

## **Prompt**

Early in the quarter, you identified a topical learning objective for yourself and steps to achieve it. You then balanced challenge and support in order to address concerns you may have had about approaching the topic, undertook the steps, and hopefully learned a lot from the experience. For this third and final step in the individual topical learning objective process, you will reflect upon what you learned and the experience of learning it and identify how that experience makes future new learning objectives possible.

### Individual Topic Reflective Essay

Word count: 1,200

#### **1. What specific topic did you explore and what steps did you take to explore it? (short)**

I explored the topic of the microaggressions that fat, heterosexual women face in online dating. My learning edge was how I respond to these microaggressions versus how others think I should respond to them. Throughout my topic exploration, I took advantage of journal articles and news stories. While exploring this topic, I was surprised by the lack of research regarding it. While my topic was precise, there did not seem to be a major focus on fat women of any sexual preference and the microaggressions they face with online dating. The studies I found were mainly focused on women of color and the microaggressions that they face in their day-to-day lives. With the research that I did find, I was able to pair other studies together regarding fat women and come to multiple researched and educated conclusions about my topic.

#### **2. What were the significant insights you gained about your topic? (long)**

There were many insights gained during my research. Many of these insights further deepened my knowledge of how I exist as a heterosexual fat woman in the dating scene. The phenomenon of microaggressions aimed at fat women, is not a new prejudice. Women have been experiencing these microaggressions long before online dating became popular. With microaggressions being based off of stereotypes, systemic oppression, and social discrimination, individuals producing these microaggressions are unaware of their demeaning behavior and words.

Microaggressions produce cognitive, physiological, and emotional effects, even if the receiver is unaware of these effects taking place. These effects often lead to depression, eating disorders, low self-esteem, and trust issues. Many of the messages I have received while online dating, refer to my body. Men like to comment on how much they love bigger women. Some comments I have either received or seen on dating profiles are as follows:

“I love bigger women!”

“I’m not interested in anyone over X weight.”

“You’re not fat, you’re curvy!”

“If you don’t go to the gym, swipe left.”

“Fat women are the best in bed.”

These microaggressions all leave lasting impacts because they are all rooted in the notion and belief that fat women are unlovable. The connotation with these comments is that I should be lucky that someone likes my fatness, that being fat is a negative trait, that as a fat woman, I am not worthy or beautiful, and that fat women are only good for sex.

With microaggressions being subtle, their threat is not immediately noticeable, and thus gaslighting by outsiders, ensues. Fat women receiving these microaggressions are made to feel as if their feelings and reactions are extreme and over the top. With these reactions, fat women then start to believe that these microaggressions are not as extreme as they actually are and that they are over-reacting. Many women decide to stay quiet and deal with the microaggressions for fear of being seen as combative and problematic.

### **3. How were these insights meaningful to you? (long)**

These insights gave me reassurance for myself and for the way that I deal with microaggressions. They have also given me a better understanding of microaggressions overall. Learning that these microaggressions can perpetuate cognitive, physiological, and emotional issues, was overwhelming for me. I have spent a lot of time connecting the dots between mental illness and microaggressions towards fat women.

It was insightful to learn how microaggressions should be addressed. Although they are implicitly learned at a cultural level, the ability to call out these prejudices falls at the individual level. As someone being oppressed, it is difficult to determine who bears the responsibility of calling out the microaggressions. With these microaggressions taking place online however, the responsibility falls on the individual being oppressed since they are the only one directly impacted by the microaggression at the time of the incident.

While it is upsetting that the responsibility falls on the woman, it also feels empowering that I can decide to call out my oppressors online if I choose to. Knowing that outsiders usually do not see microaggressions as seriously as they are, I have become empowered to handle microaggressions as I see fit. With the online dating platform being digital, calling out microaggressions does not put women in the same immediate danger that calling them out in person would. I am not in any physical danger, I can disengage (block) them at my own discretion, and the information they have on me is scarce, so I do not feel the need to alter my day-to-day life after calling individuals out.

### **4. How does better understanding your topic shape what topics you might explore in the future? What new future learning has become possible because of your completed objective? (medium)**

By being more informed on my topic, I feel that I can apply what I have learned from my research, to other microaggressions. I am confident that I have the agency to speak out on microaggressions that I see in the world. Although the experiences and results of microaggressions are always going to be different, microaggressions stem from the same stereotypes and systemic oppression.

Since completing my objective, I am excited for future learning opportunities! In a previous class, I researched visual bias in online dating and came up with strategies and solutions to combat the bias. It was an eye-opening experience for me and lead me to

choose the topic of microaggressions towards heterosexual fat women in online dating. I would love for future objectives to also fall within the topic of online dating. Specifically, I would love to explore how profile content impacts online dating and how the content can be tied to different socioeconomic and oppressive backgrounds.

**5. During the individual topical learning objective process overall, what if any new observations about yourself in relation to the topic arose? What if any new observations about how you learn uncomfortable material arose? (medium)**

Researching and learning more about the microaggressions that heterosexual fat women face in online dating, has enabled me to come to terms with some deep-seated issues that I deal with and have dealt with in the past. I was shocked after learning that microaggressions can lead to depression and eating disorders. I have dealt with depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, and attention deficit disorder for almost my whole life, and have also been in therapy for these issues for as long as I can remember. On top of that, I have struggled with binge eating disorder for at least ten years. I cannot help but think that microaggressions towards me have aided in the manifestation of these issues.

In a previous assignment, I had mentioned that researching this topic was difficult for me due to its heavy nature and relatability. It was uncomfortable having to acknowledge the microaggressions and hate that I receive due to being fat. With this being said though, this uncomfortable feeling allowed me to shatter a glass ceiling that has been holding me back for a long time. I was able to let go of the guilt that I have felt for not being the polite woman online when microaggressions were thrown my way. My vulnerabilities were exposed and it was a freeing feeling knowing that an individual's oppression and bias were not my burden to bear.

**6. Looking back with hindsight for a moment, did your choice of topic turn out to be worthwhile for you? (If not, what topic does hindsight suggest you should have pursued perhaps instead?) (short)**

Looking back, I believe that my topic was beyond worthwhile for me. While I had some general knowledge about microaggressions towards fat individuals, my knowledge never ran as deep as my specific topic. By researching this topic, I have become knowledgeable, confident, and empowered to research this topic and implement my findings. Not only has this topic pushed me to be a better advocate for myself, but it has also pushed me to be a better advocate for others as well.