issues of race, class, gender, and so forth. As this research has shown, microaggressions can be found online and therefore easy to show and discuss with others. Educators, who learn from this research and the lived experiences of those they are advocating for, can illustrate how racism and other forms of discrimination are embedded in our society and shape our individual thoughts and actions. Through education, professionals can counter misinformation that is inaccurate or poses a threat to marginalized groups. Additionally, learners can be made aware that these subtle slights against another are not harmless, but rather deeply impact individuals and groups on both a personal and societal level.

Most significantly, we can use the findings of this research to examine the ways

in which our current presidential administration and its supporters are using microaggressive language and actions to continue to support the White, male, dominant, hegemonic master narratives. Through this administration, it will be important to see how social narratives are being created and disseminated. The concepts of alternative facts and fake news are part of a social narrative used to counter challenges presented to the president and his policies. Stories about violence and intolerance directed at minorities are considered fake news while overtly inaccurate information about crimes committed by non-White individuals are considered truth. These have created a social narrative for those who support this administration, giving them permission to treat the "other" as second-class citizens or worse. These social narratives are also functioning to create digital narratives for those individuals considered to be threatening the health and safety of the nation, such as Muslims and both legal and illegal immigrants.

As prior research has shown, race and class are presented in a deficit model within news media (Best, 2010; Buck, Toro, & Ramos, 2004; Clawson & Trice, 2000; Entman & Rojecki, 1992; Gilens, 1999; Kellstedt, 2000;). Along with this, commenters often intentionally or unintentionally propagate racial or classist ideologies (Daniels, 2009; Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003; Glaser, Dixit, & Green, 2002; LeDuff & Cecala, 2012; Steinfeldt et al., 2010). In the cases of Ted Williams and Billy Ray Harris, to some extent it seemed that the media and many commenters were trying to counter the narratives associated with both Black men and homeless individuals. As Lori Adelman posited in her opinion piece in *The Grio*, "When depictions of black men go viral, are small or temporary gains in their personal fortunes or fame enough to justify the potential exploitation and cultural fallout that takes place along the way" (2011, para.16)? If we as

a society are ready to move on, we must stop objectifying those we argue we are helping.

This objectification of marginalized individuals is bound to become worse with the current administration. But, by understanding how and why microaggressions are emerging beyond the individual to the societal level, individuals and media establishments can create change. With the current administrations' view on marginalized groups and with their proclaiming fake news or alternative facts directed at our most established media outlets, it is more important than ever to get fair and accurate portrayals in the media. Because there is more room to provide additional information within online formats, journalist could supplement stories like these with links to facts about race, homelessness, or other topics relevant to our society. Links to reputable sites could be provided for more information about homelessness or about how people can help. Because online comments do provide a venue for open discussions on these types of topics, I believe they should be kept. Rather than having just a place where readers can place comments, these sources could provide temporary moderated sites for posting comments. The site would only be open for comments for a few days, but during that time article authors or experts in the field could address commenters and work to facilitate discussion. As found in the research by Stroud, Van Duyn, Alizor, Alibahi, and Lang (2016), those who comment would like to have journalists clarify factual questions, have experts participate in the comment sections, and have journalists contribute to the comments. While this study has focused on race and homelessness online, it is important to see how microaggressions affect the narrative of all marginalized individuals.

As this study comes to a close, I want to take a moment and reflect on this project. As I began this research, I was one of those well-meaning, fair-minded individuals

endorsing egalitarian values. At times, I was incredibly angry and stressed by some of the more vitriolic comments and frustrated with some of what I thought were class- or race-motivated articles and comments. At other times I was moved or inspired by some of the articles and comments that showed sensitivity and reflection regarding these men and the issue of homelessness. What challenged me most was that some of what I was reading echoed my thoughts. Prior to the research, I was well aware of many of the structural causes of homelessness; even so I found myself drawing from the same stereotypical notions as many of the commenters. I questioned Williams' tactics for getting a job (holding a sign up), without considering how difficult it would be for a homeless person to proceed through the "traditional" application and interview process or even considering his agency in engaging in this act. I made assumptions of mental illness or addiction as I read about Hillman, without considering how financial support affects this. I was grateful for Darling and Krejci and what they had done for Harris, without considering the implications their kind act had on other homeless people. It was through this project that I began to recognize that even those of us who support and advocate equality frequently perpetuate what we are fighting against. It is important that those of us who are part of the dominant culture remember that no matter how passionate or involved we are in fighting for equality, we are also part of the structure that prevents it. During the time of this writing, this is more important than ever. With the United States on the verge of turning into a White nationalist country, seeing an increase in hate crimes, and having a president and administration who clearly devalue and are trying to dismantle programs such as education, health care, public assistance, and social justice,

understanding the ways in which individuals in our society communicate overtly, covertly, intentionally, and unintentionally is more important than ever.

Table 8.1: Taxonomy of microaggressions related to race and homelessness.

Microaggressions Definition		
Intentional or unintentional verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults based on race, class, sexuality, gender, etc.		
Categories of Microaggressions		
Microinsults Often unconscious communication conveying rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person's race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.	**Microassaults** Conscious and explicit derogations meant to hurt the intended victim through violent verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attack.	**Microinvalidations** Often unconscious communication that excludes, negates, or nullifies the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of another individual.
Examples of Microaggressive Themes by Category		
Second-Class Citizen One is treated as less than another based on identity characteristics. *In the case of homelessness, denied the right to privacy and face different expectations than other citizens.	**Waging Stereotypical Attack** Use of stereotypes that demean and humiliate based on social identity.	**Significant Absences** Failure to address causes of social problems or to include the voices of marginalized individuals in addressing their specific situation.
Intellectual Inferiority Belief that those in homeless situations are there because they lack intellectual capacity. This includes mental illness, uneducated, or unintelligence.	**Assertion of Harm of Violence** Extreme devaluing of another based on identity resulting in language asserting harm or violence against them	**Divine Assistance** When positive actions or results are attributed to a higher power than individual agency.
Ascription of Exceptionalism When certain individuals in marginalized groups become the exception to whom we would expect to be in that group.		**Assumption of Sameness** All people of certain social identities have the same experiences.
Decentering the Subject Refocusing attention from marginalized individuals back to those in the dominant culture.		
Assumption of Deviance/Criminality Those living on the street are deviant and earn income through scams and criminal activities.		

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE OF CODING TABLE FOR ARTICLES

Table A.1: Sample coding table for articles

Source	*NPR.org*, February 26, 2013	*USAToday.com*, February 25, 2013	*TheGrio.com*, March 6, 2013
Title	Donations Pour In For Homeless Man Who Returned Ring He Got By Mistake	Homeless hero returns woman's engagement ring	Homeless man who returned ring gets over $175K in donations
Author	Mark Memmott	AP Story	Meena Hart Duerson
Additional Narrators	Billy Ray Harris, Sarah Darling, Bill Krejci - all have quotes	Sarah Darling – quote, Harris quote	Robin, Harris, sister - has quotes
Characters	Billy Ray Harris, Sarah Darling, Bill Krejci	Harris, Darling	Robin Harris
Comments	106- taxes and politics, heartwarming, do not judge	14 – kindness. No judging appearances	25 – reference God and family after money
Main Points	Raised over 100K, Reiterate story, Darlings miracle – ring not lost, feared not be returned – Harris a thief?, Krejci talks with Harris about $, Why not pawned? No homeless context, no info about Harris – where from, why homeless. Feel good story. Article has links to Williams nd Hillman articles	Stock photo of ring, Amount donated Harris panhandles Harris thought ring was $$$ Darling – good people out there, it was a miracle Harris has religious upbringing No context to homelessness	Includes Today video How much raised, brief recap of events. Harris gone 16 years. Robin recognizing him and tracked him down. Emotional connection for Robin – headline reference $, article references fam.No context to Harris' homelessness or causes of homelessness

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE OF CODING TABLE FOR COMMENTS

Table B.1: Sample coding table for comments

USAToday.com - Hillman	Bob Makin	N.J. classmates rally around homeless man in viral photo (55 comments)	12/4/2012
Commenter	**Comment**		**Notes**
Wyatt Buchanan	You could fill sypmathy for the guy until he says "**I want a piece of the pie**". C'mon.... you got **boots** and your getting **free shelter** and who knows what else. His family said they would welcome him into their home but the **homeless beggar** life is a life he has **chosen**. Move on.		Entitlements Beggar Chose homelessness Piece of pie
Gary Richards · - multiple comments	He is a **MENTALLY ILL** VETERAN! GOT IT YET? 14 **Veteran**s are committing suicide everyday Wyatt. Get the picture yet?		Mentally Ill Vet *Does not say mentally ill vet in article.
Andrew Miller – multiple comments	Good lord, how much are we supposed to **'give'**? Guy already **has a home** and obviously finds it **better to live on the streets**, and not wear his newly gifted **boots**, and **asks for youtube money**. How much until the left realizes you can't help everybody because **some don't want it** or are going to take advantage? Really close to using the word 'idiot(s)'		Entitlements Better on streets Don't want help *Political debate
Keith Faulkner	How long till the right realizes that you cant lump everyone in similar situations into one group because of a few a-holes and that it makes it convienent to post a bs comment about **a certain class of people** to **dehumanize** them tothe point that its **exceptable to kick them** while their already down		Certain class of people – homeless Dehumanize Treat them poorly *Challenge comment *Political debate
Calonie Johnson – multiple comments	I say if he is sooo **mentally ill**, he SURE knows how to ask that he get a **'piece of the pie'** from all this media action. HE sounds **pretty sane** to me.		Piece of pie Not mentally ill/sane
Andrew Miller – multiple comments	Cj Laity don't think you did. Tracey, I agree. I only give food, nothing more or less (other than tax dollars), other than time. **Our poor live like royalty** compared to the world, and more is asked for. It has made me more of a 'scrooge' with the money I earn, because I've seen it, I've lived it. I've been around **people who've sold their 'food stamps' for booze** and other **substances of abuse**. I've seen people get thousands on a tax 'refund'/giveaway that buy TVs, new shoes (expensive as possible of course) and whatever else that does nothing more than try to proclaim some type of status		Poor live great Entitlements Alcohol Drugs Poor money management/status Only give food

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