



Gender and Disability: The Experiences of Microaggressions Against Women with Disabilities in the Philippines

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Abstract

This article presents how women with disabilities experience microaggression from a gender lens. Through analyzing a qualitative dataset from 14 women with disabilities, this article showed the distinct microaggression types against women with disabilities. The findings from the study supported seven (7) of Keller and Galgay (Microaggressions and marginality: manifestations, dynamics and impact, Wiley, Hoboken, 2010) Ten (10) Domains of Microaggression. This research also revealed other aspects of microaggression that are important in extending the existing knowledge of gender and disability studies. First, perpetrators of microaggression against women with disabilities are primarily in closed communities such as their families and friends. Second, gender microaggression may present a continuum towards sexual harassment, but this needs further investigation. This article explains the following recommendations: (i) targeted public campaigns to reduce specific types of microaggression; (ii) changes in public transportation systems; (iii) more studies on women with disabilities; (iv) integration of practical and strategic gender interest in disability inclusion in the Philippines.

Keywords Microaggression · Ableism · Women with disabilities · Sexual harassment · Disability studies

Résumé

Cet article présente la façon dont les femmes qui vivent avec un handicap font l'expérience de micro-agressions, en adoptant la perspective du genre. Grâce à l'analyse d'un ensemble de données qualitatives issues de 14 femmes vivant avec un handicap, cet article montre les différents types de micro-agression envers les femmes qui vivent avec un handicap. Les résultats de l'étude ont retenu sept (7)

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des dix (10) domaines de la micro-agression de Keller et Galgay (2010). Cette étude a également révélé d'autres aspects des micro-agressions qui sont importants pour étendre le champ des connaissances dans le cadre des études sur le genre et le handicap. Premièrement, les auteurs de micro-agressions envers les femmes vivant avec un handicap se trouvent principalement dans des communautés fermées telles que le cercle familial et amical. Deuxièmement, une micro-agression liée au genre peut déboucher sur un harcèlement sexuel, mais ce point nécessite d'être approfondi. Cet article formule les recommandations suivantes : (i) mener des campagnes publiques ciblées pour réduire certains types de micro-agression ; (ii) réaliser des changements dans le système de transports publics ; (iii) conduire davantage d'études concernant les femmes vivant avec un handicap ; (iv) intégrer les questions pratiques et stratégiques liées au genre à la question de l'inclusion du handicap aux Philippines.

Introduction

The Philippines ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2008. Since then, the Philippines has had impressive outcomes on a legislative level to address discrimination against women (e.g., RA 9710 or the Magna Carta of Women, RA 9262, Anti-Rape Law of 1997, RA 10354), and persons with disabilities (e.g., RA 7277 or the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities, RA 10754, RA 10524, Batas Pambansa 344, and RA 6759) compared to other Southeast Asian countries. The Philippines is the first in Southeast Asia, and the 23rd country in the world, to sign and ratify the UNCRPD, and also the first in the Pacific region to have a Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities (Cruz et al. 2015, p. 55, para. 3). However, despite the intersecting human rights standards of CEDAW and UNCRPD in addressing women's rights and the rights of women with disabilities (WWDs), the enactment of domestic legislation has been extremely poor (A). A 2013 report from the Philippine Coalition on the UNCRPD showed that since the ratification of the international treaties, government-led efforts were only limited to awareness-raising and celebratory activities of persons with disabilities (PWDs)¹. According to the [Philippine] Coalition, 'resources are not put into maximal use because these celebrations are repetitive, lacking in substance from the perspective of human rights advocates, and still perpetuate a medical view of disability' (Parallel Report on the UNCRPD 2013, slideshare, p. 16, Art. 8, para 2).

¹ The National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA) is a government-mandated agency that formulates policies and coordinates the activities of all agencies, whether public or private, concerning disability issues and concerns. The Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities or Republic Act 7277 is a Philippine law for the rehabilitation, self-development, and self-reliance of disabled persons and their integration into mainstream society and for other purposes. A case in point: NCDA's online discussion board, PWDs, and their family members complained that they could not avail of the discounts in major malls and establishments in their area even if they are qualified to do so [<https://www.ncda.gov.ph/2009/07/discounts-on-basic-commodities/>].



The Philippine Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities, the chief national policy document for PWDs, recognizes discrimination only in the contexts of employment, transportation, and public accommodation of services (NCDA 2020)². However, WWDs experience other types of discrimination way more than what is written in the core legislation. To put discrimination only within the context of the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities denies other types of discrimination that are overt or subtle in nature. More research is needed to investigate forms of discrimination that have not been articulated in the Philippine legislation and have not been discussed in socio-cultural spaces. Given these factors, there are three central goals for this article. The first goal is to document the experiences of discrimination particularly, microaggression and ableism in the context of women with mobility disabilities in the Philippines. The second goal is to analyze forms of microaggression due to the intersecting identities of women with mobility disabilities. These goals will be examined using Keller and Galgay's (2010) Ten Domains of Microaggression as a framework of the study. The third goal is to identify the gender needs of WWDs that may address microaggression and ableism. These will be analyzed using Molyneux's (1985) Practical and Strategic Gender Interests.

Disability Data in the Philippines

Data collection on disability in many countries is at an early stage of development because it is given low priority or often excluded from the official statistics (Tabuga and Mina 2011, sec. Background, para. 2). The World Health Organization (2011) reported that the global estimate for disability data is 15% of the world's population, and disability prevalence is higher for low-income countries (WBG 2020, p. 29 para. 6). In the Philippines, disability-related statistics are scarce with decade-old official estimates (Tabuga and Mina 2011, Review of Literature, para. 1). The Asian Development Bank or the ADB (2005) reported that in 2000, there are an estimated 7.5 million PWDs in the Philippines based on the 10% estimate of the World Health Organization in the 1970s; in 2004, the ADB estimated that numbers were 8.3 million PWDs. Meanwhile, official statistics from the 2010 Census of Population and Housing (CPH) show that of the household population of 92.1 million, only 1.443 million Filipinos, or 1.57%, have a disability (DOH 2020). The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) placed its estimate in 2010 at 1.2%, of which males accounted for 50.9% while females comprised 49.1%. The PSA figures resulted in a sex ratio of 104 males with disabilities for every 100 females with disabilities (PSA 2013). Available statistics show that there are discrepancies in the ADB results in 2005, CPH results in 2010, and the results gathered by the PSA in 2010. Attempts to include PWDs in the national census have not been successful for

² Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities was used by the author than Magna Carta for Disabled People. The author decided to use Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) as the author is concerned that much of the Philippine legal definitions still uses "disabled person" in a way that categorizes and diminishes, rather than as an enlightened understanding of identity language.



many reasons, including the hesitancy of families to declare that they have members with disabilities (Buenaobra 2011 para. 4). Buenaobra (2011) also added that “the general lack of reliable data on disabilities also prevents government agencies from knowing the extent to which PWDs are included in mainstream social services such as education and healthcare (para. 4)”.

In terms of national legislation that addresses disabilities, the Philippines has the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities and other impressive disability laws. The Philippines also has a national council to reinforce these laws. Despite the National Council on Disability Affairs (NCDA), many PWDs still struggle to avail themselves of the mandated discounts, access education, gain employment, and seek medical assistance even when these are their fundamental rights and privileges as stated in the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities. In terms of PWD’s knowledge of the laws that cater to them, the latest data are two Philippine Social Weather Stations (SWS) surveys conducted in December 2011 and July 2013. The two surveys found out that more than half of PWDs had almost no knowledge of the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons. Only 7% answered that they had “extensive” knowledge of it (Cruz et al. 2015, p. 10 para. 1). The latest population data of PWDs in 2010 and the SWS surveys by The Asia Foundation in 2015 show that despite enacted disability laws, the government lacks in providing accurate and updated data about PWDs in the Philippines.

A World Bank study showed that women with disabilities (WWDs) are even more likely to be victims of violence or rape than non-disabled women, and they are less likely to be able to obtain police intervention and legal protection (Women Lobby, 2011). Girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are generally among the more vulnerable and more marginalized of society than other marginalized identities (UN 2020). In the Philippines, most studies on PWDs focus on policy level such as the accessibility of sexual and reproductive health of women (e.g., Lee et al. 2015), policy analysis of disability laws and executive orders (e.g., Tabuga 2013), health and practices of children and women with disabilities (e.g., Reyes et al. 2017). The discrepancies in statistics and the little literature on disability studies continue to show how PWDs, including WWDs, have been invisible in policy implementation and welfare intervention. Because of these gaps, little is discussed about how PWDs, particularly, WWDs are neglected. All of this adds to their systemic marginalization and oppression in the Philippines.

Microaggression and Ableism

Microaggression is the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or harmful messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership (Sue et al. 2007). Most qualitative studies on microaggression are focused on racial experiences of people of color (e.g., Nadal 2011), Asian Americans (e.g., Nadal et al. 2012), and African Americans (e.g., Smith et al. 2007; Sue et al. 2007). Nadal (2015) described that “the majority of microaggression research is focused solely on how microaggressions are triggered



by an individual's single identity." Existing literature on microaggressions is primarily focused on the context of Global North countries like the United States. Notably, less research has been made to concentrate on microaggression experiences against people with multiple and intersecting identities in low-income countries.

WWDs primarily hold at least two marginalized identities (e.g., being a woman and being a person with a disability). Compared to men with disabilities and non-disabled women, WWDs are more vulnerable targets of microaggression due to their intersecting identities of gender and disability (Olkin et al. 2019, p. 758). As women, the social construction of gender puts them in subordinated positions with non-disabled men and even men with disabilities. Pineda-Ofreneo (2000) explained that "women's subordination in society is justified and maintained by a prevailing gender ideology, a system of ideas and beliefs that rationalizes the relative positions of men and women in society." On the one hand, WWDs experience microaggression through hierarchical power systems brought by sexism which is similar to the WWDs' experience of microaggression through hierarchical power brought by ableism. As WWDs, their subordination in society is reinforced by a predominating ableist ideology, the compulsory preference for non-disability (Campbell 2009). The subordinated position of women to men has parallelisms to the subordinated position of PWDs to non-disabled people. Systems of power manifested in forms of sexism have placed women in a lower status than men. Meanwhile, systems of power manifested in ableism have placed PWDs in a lower status than non-disabled persons. When these two identities are combined, WWDs are more subordinated based on their gender and disability. As a result, WWDs become targets of multiple layers of microaggression.

The discourse on microaggression has widened since it tackled not only racial interactions but also other identities such as LGBT (e.g., Nadal et al. 2010), gender (e.g., Capodilupo et al. 2010), and disability (e.g., Keller and Galgay 2010). While microaggressions are generally discussed from the perspective of racism, any marginalized group may become targets: people of color, women, LGBT persons, those with disabilities, religious minorities, and so on (Sue et al. 2007). Sue (2010) discussed that "microaggression is one type of discrimination targeted to stigmatized groups such as the PWDs." When that discrimination is systematized, pervasive, and unjust, it is "oppression," and when targeted at PWDs, it is "ableism" (Olkin et al. 2019, p. 758). Ableism is the overarching act of prejudice and discrimination against PWDs and the devaluation of their disability (Hehir 2002). Keller and Galgay (2010) described ableism as "the unique form of discrimination experienced by PWDs based on their disabilities." Because of the lack of awareness and conversation around ableism, prejudice against PWDs may at times be more prevalent and socially acceptable than any other prejudices (Ford 2009 as stated in Kattari 2018, p 2. para 4). The subtle nature of these prejudices and discrimination becomes an entry point of ableism to manifest in the everyday lives of PWDs and continues to dominate over them. When ableism is combined with subtle or brief acts of discrimination, ableist microaggressions are formed (Kattari 2017, p. 4). Inaccessible public facilities, neurotypical preferences on employment, and educational policies that focus on student segregation are typical examples of ableism in society (e.g., Beratan 2006; Loja et al. 2013; Shier et al. 2009).



Table 1 Keller and Galgay's ten domains of microaggression

Keller and Galgay's (2010) Ten Domains of Microaggression
Examples of disability microaggressions in everyday life

Denial of personal identity	occurs when any aspect of a person's Identity other than disability is ignored or denied
Denial of the disability experience	Occurs when disability-related experiences are minimized or denied
Denial of privacy	Occurs when personal information is required about a disability
Helplessness	Happens when people frantically try to help PWDs
Secondary gain	Occurs when a person expects to feel good or be praised for doing something for a PWD
Spread effect	Occurs when other expectations about a person are assumed to be due to one specific disability
Infantilization	Occurs when a PWD is treated like a child
Patronization	Appears when a PWD is praised for almost anything

Source Keller and Galgay (2010)

Ableist microaggressions are brief or covert insults targeted towards individuals based on their disability status (Keller and Galgay 2010; Sue et al. 2007).

Perhaps, one of the main reasons why WWDs in the Philippines remain invisible, and their experiences of discrimination remain undocumented and unrecognized is that the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities does not consider other types of discrimination in its definitions. Another reason is that the implementation of the Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities among government offices, local government units and private sectors has been vague with activities limited to awareness-raising and celebratory programs. As a result, not all WWDs are heard when they report their experiences of discrimination, microaggression, ableism to authorities. The Magna Carta for Persons with Disabilities also does not have provisions for gender-specific and disability-specific interventions for WWDs. Social barriers have remained which kept WWDs from participating in society. In other words, the Magna Carta for Disabilities does not challenge the long-standing issues of WWDs when it comes to their gender needs and disability needs. The Magna Carta for Disabilities does not also challenge the discriminatory and abled-bodied structures of society because it lacks contexts in capturing the perspectives of WWDs. The invisibility of their discrimination has been the ultimate cause of their systemic marginalization. A qualitative examination of the lived experiences of WWDs must be explored to fully capture a larger context of discrimination, microaggressions and ableism that happen to WWDs. This study used Keller and Galgay's (2010) Ten Domains of Microaggression as a framework to understand the lived experiences of WWDs (Table 1).

Methods

The researcher self-initiated this study; to the researcher's knowledge, no identified review board approved ethics. However, the researcher integrated feminist research methods to carefully conduct the research process with an equal amount of



sensitivity and political commitment to emancipate women with disabilities from unequal power relations.

The article employed two different methods in qualitative research namely, in-depth interview and focus-group discussion (FGD). Feminist research recognizes that traditional social science has begun its analyses solely on men's experiences (Harding 1987). The FGD allowed the researcher to provide participants with a safe space to share their lived experiences of microaggression and ableism. As feminist research, this article applied Hesse-Biber's (2005) feminist values (e.g., placing women at the center of research, gearing towards social change, etc.) throughout the research process. Elis-Sloan (2014, p.134) described that "feminist research should be transformative and must provide explicit importance on the experiences as these enable sources of oppression (e.g., structures of gender, disability, etc.) to be named and therefore challenged." In-depth interviews was maximized to examine how WWDs experienced microaggressions and ableism due to their intersecting identities. Recognizing the importance of women's lived experiences provides new empirical evidence that offers new resources for research (Harding 1987).

Data Collection

The researcher was a volunteer for six (6) years at a non-government organization (NGO) for persons with mobility disabilities in the Philippines. This helped the researcher identify possible participants in the study, considering that disability data in the Philippines are decade-old and inaccurate. This study complies with the ethics of feminist research by valuing confidentiality and privacy, informed consent, and autonomy (Paredes-Canilao 2002). The researcher announced a call for research participants in the PWD institution. Four (4) participants instantly volunteered to participate, and the rest were recruited through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was efficient because it allowed participants to identify other WWDs who might have encountered similar experiences. The researcher was able to gather ten (10) participants for the focus group discussion. There were only four criteria for inclusion in the study. First, participants had to self-identify that they are women. Second, participants had to self-identify that they are 18 years old and above. Third, those participants were open about their disabilities. Fourth, those participants reside in Metro Manila or the adjacent towns. Participants in the study were provided with a simple token for their participation.

A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with ten (10) WWDs members of the PWD organization. The FGD necessitated participants who had an opinion or had experiences of ableism, microaggression, and discrimination. Considering the physical barriers of public and private spaces outside the PWD-inclusive organization, accessibility was the topmost priority throughout the research processes. The researcher conducted the FGD at the PWD organization to ensure that the place was physically accessible to all. Before starting the FGD, the research objectives were thoroughly discussed in the native language and English; a definition of ableism, microaggression, and discrimination was also addressed in the native language. The participants also answered an information sheet with questions



such as age, gender identity, civil status, educational status, employment status, and disability. The collection of information sheets was necessary to present the real identities of the participants in the writing up of findings. Finally, a printed informed consent form was also distributed to each of the participants for their signature. The researcher thoroughly explained that consent might be retracted at any point of the research process if participants wished to exclude themselves in the research process.

Of the ten (10) participants, all identified to have mobility disabilities (e.g., using a wheelchair or crane). Six (6) women identified as single, and two (2) women identified as married, and two (2) identified as single mothers. Seven (7) women were college graduates, two (2) women were high school graduates, while the other one (1) did not identify her educational attainment. Nine (9) participants were office workers in the PWD organization. One (1) participant was a disability desk officer at a local government unit. The age bracket of the focus group is 22–65 years old. The FGD offered a safe space for participants to process their experiences that might have remained unspoken due to the topic's sensitivity. After the FGD, the participants provided the researcher a list of names to be contacted for the in-depth interviews.

Through the recommendation of FGD participants, the data was complemented with four (4) in-depth interviews with WWDs that are disability experts and had integral roles in advancing social movements in women and disability sectors. One key informant was a former executive director of a government agency for PWDs; the second informant was a former chief operating officer of an NGO for PWDs; the third informant is a board member of a government sports commission for PWDs and she is also a point person for Women in Sports in the Southeast Asia region; the fourth informant is an employee of another government agency. The FGD was conducted last May 28, 2019, while the in-depth interviews were conducted online (e., Zoom, Google Meet) from July to August 2020.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically. The researcher transcribed the interviews and read through the transcripts. The researcher generated themes using four steps of data analysis which are: (i) immersing in the data, (ii) processing the codes, (iii) creating categories, and (iv) identifying themes (Green et al. 2007, p. 547).

Ethics Declaration

The personal involvement of the researcher is a central aspect of feminist research. Methodologically, feminist research differs from traditional research because it aims to eliminate any unequal power relations between the researcher and the researched (Greaves 1995). The researcher recognized that her background as a non-disabled, queer, and middle-class woman might affect the participants' way of responding to the questions, sharing their experiences, and interpreting the discussion. The overarching goal is to create spaces and opportunities to reveal



lived realities of power inequalities and difference and provide evidence to address these ingrained inequalities (Jenkins 2019). The researcher knew all participants in the FGD. The researcher also knew two (2) of four (4) participants in the in-depth interviews. Recognizing that the researcher has personal biases and has influences in the research process, the researcher included her biases in writing up the research findings. As a non-disabled, queer, and middle-class working woman, who volunteered and immersed herself in the lives of WWDs for six years, the researcher knew that safe spaces are what feminist researchers prioritize in research processes. The researcher created a space of shared trust and compassion, wherein participants processed their experiences openly and without hesitation. The narratives of the participants were detailed as they could remember, and these helped the researcher gather sound findings.

Findings

Denial of Personal Identity

The denial of personal identities, such as the capability of being a mother, raising a family, or obtaining gainful employment, was seen as a frequent theme in the focus group discussion. Two participants from the FGD shared that they had experiences of microaggression in terms of motherhood. On motherhood, WWDs' experiences of microaggression were revealed in questions such as, "...can you take care of a child? Can you give birth?" One participant shared that a non-disabled person told her, "...it's pitiful for your future children, it's best for you [not to be a mother]." On raising a family, the second participant shared that she and her PWD husband were asked, "can you live and raise your family?" The same participant also shared how annoying and displeasing these questions are. On obtaining gainful employment, the one participant shared that in the hiring process, she was asked questions such as, "how can you be on time at work? Can you go to work? How will you commute?" The participant elaborated that none of the hiring questions was about the job she was applying for.

These accounts of microaggression were also supported by one informant from one of the in-depth interviews. The informant described her experience of denial of personal identity when she tried to apply for a job:

Oh yes. I was called for an interview. The interviewer saw me and said, 'oh, you're in a wheelchair! But in my head, I was like, 'so what if I'm a wheelchair-user? Eh, I passed the screening.' However, in the interview they asked, 'how will you work?' How will you adjust? I even told them that I would not have applied if I can't do it. Of course, I knew what I signed up for. But that's how we are questioned at hiring processes, and they're all fixated on our disabilities.

Most participants in the focus group agreed that these comments are common and that these became their norm. This type of microaggression occurs when salient aspects of a person's identity are overshadowed by the person's disability (Keller



and Galgay 2010). The disability is overemphasized while other parts of identity are disregarded (Olkin et al. 2019, p. 770). Recognizing that the perpetrators of these microaggressions were non-disabled people, these also passed as ableist microaggressions. These examples of microaggression send a message that WWDs are still perceived as incapable of performing their chosen roles and, in turn, of lower value compared to non-disabled persons merely because of their disability.

A microaggression that is not reflected in Sue and Galgay's taxonomy but was expressed by the two participants in the focus group discussion is the notion that disability is hereditary. Most participants in the focus group discussion also shared that they are often asked if their disability runs in the blood. While one participant agreed to the hereditary nature of some disabilities, another participant shared that the way people ask them is utterly offensive. She stated that non-disabled persons have this notion that PWD mothers automatically give birth to children with disabilities.

Desexualization

Desexualization is another theme that was notable in the focus-group discussion. Desexualization occurs when sexuality or sexual identity is discouraged or denied, or the value of PWD as romantic partners is minimized (Olkin et al. 2019, p. 776). The participants from the focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews shared their microaggression experiences in terms of dating and relationships. Most of the examples draw on the assumption that PWDs are not entitled to have a relationship or be in love. One participant in the focus-group discussion shared that she was asked if she was with her sibling when she was with her boyfriend. Another participant elaborated that she is often asked if she can love and have a relationship. An informant from the in-depth interview elaborated that WWDs experience more microaggression compared to their male counterparts:

WWDs experience more microaggression [than men with disabilities]. Let's say one WWD gets a boyfriend or decides to marry a non-disabled man; there are more negative effects such as insults which are more likely to come from relatives. However, men [with disabilities] only concern themselves with handling the married life or financial resources. Still, women need to confront comments such as having and raising children, and performing reproductive duties. There are many layers that we need to talk about.

The traditional gender role system that reinforces women into reproductive work and men into productive work is still applied in the lives of WWDs who take on romantic or married life. The two participants in the FGD further explained that they felt that there is always an undertone of discouragement in the questions they hear from non-disabled people. Even when WWDs assert their sexual feelings and attractions towards other people, they eventually face the attributions of traditional gender roles when they decide to be in a relationship or get married. These examples of microaggression are more evident in WWDs compared to their male counterparts. Their lived experiences show that WWDs are subject to microaggression when they engage in romantic or married life.



Another new type of microaggression that is not present in Sue or Keller & Galgay's taxonomy is hypersexualization among WWDs. Hypersexualization is the heightened emphasis on women's adherence to unrealistic beauty expectations in the form of sexualized representations. Women are hypersexualized through the model of "ideal" women in mass media, marketing advertisements, and magazines. Heteronormative behaviors are still embedded in Philippine culture, including the of "ideal" women as feminine, beautiful, and as caretakers of the family. In the case of PWDs, WWDs are often assumed by non-disabled and ableist people as pathological and asexual. However, when WWDs choose singlehood or unmarried life, they receive questions such as "how come that you're still single when you're beautiful?" even when singlehood was their choice. Hypersexualization on WWDs is present when the socially constructed idea of "beautiful" disregards the disability of a woman. Therefore, a "beautiful" WWD should be sexual, pretty and not single. Although WWDs' experience of hypersexualization may be similar to non-disabled women, WWDs always come from a place of stereotyped asexuality before they are hypersexualized. The examples drawn from the data show that WWDs bear the burden of desexualization when they are denied of their assertion of their sexual feelings, and hypersexualization when they are reinforced to perform their feminine attributed gender. These examples of microaggression send a message that PWDs, particularly WWDs, do not have agency when it comes to their sexuality and bodies. They are labeled as asexual even before they choose their own sexualities. Meanwhile, they are also questioned when they participate in romantic relationships because of their disability.

Denial of Privacy

Denial of privacy also includes violation of physical boundaries (Olkin et al. 2019, p. 772). WWDs have physical and social boundaries similar to non-disabled women. The participants from the FGD explained that their wheelchairs are part of their bodies, thus, consent to touch their wheelchairs is part of asserting their body autonomy. Two participants listed examples, such as pushing their wheelchairs without their consent. One participant described her experience:

They would talk to me and think that I am an appliance. Whenever they feel like pushing my wheelchair, they'll push me without my consent. I often scold them because they might cause accidents.

The assumption that non-disabled people can voluntarily push a PWD's wheelchair without consent is based on the attitudes of ableism. When targeted to PWDs, it is ableist microaggression (Olkin et al. 2019 p. 758). The secretive nature of microaggression makes it difficult for WWDs to enunciate their experience because they could not gauge the exact intention of non-disabled persons. This type of microaggression sends a message that the bodies of WWDs are objectified through nonconsensual physical assistance. Furthermore, this type of microaggression led



to more attacks on WWDs. The same participant elaborated on her experiences of microaggression that led to her sexual harassment³. She recalled:

The experiences that I had when I was young were a lot. I was already disabled then. When I asked for assistance to be lifted inside the jeepney, I felt that I was touched inappropriately. And now I am scared each time I ask for assistance. I don't think that I could complain because they might say that 'I asked for it.' And it is public transportation, and I don't want to be insulted. They might even say that they would not bother hitting on a woman with a disability.

Those are the experiences that we have as women with disabilities. Unlike women without disabilities, they could complain. They might have evidence when they are violated. But for us women with disabilities, I am ashamed. People might say we are too malicious. We ask for help and get help. Therefore we cannot complain nor think of any violations. So instead of complaining, we learned to keep it to ourselves. That's also why I have developed an attitude that I don't want to be touched at all. Because of my bad experiences and those unwanted touches, I have this anger. I have trauma especially when somebody touches me.

Helplessness

Helplessness is another theme revealed in the focus group discussion. This type of microaggression is based on the assumption that people with disabilities need help most of the time (Olkin et al. 2019, p. 773). Most participants expressed frustration with the insensitivity of questions raised by non-disabled persons. Questions such as "how do you take a bath? How do you sleep?" are common microaggressions against PWDs. However, the body experiences of WWDs are centers of curiosity for many non-disabled persons. One participant described these experiences as annoying. She shared her experience dealing with non-disabled persons visiting the PWD institution. She said that "I notice each time visitors would come to our institution, say, for example, there are discussions on disability, their reactions would always appear as if they pity us." Another participant added that she is often confused if these gestures are sincere or not. Most of the time, she ended up feeling sorry for herself. One more participant shared that she would always hear visitors say, "I'm blessed." Most of them expressed that these examples, albeit their genuine intentions, are insulting.

Spread Effect

The spread effect refers to the assumption that a limitation in one functional area leads to limitations in other areas (Olkin et al. 2019, p. 775). The confluence of gender and disability as intersecting identities bring women with disabilities a double burden. They are criticized for being women and for having a disability. One informant from the in-depth interview described her experience while strolling at a mall with her daughter. She stated, "...I was asked, 'Is she your

³ Jeepney is common public transportation in the Philippines.



daughter? Wow, you're so great!" She felt it was not a compliment but a question in her ability to be a mother with a disability, thus referring to this as microaggression. Another informant from the in-depth interview shared her experience with her ob-gyn doctor. She was told, "Oh no, you should not be pregnant. It's hard for you." The informant had three healthy children.

Second-Class Citizenship

This type of microaggression occurs when the rights of people with disabilities for equal access are considered unreasonable, unjustified, or bothersome (Olkin et al. 2019, p. 768). Second-class citizenship happens when the rights of PWDs and WWDs are denied even if laws and policies are in place. Second-class citizenship manifests in ways PWDs are treated as nuisance. Second-class citizenship also manifests in verbal or nonverbal settings such as inconspicuous assistive sign language and inaccessible transportation. Most participants reported their experiences in public transportation, in domestic or international flights, in accessing buildings and bathrooms as examples of being treated as second-class citizens. Even with the implementation of disability laws in the Philippines, many PWDs, especially WWDs, experience microaggression regularly. The participants from the FGD and in-depth interviews describe it as a "normalized daily occurrence." One informant from the in-depth discussion shared:

Every day, especially at work outside the PWD institution, it is a daily torture. First you ride public transportation, but you need to explain a lot before taking you in. Second, you go to a building; you have to ask people to help you because the entrance to the building is not accessible. And you stay in the building for three to four hours, and you can't use the bathroom because you can't fit inside.

Most participants in the focus group had their individual experiences of second-class citizenship. Two participants from the focus group shared that they were denied entrance into college because the school they applied for was not accessible to PWDs. Another woman shared her experience dining at a fast-food restaurant with her fellow PWDs. When they asked assistance from the restaurant staff, the staff yelled at them:

We had a recent experience at a fast-food restaurant. The four (4) of us were in our wheelchairs. We were looking for a table, and a staff member was there. I asked for assistance to clean a table and remove its chairs because we were in our wheelchairs. The staff member yelled at us, "for a moment!" We always wondered if we were screamed at because we're in our wheelchairs. When we got our orders, we changed tables, and the treatment still felt different. We called the attention of the manager and he said that the staff member was a new hire. But we asked why we were treated that way. Was it because of our wheelchair? That was how we felt.



Second-class citizenship has many nuances. When the researcher asked a follow-up question to about how she felt, she said:

we've felt humiliated by the tone of the waiter. Maybe he would not have yelled at us if we were non-disabled people or if we did not ask to remove the chairs, but we needed those chairs to be removed because we're in our wheelchairs.

The subtlety of second-class citizenship may be deemed inoffensive from the perspective of non-disabled people. However, social and physical barriers have prevented WWDs to participate freely and independently in society. Feeling second-class citizens are often occurrences for many WWDs.

Another informant from the in-depth interview shared her experience at a university:

There's this ramp that isn't that friendly to persons with disabilities. And then the security guard was just looking at me. I really could not tell if it was already microaggression. The frequency of it made things 'normal'. We really got used to it. We had to learn how to deal with it. We ignore it because it will make you feel less of a person. You'll pity yourself.

Secondary Benefits

This type of microaggression happens when the perpetrator expects to feel good or be praised for doing something for a person with a disability (Olkin et al. 2019, p. 774). One informant from the in-depth interview elaborated how non-disabled persons often see disability as a result of sin. She shared a story where religious people "offer" her prayers for healing. She stated, "...they have this façade, and they will say, 'Can I pray for you?' And they make promises. They were like praying. But do they believe in God? I really can't help but think, 'What do they think of me?'".

Another example of this is the notion that non-disabled persons feel "blessed" whenever they encounter PWDs. One participant from the focus group also shared what she always experiences at the PWD institution. She said, "...whenever there are visitors, I would always hear them say that they are 'blessed,' which I interpret as they are blessed because they don't have disabilities. Non-disabled visitors would even say, "We thought we're already helpless, but we are blessed." During her sharing, all participants attested to her experience. Non-disabled people would always feel "blessed" when they compare themselves to PWDs.

Other Findings

This research revealed significant aspects of microaggression that previous studies of Keller and Galgay (2020) and Sue (2010) had not discussed. First, this article discovered that significant microaggression perpetrators against WWDs were their relatives, members of their closed communities due to affinity, intimacy, or closeness to WWDs. One aspect of microaggression is the uncertainty of its intention and the subtleness of its impact. This aspect is where significant perpetrators lack knowledge, resulting in microaggressive behaviors



towards WWDs. One informant from the in-depth interview shared that the most challenging microaggression is the one that come from her parents. She recalled:

All forms of microaggression happen [to me], but I guess it's more difficult for other women because of the treatment of their families. Most women have overprotective parents. There are only things: neglect or overprotection, which are both negative to the extent that women cannot move, cannot decide for themselves. If you tell [your parent]s that you want to go somewhere, they'd, 'Oh, you can't do it.' That's the worst microaggression WWDs experience daily. They deny you to become decision-makers for yourself.

Another informant from a separate in-depth interview shared similar experience. She recalled:

...relative. Mostly grandmothers or grandfathers. It already resorted to microaggression, but they did not realize because they've been overprotective. But they don't know that they can cause microaggression.

Overall, the secretive nature of microaggression as subtle and fluid makes it difficult for policy makers and implementers to address it. However, there can be other tools apart from implementing policies that can mitigate the impacts of microaggression against WWDs. Molyneux's (1985) Practical and Strategic Gender Interests is a tool that is often used in gender planning. Molyneux (1985) explains that there are two ways to address the gender inequalities that are oppressive to women. First is the employment of practical gender interests to the basic needs of women. Practical gender interest responds to an immediate perceived need, and they do not generally entail a strategic goal such as women's emancipation or gender equality (Molyneux 1985). Although this does not challenge the traditional gender roles of men and women, this certainly addresses some microaggressive behaviors WWDs encounter.

The seven identified domains in this article as based on Keller and Galgay's (2010) ten domains of microaggression can be mitigated by further analyzing the application of Molyneux's gender tools. Of the seven domains, five domains are categorized as an ableist microaggression, namely: denial of personal identity; denial of privacy; helplessness; second-class citizenship; and secondary benefits. The other two domains are categorized as gender microaggression, namely: desexualization and spread effect.

The ableist microaggressions (i.e., denial of personal identity, denial of privacy, helplessness, second-class citizenship and secondary benefits) can be addressed by applying Molyneux's (1985) practical gender interests. Example of these are: allocating accessible ramps and bathrooms to WWDs; heightening campaigns that eliminate microaggression against WWDs in schools, homes, workplace and government offices; creating targeted Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials and conducting seminars to parents on how to empower their children with disabilities instead of giving them microaggressive behaviors. Addressing these microaggressions by employing Molyneux's



practical gender interests does not directly answer the gender inequalities WWDs experience, but these steps offer immediate relief to WWDs daily burden.

Meanwhile, the gender microaggression (i.e., desexualization and spread effect) such as WWDs being told not to be mothers and WWDs being denied to work can be addressed by using Molyneux's strategic gender interests. Strategic gender interests can be utilized to create policies intended for WWDs. Examples of these are amending the core legislation that includes other types of discrimination in its stipulation, extending social services to WWDs, providing WWDs with reproductive access specialized to their gender needs. These are concrete steps that can be done on a legislative level.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to document the existence of different types of discrimination particularly, microaggression against WWDs in the Philippine context. This article hopes to invite further research that will study how WWDs are protected or unprotected from the impact of microaggressions. This article also hopes to encourage government offices and agencies, as well as civil society organizations and non-government organizations in rethinking the definition of discrimination that would capture other contexts. Finally, this study hopes to explain how to eliminate microaggression against WWDs using other tools aside from implementing laws and policies. It should be taken into account that the number of participants in this paper was only 14 participants. Although the sample was diverse based on education, age, and work experiences, the data was limited to mobility-impaired WWDs. The sample failed to collect data that reflect the lack of access to certain rights and privileges such as access to employment and education as 11 participants were college graduates. All participants are working-class WWDs whose identities do not represent the most marginalized PWDs in the Philippines. However, this article supports developing empirical evidence that ableist and gender microaggressions exist among WWDs regardless of status, age, and background. One informant whose work is integral in the disability movement in the Philippines described microaggression as daily tortures. The data suggest that even leaders and advocates of the disability sector are targets of microaggression. Sue (2010) discussed that microaggression is one type of discrimination targeted to stigmatized groups such as the PWDs. Participants expressed that even though microaggression appeared to them as a new concept, it has been there throughout their lives from childhood to adulthood. Using Keller and Galgay's (2010) Ten Domains of microaggression, this article identified seven (7) domains present in the everyday lives of WWDs: denial of personal identity, desexualization; denial of privacy; helplessness; spread effect; second class citizenship; and secondary benefits.

The extent of microaggressions can cause trauma to WWDs. Participants reported that they experienced trauma from microaggression and became sexual in nature. Other trauma stemmed from being neglected by families. And other traumas were the "daily tortures" of microaggression from closed communities and structures such as education and employment. WWDs experienced microaggressions the most



from their closed communities that are supposed to provide them with security and acceptance.

There are also three new taxonomies found in the data that had not been discussed in Sue's (2010) and Keller and Galgay's (2010) studies of microaggression. These are hypersexualization, the assumption that disability is hereditary, and overprotection from family members. This article revealed hypersexualization as a new type of microaggression based on reinforcing the "ideal" woman among WWDs. WWDs are always seen as pathological and asexual, however, perpetrators of hypersexualization are in disbelief when they hear WWDs say that singlehood is their choice. WWDs are hypersexualized when their single status is put to question if they are "ideally" beautiful. Hypersexualization on WWDs suggests the idea that if the WWDs is "ideally" beautiful, then they could be in a committed relationship just like non-disabled women. When WWDs decide for themselves, whether they want to get married, be in a romantic relationship, or stay single, there would always be microaggressive comments against them.

Second is the assumption that disability is hereditary. Although some disabilities can be genetic, it is microaggression when it is assumed as a default. Stating or even implying that WWDs will certainly transfer their disabilities to their future offspring is utterly offensive and microaggressive.

There is also a form of microaggression that can potentially be added to the new taxonomies of microaggression but it needs a context-specific investigation—this is the overprotection of families to WWDs. The informants from the in-depth interviews and one participant from the FGD had a firm conviction that overprotection is the worst microaggression they experienced as WWDs. The taxonomies of microaggression by Sue (2010) and Keller and Galgay (2010) had not discussed overprotection as microaggression. Overprotection restricts WWDs' capability to become the decision-makers of themselves and their bodies. Although overprotection is not in itself a microaggression, the standpoint of WWDs who had a lived experience about feeling restricted by parents and relatives must be taken into account for further research. Participants stated that one of the most hurtful forms of microaggression they have experienced is parents' overprotection. Overprotection to the girl-child with disabilities is manifested when parents decide for their children with disabilities on almost everything. Overprotection is a distinct form of microaggression that happen to WWDs. The overprotection of predominantly Asian or Filipino families with patriarchal roots to the girl-child, provide a notion that parents only want what is best for their children. However, overprotection to WWDs came to points that parents failed to consider WWDs' capabilities to decide for themselves and become the decision-makers of their bodies.

Lastly, there is also a new key finding that should be taken into account: the escalation of microaggression into sexual harassment and gender-based violence. As stated in the findings, second-class citizenship manifests in verbal or nonverbal settings such as inconspicuous assistive sign language and inaccessible transportation. One striking finding of this article is the trauma experienced by one participant in her daily use of public transport, where she was touched inappropriately after asking for physical assistance. The feeling of helplessness resulted in her aversion to asking for any physical aid whenever she needed help.



The prevalence of microaggression in the lives of WWDs are distinct experiences compared to their male counterparts.

This article is not conclusive that the microaggression experiences of women with mobility disabilities are unique to them. Thus, this article provides an idea how other women with different disabilities might experience these types of microaggression at varying extents. This article encourages more research that will investigate microaggressions that happen to visually-impaired WWDs, Deaf, and women with mental disabilities and others.

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