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A Phenomenological Approach

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Flora Löffelmann, BA Bakk. MA

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Many thanks to my home base
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Eidesstattliche Erklärung

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Wien, am 7.5.2021 Flora Löffelmann

1. Introduction

This study's purpose is, firstly, to shed a light on how university students experience discrimination, with a specific focus on racist discrimination. Secondly, its aim is to describe how discrimination experienced at university differs from discrimination experienced elsewhere. Thirdly, its purpose is to map out possibilities for actors within the university to counteract these experiences of discrimination. To attain these goals, I have executed qualitative interviews with university students and provide an interpretation of these interviews from an intersectional perspective that is influenced by theories from social epistemology.

Previous empirical studies (IHS 2015) have shown that 25% of Austrian university students have experienced discrimination during their studies. Yet, the link between discriminatory structures within academia and individual experiences of these structures has so far not been examined in a comprehensive manner. In order to bridge this gap, this study's method consists of an exploratory empirical part and a theoretical examination of the results through the lens of intersectional feminism, with special emphasis on phenomenological experiences. The goal of this study is to show how individual students' experiences at university are influenced by overarching power structures such as sexism, racism, classism, ableism and ageism.

The explorative empirical part of research is aimed at mapping phenomenal experiences of discrimination. It consists of episodic interviews (Flick 2011) with four individuals who came forward after I placed an online advertisement looking for interviewees willing to share their experiences of discrimination at university. The episodic interview's specific form offers a possibility to ask for semantic knowledge concerning certain concepts, as well as episodic knowledge connected to memories of situations formative for these concepts. When it comes to experiences of discrimination, the latter are particularly important, since an individual's perception of and phenomenal affectedness by discrimination is highly dependent on the context of their upbringing and socialization.

Queer phenomenology (e.g., Ahmed 2006) provides a new perspective on bodily phenomenology. It figures as this thesis' qualitative research approach because it enables me to focus on the lived experiences of students who experience discrimination at university. Queer phenomenology "queers" traditional phenomenology, a philosophical perspective concerned with the first-person experience, by tying it to a critique of ideology: the goal is to shed light on unintentional orientations "any body" has by virtue of its personal history and bodily positionality, in order to help us understand the historicity of the human body and its experience. In other words, queer phenomenology is specifically geared to explaining the experience of “bodies that are out of place” (Ahmed 2006:170): queer and other marginalized bodies. Even though, in the interviews I focus on individual narratives and experiences, the subsequent analysis of these individually recounted impressions will enable me to point out commonalities between the interviewees' accounts. (Creswell 2009)

Gender or *race* are not properties people ‘possess’ in the manner that ordinary objects have properties; they arise from, and are maintained by, how people relate to one another. Following societal rules and practices, people are gendered or racialized and receive a specific treatment that is a reflection of their perceived difference from a mythical norm. Thus, differences in gender or race manifest in interaction with others. A phenomenological perspective is able to conceptualize ‘difference’ as something that is not an ontological given, but a constantly created and re-created background of experience. Building on this individual experience, queer phenomenology can locate its accounts at a specific, spatio-temporal, social moment, allowing for a concrete analysis of how processes of marginalization affect people on a bodily level.

Another cornerstone of this study is contemporary accounts of race-critical theorizing. To answer my research questions, I will give an analysis of notable remarks and emerging patterns from an intersectional point of view. My method here is influenced by feminist phenomenologist Sara Ahmed's texts on diversity work within the academy (Ahmed 2012) and interdisciplinary theorist Grada Kilomba's book *Plantation Memories. Episodes of Everyday Racism* (Kilomba 2008). I am especially interested in students' experiences of being made to feel ‘different’, and how they experience their ‘difference’ from a “mythical norm” (Lorde 1984: 116) within an academic setting.

In line with Linda Martín Alcoff's notion that a critique of the ontological basis of categories does not mean that they themselves disappear, and Ahmed's (2012) observation that a denial of categories of difference hinders the ability of political action for discriminated subjects, I will engage with the following questions: What are the challenges faced by people who experience discrimination at university? How does the experience of discrimination at university relate to experiences of discrimination elsewhere? And what can people targeted by less or no discrimination do to improve the experience of people facing discrimination at university?

2. Theoretical Perspective

2.1 State of Research

2.1.1 Quantitative Approaches

Discrimination of students at Austrian universities has so far been quantitatively examined once. The study, conducted by Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS) in 2015, shows that 25% of the 3,660 students who participated in the online survey experienced discrimination during their studies. The study's design was specifically aimed at recording experiences of discrimination concerning gender and country of origin. The types of discrimination recorded in the study range from verbal harassment, comments and sexual jokes to between 20 and 30 cases that can be classified as criminal offenses, such as unwanted body contact or violence. (Wejwar and Terzieva 2015)

One notable find of the study is that discrimination seems to increase with the level of education: 19.9% of BA students say to have experienced discrimination within the university context, in contrast to a striking 42.7% of PhD students. It is also significant that the degree of discrimination seems to differ according to the type of higher education a student attains. There are, for example, fewer records of discrimination at technical colleges (FHs) than at state universities. According to Berta Terzieva, one of the researchers involved in conducting the study, this can be attributed to the fact that the recognition of discriminating practices and their subsequent impact in studies is highly dependent on whether students have prior knowledge of different sorts of discrimination and how to spot them. Students at state universities seem to be more aware of discriminatory practices, which leads to more discrimination being recorded in the study. (Kroisleitner 2015)

If one considers Terzieva's statement that, in a methodology based on self-assessment, a lack of awareness of the problem of "discrimination" leads to fewer incidents of discrimination being recorded, it seems apt to consider other methodologies that can fill this gap. Otherwise, the false conclusion could be that discrimination occurs less in environments where people take less notice of it. This is reflected in Terzieva and Wejwar pointing to the study's limitations, and in stating that it is aimed at providing a very first look into the topic. Additionally, they state that the study should serve as an incitement to further qualitative analyses. (Wejwar and Terzieva 2015: 7)

Another problematic aspect of the 2015 study's methodology is that it implicitly places the responsibility to end discrimination with those experiencing it, by suggesting that only if discrimination is spotted and named by those who experience it, can it stop. This phenomenon, often discussed as 'victim blaming' in cases of sexual harassment or rape, leads to an attention shift away from the predator and back to the survivor, often causing serious psychological harm for subjects that are already vulnerable. The same is accounted for people facing discrimination, who may suffer interpersonal costs such as being perceived as “troublemakers” when they express their dissatisfaction with discrimination, often leading to even more ostracization. (Kaiser and Miller 2003)

Additionally, the 2015 study does not shed light on the fact that the pointing out and acknowledgement of acts of discrimination requires a certain amount of mental strength, since every act of that sort takes place in a power-laden environment. This is the reason why it seems useful to look at research that departs from quantitative methods and focuses more on the overall environment of experiences of discrimination and, especially, the conditions of experience.

2.1.2 Qualitative Approaches

Sara Ahmed’s book *On Being Included* (2012) is the most notable contribution to higher education research from a phenomenological angle, which is geared at accounting for the first-personal experience of discriminatory instances. In it, Ahmed reflects on diversity within universities by providing “a set of feminist reflections on the subtle and not-so-subtle forms of institutional power” (Ahmed 2012: 13). Her goal is to shed a light on how “diversity, as a set of practices, can participate in the creation of an idea of the institution that allows racism and other inequalities to be overlooked” (Ahmed 2012: 14). According to Ahmed, contemporary universities often provide policies, guidelines and mission statements that emphasize the institution’s commitment to a certain form of plurality among their employees and students. Yet, as she notes, these “diversity” papers often serve a rather symbolic purpose and fail to actually counteract discriminatory practices (Ahmed 2012).

Adopting a qualitative method, Ahmed provides insights from conversations with individuals working in the field of diversity and equality, and critically assesses these statements in the context of different forms of institutional power. Additionally, she gives an account of her own experiences as a non-*white*, female, lesbian academic within male- and *white*[1]-dominated academic institutions, making *On Being Included* a valuable contribution to a growing field of ethnographic approaches to universities (Ahmed 2012: 11).

In the last chapter of *On Being Included*, Ahmed proposes a “way of thinking about diversity work as phenomenological practice” (Ahmed 2012: 173). She points out that diversity work has two different effects: On the one hand, it creates knowledge about institutions, on the other hand it aims at starting a process of transformation. Conventionally, one would attest a causal relation between those two processes: “knowledge leads (or should lead) to transformation” (ibid.). Ahmed changes the direction of the argument: “transformation, as a form of practical labor, leads to knowledge” (ibid.).

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[1] In the course of this thesis, the term *white* will be set in cursive to help a decentralization of the idea of *whiteness* as the default.

Concerning the ‘university’, the phenomenological practice means that those who work in the field of diversity management only discover the limitations they try to counteract, the moment they are already fighting them through practical work. In contrast, those who never work against limitations, or are never forced to do so, experience the university as open and diverse. This also translates to students’ experiences: Those who are never confronted with any hurdles or discrimination will experience the university as a place full of opportunity, whilst those who are targeted by others because of their assumed and attested “difference” will notice the lines of power that structure the institution (Ahmed 2012).

This is reflected in the account Ahmed gives of women of color[2] perspectives on the university: she recounts instances where her pointing out discriminatory practices led to her being labelled “overly sensitive”. Those accusing her did not take into consideration that what Ahmed was experiencing was invisible to them, by virtue of lack in their own engagement with the problematic, and their privileged position which never made it necessary for them to pay attention to the way people’s experiences differ from their own. (Ahmed 2012)

Interestingly so, one of the counter arguments the people in question used to challenge Ahmed’s account of her own experiences was them claiming to “live in a time beyond identity politics”. Ahmed points out how this call for a renunciation of different categories like gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and ability in favor of ‘neutrality’ hinders discriminated subjects’ possibilities for political action. Yet, these categories should not be conceptualized as ontologically given: She quotes Linda Martín Alcoff who points out that a “phenomenological approach shows how a critique of the ontological basis of categories does not mean that the categories themselves disappear.” (Alcoff 2006: 185) Rather, it is, according to Alcoff, one of philosophy’s goals to point to these categories’ “often hidden epistemic effects and its power over collective imaginations” (ibid. 179), in order to eventually transform them. As Mathias Möschel puts it, “precisely because race is a social construct and therefore part of the real world its use should be continued as an effective strategy to combat racism” (Möschel 2011: 1651).

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[2] In the course of this thesis, the term ‘people of color’, here gendered as ‘women of color’, “refers to anyone who is perceived to be visibly different from the mainstream white, Christian European population, and not only refers to the skin color but also includes for example Muslim women wearing the headscarf. The Canadian term ‘visible minorities’ could also be used in this context” (Möschel 2011: 1662).

Considering race and gender a social construct which is part of the real world, necessitates a closer look at how the introduction of this category has, firstly, originated, and secondly, influenced global power relations. This is why decolonial feminist author María Lugones' research on the origins of the categories gender and *race* in colonial modernity is pivotal to this study: Lugones illustrates where the influence these categories have over subjects stems from, and why they don't just "disappear", even though they are by no means ontologically given. (Lugones 2010)

Lugones argues that "[m]odernity organizes the world ontologically in terms of atomic, homogenous, separable categories" (Lugones 2010: 742), and that, by imperialism, this set of categories was imposed on peoples all over the globe, installing corresponding hierarchies. According to Lugones, the first such hierarchizing distinction was that between animal and human, and all such distinctions serve the cause of marking 'civilization' by marking the 'human': "Only the civilized are men and women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species – as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild." (Lugones 2010: 743) By way of the human-animal distinction, the division between the sexes was spelled out. The hierarchical dichotomy became a "normative tool to damn the colonized" (ibid.), and an excuse to place strict rules of conduct which, for example, regulated who could freely interact with whom, and who could not. Lugones further argues that the coloniality of gender is "what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of capitalist world systems of power" (Lugones 2010:746), and that it is still structuring today's societies.

Likewise, the 'civilizing' mission imposed a "colonization of memory" (Lugones 2010:745), which targeted people's sense of self and their traditions in an attempt to reorganize societies according to the ideas of Christianity and devoid of belief in any 'uncivilized' matters, such as spirits or an animistic relationship with nature. Especially the last point, a forcibly imposed view of nature as a mere instrument of willpower, provides a link to questions of class within capitalist societies who rely on "the instrumental modern concept of nature" (ibid.) in order to accumulate wealth.

In line with Lugones, George M. Fredrickson points to the origins of racism in the segue from the Middle Ages to the early modern period and debunks claims that both historically place racism's origins in antiquity and assume the 'naturalness' of a significant social distinction between humans on the basis of their appearance. He explains how early antisemitic sentiments in the Catholic Church could be seen as the first instances of actual racism: there, the belief in the hierarchically lower status of Jews in comparison to Christians was expressed by highlighting the former's supposed association with the Devil. The rumor was spread that they had poisoned city wells and killed thousands of people, when it was in fact the Black Death, a bubonic plague pandemic, which had killed vast numbers of the population. (Fredrickson 2015)

If the Christian God could not prevent their followers from being killed this way, it must have been the Devil's doing. Yet, the real basis of the conflict might have been that many Jews were, even under the threat of death, unwilling to convert to Christianity. The repudiation of Christianity's offer of salvation to all of humanity was an affront, and antisemitic activities were used to right this jab to the Christian self-conception of self-evident theological superiority. Fredrickson argues that Jews were the first to be "relegated to pariah status and isolated from the larger society, they became external to the official hierarchy of estates or status groups and therefore became truly Other and expendable" (ibid. 23). Even though equality between all was the guiding principle of Christianity, medieval Christians effectively excluded Jews from the membership in the human race. Soon, the racist contempt was exported beyond Europe, using the imperial extension of Christianity's powers to the Americas. There, the local population was, again, classified to be the Devil's associate, and racialized accordingly. (Fredrickson 2015: 23f.)

Note that racialization, as I use it in the course of this thesis, goes back to Michael Omi und Howard Winant's 1994 book *Racial Formation in the United States* (2014). Therein, the authors argue that, even though the notion of race is inherently instable and constructed, its nature is ocular, since human bodies are read visually, and meaning is attached to them by means of association and symbols. Phenotypical differences are always operating within a specific social setting, which influences how they are read and interpreted. Consequentially, "sociohistorical practices as conquest and enslavement classified human bodies for purposes of domination" (Omi and Winant 2014: 13). Racialization, as a process, is the ensuing operation of extending "racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group" (ibid.). In short, it means attaching meaning to circumstances that were previously read in a 'neutral' way, or not at all.

Omi and Winant's, Fredrickson's, and Lugones', accounts show that gender, as well as *race*, are historically contingent ideas dependent on human classification. As we can see in numerous historical and contemporary examples, both the genderization and racialization of the human population have had pervasive negative impacts on both non-cis-male and racialized Others. This contingency also shapes how the negative impacts of racialization and genderization can be addressed and, lastly, altered: as Mathias Möschel points out, racial scepticism is the prevalent idea of how to deal with racialization in continental Europe, and its goal is to eliminate race from political and normative vocabulary. This is due to the region's history, especially the Nazi regime, which made race the basis for its exterminative endeavors, resulting in the racially motivated death of six million Jews, 250,000 Roma and Sinti and countless others during the Shoah. (Möschel 2011)

Following 1950, the rejection of an idea of race founded in biological differences was expressed in four UNESCO declarations. As a consequence, continental Europeans stopped using race as an analytical category: “The fear is that by referring to race one might be implicitly and normatively recognizing the existence of different human races from a scientific viewpoint. Even when the social construction of race is acknowledged, it only serves as an argument that therefore race is not real and must be rejected.” (Möschel 2011: 1651) This position manifests legally and normatively, for example in the unease of using the terms “race” or “racial origins” in recommendations by the European Union. “At the national level, there are attempts to eliminate race from public discourse and laws, eventually re-framing it in the softer terms of ethnicity, ethnic belonging, xenophobia or racial preference.” (Möschel 2011: 1651) In Austria, for example, race has, in legal texts, been substituted by ‘ethnic belonging’. (Möschel 2011)

Möschel, who works in the tradition of US Critical Race Theories, which he wants to introduce to European legal discourse, argues that the price for this evasion of calling the phenomenon racism by its name is paid by European people of color: they are “prevented from legally naming and redressing their real-life experience of racism.” (Möschel 2011: 1661) In reducing the legal possibilities to address racist discrimination, the legal system sends to the majority population the “soothing message […] that racism is a problem of the past and that racists are only a few crazy individuals” (ibid.). This contributes to a shift, which attributes the responsibility for racism to individuals, and obfuscates the role institutions and society have in upholding racist systems. (Möschel 2011)

By using phenomenology, my research aims to address “difference” as something that is not an ontological given, but a real-life experience. Drawing on insights from epistemology, I highlight that what someone considers “different” is heavily dependent on how a person’s habits of perceiving and interpreting the world have been formed. Taking this into account, phenomenological approaches that are informed by feminist theory, Critical Race Theory, queer theory, decolonial and indigenous scholars and disability scholars can offer new perspectives. They highlight that every experience is “generated from particular places, times, and cultural milieus” (Weiss, Murphy and Salamon 2020: xiv), and that these “horizons actively inform our experience and for the most part do so prereflectively, without our explicit awareness” (ibid.). It is, thus, the purpose of a critical phenomenology to shed light on these horizons – and to map out how they inform our being in the world, on a phenomenal as well as observational level.

Using the experience of the individual as research material, as I do in this study, and taking into account the uniquely habituated modes of perception that structure this material, allows for an analysis that challenges the tendency to universalize that is present in philosophy and other scientific research. Secondly, it offers new ways to think about accountability by placing the individual experience within the wider network of power relations that marks the place of their existence in the world.

As stated earlier, this study's goal is to show how individual student's experiences at university are influenced by overarching power structures such as sexism, racism, classism and ableism. To provide a link between individual experience and structures, and to bridge a gap in existing literature, the research questions I will answer are the following:

RQ1: What are the challenges faced by people who experience discrimination at university?
RQ2: How does the experience of discrimination at university relate to experiences of discrimination elsewhere?
RQ3: What can people targeted by less or no discrimination do to improve the experience of people facing discrimination at university?

2.2 Reflection on the author's position

My position as a *white* researcher asking the above questions is, of course, quite risky. How will I avoid the pitfalls of repeating, once again, what Grada Kilomba calls "speaking for the other"? In *Plantation Memories* (2019), she thematizes that "the very absence of the colonized (from the center) can be read as emblematic of the difficulty of recovering the voice of the colonial subject and confirmation that there is *no space* where the colonized can speak." (Kilomba 2019: 25) The center Kilomba refers to is the academic center, a historically *white* space where people of color have been denied the privilege to speak: As Kilomba aptly puts it, "our voices – through a system of racism – have been either systematically disqualified as invalid knowledge; or else represented by *whites* who, ironically, become the 'experts' on ourselves." (Kilomba 2019: 26)

How can I methodologically avoid being just one more of these researchers who aim to speak on behalf of people whose position and privilege are so vastly different from their own? How can I, instead, let those speak who make the experience of being pushed to the margins of an academic center on a daily basis? How can I avoid putting myself in an expert position? And then, if I refuse this position, what *is* my position as an academic? What, besides an academic qualification, is the purpose of my study?

I will start by explaining the position I am writing from. I am not an expert of the experience of marginalization to the extent that the people are who form the core of this study. However, as a woman in philosophy, a male dominated space at the University of Vienna, I have had to deal with marginalization, and the struggle of trying to have my voice heard for ten years now. Yet, as a *white* person with Austrian citizenship, the child of an academic[3] who grew up in a context where the exercise of the mind was valued above all else, I have many privileges in other aspects – privileges I feel obliged to use. Over the years I have acquired knowledge of theories from both philosophy and gender studies. I have had insight into academic discourses in several languages, and in different fields. I am privileged in what I know, and in being in a position to devote my time to investigating whatever I take interest in. University is the breeding ground where I discovered, by way of lectures, seminars, discussions and friendships, most of the things in which I am interested today, and I realize that my experience of it was fundamentally shaped by my privileged position. I know that, had I entered this space as a person of color, my experience would have been totally different – and this is an injustice.

Charles Mills writes that “there are typical ways of going wrong that need to be adverted to in light of the social structure and specific group characteristics, and one has a better chance of getting things right through a self-conscious recognition of their existence, and corresponding self-distancing from them” (Mills 2007: 23). The chance to make a contribution to the self-conscious recognition of doing wrong, and the ensuing ability to distance oneself from it, is why I feel permitted to write this thesis, even though I run the risk of repeating the patterns of othering and *white* expertise Kilomba alludes to.

In using my experience in philosophy and gender studies as a resource, I hope to be able to point to many of the unjust mechanisms that shape the lives of people of color, and that I, as part of the *white* academy, am complicit in upholding. This is why I chose in-depth interviews with four individuals who face racist discrimination as a starting point for my investigations. The mechanisms of epistemic marginalization I later explain by way of theory are already present in their accounts: the interviewees are the experts. They should be at center stage. My goal in this thesis is to explicate what is already there in my interviewees’ accounts. This is why chapters 4.1, 4.2, 5.1 and 6.1 of this thesis are entirely dedicated to their testimonies. In the subsequent part of interview analysis, I will use their own accounts to show why the testimonies of people of color are often ignored and under-researched by *white* academia.

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[3] Nearly two: my mother was about to write her doctoral thesis when she discovered she was pregnant with me, and abandoned the project because she did not have the support she would have needed to feel able to have both a child and a doctoral degree.

My interpretation of the interviewees' accounts is influenced by my own positionality and perspective. This is why, in chapters, 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5, I will outline the theoretical knowledge that makes up the foundation of my vantage point of interpretation. This is the ground from which my explorations take off.

2.3 The Phenomenological Method & Standpoint Theory

Experience is the basis of all considerations within the phenomenological practice coined by Edmund Husserl in the 1920s. This philosophical approach consists of distancing oneself in an act called *epoché* from what seems apparent in order to perceive it properly. The goal of Husserl's work is to learn more about the nature of consciousness by analytically separating it from the objects at which it is directed. Husserl's starting point for most of his considerations is his own writing desk, which exemplifies that phenomenologists are directly engaging with what surrounds them, and prioritize their own, personal and subjective experience of things. (Husserl 2011)

Yet, as feminist critics such as Alcoff and Ahmed point out, there are numerous implicit racisms and eurocentrisms in phenomenology's alleged neutrality. According to Alcoff, Ahmed and various other feminist philosophers, experience, by virtue of its bodily conditionality, is never 'neutral'. Rather, it is always already positional and embedded in specific spatial and temporal settings. If one thus intends to adapt phenomenology in an intersectional way, it is indispensable to combine it with a critique of ideology. (Alcoff 2000)

In her 2006 book *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed proposes a queering of Husserl's phenomenology by shedding light on exactly those unintentional orientations a phenomenologist's body – or any body, for that matter – might have. These orientations are responsible for what one can perceive or what is being left out of analysis. Ahmed points out that there are many things Husserl does not take into consideration when musing about his writing table: What, for example, are the conditions of its emergence in Husserl's study? What about the labor necessary to produce it or to keep it clean? What, thus, are other things that Husserl cannot see from his own perspective – and, thus, does not take into account? (Ahmed 2006)

In line with Ahmed's and Alcoff's arguments, the phenomenological approach that figures as a centerpiece of this thesis is committed to highlighting the analytical importance of what one cannot see by virtue of one's own perspective. As I have pointed out before, factors such as gender or *race* arise mainly in how people relate to one another and should not be considered ontological givens.

Following societal rules, people are gendered or racialized in specific ways and receive a specific treatment in accordance with their attested difference from the "*mythical norm*" (Lorde 1984: 116)[4] which Audre Lorde considers where "the trappings of power reside within this society" (ibid.). According to this line of reasoning, differences are something that show in interaction with someone, or in comparing oneself to said *mythical norm.* Consequentially, they are a product of social life.

Queer phenomenology's critique of ideology and its emphasis on the philosophical and political salience of specific, embodied experience links it to core ideas of social epistemology. The most obvious connections are to "standpoint theory" and its analysis of how practices of power influence the production of knowledge. Both queer phenomenology and standpoint theory emphasize marginalized subjects' epistemically advantageous position with respect to the social world they inhabit. (Harding 2004, Solomon 2009) But whereas standpoint theory can only explain how these perspectives are of additional epistemic value, queer phenomenology is also equipped to reflect on the phenomenal, bodily dimension of this positionality at the margins: it can point to how this positionality pre-structures what bodies can do, and how their being in the world is shaped by their position.

Methodically combining elements of standpoint theory and queer phenomenology thus offers a possibility to reflect on the specific philosophical salience of being positioned at the margins on both an epistemic and an experiential-phenomenal level: it can highlight how being marginalized comes not only with a specific perspective, but also with substantially altered possibilities in terms of potential for action.

Epistemology, because of its obvious focus on mental states, is not well equipped for accounting for the ways in which various forms of discriminations are also experienced bodily, and how these ways alter options for operating in and on the world. In emphasizing possibilities for action that arise from marginalized positions, queer phenomenology resists causal subject-object relations prevalent in psychological or biological analysis. It critically assesses how those marginalized by personal and impersonal power structures experience these circumstances. Previous analyses of discrimination stress causal relations that lead to discrimination, all too often reinforcing processes of victimization. A queer-phenomenological perspective centered on bodily phenomenology offers a corrective here, insofar as it highlights the potential for action and agency that arises from being a body “out of place”.

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[4] "Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical norm*, which each of us within our hearts knows 'this is not me'. In america [sic], the norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society." (Lorde 1984: 116)

The queer phenomenology approach mapped out above is guided by an understanding of the human experience as the nodal point between overarching power structures and personal historicity and experience. This point is crucial because, as Gayle Salamon points out, “[t]here is no perception without a subject, but there is no subject without a world. A subject only becomes so through her enmeshment within a world” (Salamon 2018: 16). Thus, each subject’s individual position has to be considered in regard to how they are positioned in the world, and how this position influences them.

In understanding power as an oppressive as well as productive force, as coined by Michel Foucault (1976), there is an emphasis on the productive forces of power and how they co-constitute human beings. Foucault understands power as:

> [T]he multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or in the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (Foucault 1978: 92f.)

It is especially Foucault’s last point, the social hegemonies that are a product of various power interrelations, that is of interest to me in the context of this study: Foucault proposes to use power’s “mechanisms as a grid of intelligibility of the social order” (Foucault 1978: 93). On the one hand, I will look at my interview partners’ narratives from this perspective, since the discriminatory instances that are the focus of this study take place in social settings. As such, they are embodied crystallizations of the strategies in which power takes effect. On the other hand, I will be attentive to what Foucault calls the “directly productive role” (Foucault 1978: 94) of relations of power. This is especially salient given that my interview questions do not only tackle the moments where hegemonic power manifested in my interview partners’ oppression or discrimination, but also other instances where they felt their outlook on things changed in a positive manner due to new social environments they entered, and which subsequently helped them with their experiences of discrimination.

On a third note, the voluntary aspect of my interview partners’ participation in this study can be counted as a vital manifestation of the power-laden situations they had to deal with because of being experienced as different from a governing norm. As Foucault argues, “[w]here there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault 1978: 95). Thus, the fact that the interviewees volunteered for an interview already constitutes an act of resistance in the eyes of oppression, and reinstates that they had been in a situation where they felt that power was being unfairly exercised on them.

2.4 Intersectionality and Social Justice

The second theoretical perspective this thesis is committed to, apart from queer phenomenology/ standpoint theory, is intersectionality. In the following section, I firstly introduce an intersectional social justice approach founded on the writings of authors such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins. (Crenshaw 1989, 2017; Collins 1990, 1995; hooks 2000) Secondly, I map out a post-colonial critique of the concept of intersectionality by Nikita Dhawan, Maria do Mar Castro Varela and Sara Ahmed (Ahmed 2006, Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016).

My two-step treatment of intersectionality is influenced by Jessica C. Harris' and Lori D. Patton's text “Un/Doing Intersectionality through Higher Education Research” (2019). They point out that there are many ways in which research on higher education with an intersectional agenda runs the risk of ‘undoing’ the concept in its process. The authors appeal to academics using intersectionality as a framework, demanding they should provide a detailed history and explore it as a concept. Intersectionality should be implemented at “macro and micro level structures” (Harris and Patton 2019: 368), and present in all stages of the research process. Additionally, intersectionality should be used in “ways that advance a radical social justice agenda” (ibid.). I am committed to doing Harris' and Patton's demand justice by exploring and explaining the concept of intersectionality as part of my theoretical approach, as well as in the process of analyzing the interviews.

To use intersectionality in a way that is geared at aiding a radical social justice agenda and follow Harris' and Patton's demand, I will, in a first step, discuss two different concepts of social justice: Axel Honneth's recognition approach to social justice, and Nancy Fraser's justice of redistribution approach (Honneth and Fraser 2003). The discussion of Fraser's and Honneth's theoretical stances offers the possibility to account for the link between individual experiences of discriminatory instances and the overall social conditions that cause them. In a second step, I will argue that intersectional perspectives can account for *both* a change on the recognition as well as the redistributive level. To support this claim, I will focus on texts by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw 1989, 2017), Patricia Hill Collins (Collins 1990, 1995) and bell hooks (hooks 2000). This part will delineate the history and potential of intersectional approaches. In a third step, I will implement a post-colonial critique of the concept of intersectionality by invoking authors Nikita Dhawan and Maria do Mar Castro Varela (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016), Sara Ahmed (Ahmed 2006) and

Jasbir Puar (Puar 2007, 2012). This allows me to work with a concept of intersectionality that is geared towards understanding the experiences of subjects in a world shaped by the powers of European imperialism and the challenges of a globalized world. This discussion is vital to this study, since the way 'difference' is attested is fundamentally shaped by the coercive introduction of European ideals on a planetary scale, and the subsequent need for others to adhere to these standards in order to fit in.

2.4.1 Social Justice

I now introduce two different takes on the concept social justice. This is because social disadvantage often takes the form of discriminatory instances, and my goal in this thesis is to shed a light on how individuals experience this form of social injustice.

In their book *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (2003), Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser debate two different concepts of social justice in their attempt to provide a critical theory of capitalist society, encompassing the usually discrete levels of moral philosophy, social theory and political analysis. In the context of this thesis, this approach is especially interesting since my aim is to account for both individual experiences of discriminatory instances and the overall social conditions that bring about those instances.

Honneth and Fraser point out that, in order to establish social justice, theorists for social justice usually either center around the idea of redistribution of resources, or politics that focus on the recognition of cultural differences. A focus on distributive justice is motivated by the notion that an even distribution of material goods will help lift the prevailing restrictions on chances for a good life of individuals, groups and societies. By evening out the playing field when it comes to economic dis/advantage, access to generally available and desirable social goods and social positions can be equally distributed, leading to a society where less discriminatory instances occur (Kreckel 1992: 17; Riegraf 2015: 58).

In contrast, theories of recognition criticize a stance that believes an equal redistribution of goods will inevitably lead to a more just society. Their main claim is that the contemporary pluralization of forms of life has prompted a change when it comes to parameters of social inequality, and that there are numerous new lines of conflict between different societies that emerge as a result of this process. Theorists of recognition ask how theories of social justice can be adapted to modern society's pluralization, aiming at justice for all the different life contexts of different societal groups (Riegraf 2015: 59).

From the perspective of recognition, questions of societal participation and exclusion arise, which are necessarily linked to limitations in terms of being able to live a good life, and to fully live up to one's individual potential. Note how this approach is already influenced by a meritocratic understanding of society which presupposes that, if all were given the same societal recognition, differences in how people are treated and how they can advance in life would be necessarily evened out. As theorists of recognition argue, "minorization interrupts and interrogates the homogenous, horizontal claim of the democratic liberal society" (Bhabha 1996: 57).

Through the lens of minorization, a social process which Bhabha traces back to the 1920s and whose result is "a minority [which] is never a full citizen and only has a partial identification with the nation" (Anfeng 2009: 175), the experiences of disregard marginalized groups make on a daily basis can be considered results of global shifts of power. Theorists of recognition argue that societal devaluation cannot be counteracted by merely redistributing wealth, but that there are other power dynamics at play which cannot be counteracted by economic tools alone. Mechanisms such as political or cultural representation of marginalized groups are necessary to counteract this kind of discrimination.

Honneth theorizes the "socialist ideal of redistribution as a subvariety of the struggle for recognition" (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 3), thus, as a normative monism, whereas Fraser proposes a "perspectivist dualist" analysis which "casts the two categories as co-fundamental and mutually irreducible dimensions of justice" (ibid.). The base argument of Honneth's recognition approach is that a society should only be considered socially just if societal institutions manage to establish an environment in which all members of society and all social groups get the chance to experience social recognition. He critiques a purely economist understanding of social justice for its inability to take into account that a just society must provide all their members the possibility of an "intact identity", a demand which necessitates the acknowledgement of cultural differences and recognition of different identities. The social fight for recognition is central to Honneth's theory since, for him, societal changes are something that emerges from within societies, due to their intrinsic pluralist potential (Honneth 2003, Riegraf 2015).

Fraser, on the contrary, conceptualizes recognition and redistribution as two intrinsically linked concepts, drawing attention to the implicit dangers of a normative social justice theory. She argues that Honneth's account falls short of demands for a redistribution of wealth, and, by being solely centered around individual identities, gives way to a meritocratic understanding of society which lastly places the responsibility for societal success with the individual. Fraser argues that "status conflicts have achieved paradigmatic status at precisely the moment when an aggressively expanding neoliberal capitalism is radically exacerbating economic inequality" (Fraser 2003: 92). Thus, already economically disadvantaged – and thus vulnerable – parts of society are at a great risk of being even more neglected when political focus lies solely on questions of recognition.

Fraser's critique is that theories like Honneth's presuppose a reductive, culturalist perspective by believing that broader societal change will result from a change in the cultural order, implicitly placing the responsibility for economic differences with a cultural order that privileges certain forms of wage labor and devalues others. Fraser's diagnosis of efforts that only aim for change in the field of recognition is that it is merely "a 'progressive' neoliberalism that celebrates 'diversity', meritocracy, and 'emancipation' while dismantling social protections and re-externalizing social reproduction" (Fraser 2017: 33).

Ruth Lister, along Fraser's lines, argues that one concept that remains largely unchallenged through Honneth's demand for justice based on recognition is a meritocratic understanding of society. It is based upon the premise that, if all were given the possibility to live out their full potential, there would be no poverty, since those who "give their best" will succeed in a just society. "The theory is that meritocracy offers a 'ladder of opportunity', on which everyone has an equal chance to climb as far as their 'merit' permits" (Lister 2006: 232). Yet, as she elaborates, meritocratic thinking can provide the basis for the legitimization of wide inequality, by placing the responsibility for success with the individual without regard to their specific positionality. Lastly, meritocracy is oriented by the life of the western, male, *white* and heterosexual citizen, who is taken to be the societal norm. This is especially interesting in the context of the studies I quoted earlier on in this thesis (Kaiser and Miller 2003), which shed a light on the problems posed by implicitly placing the responsibility to end discrimination on those who experience it (McConahy 1986; Buraschi, Bustillos and Huici 2018).

2.4.2 Intersectionality

In the text "Zwischen Umverteilung und Anerkennung: Gerechtigkeitstheorien"[5] (2015), Birgit Riegraf argues that discourses around intersectionality pay attention to both the above-mentioned justice of recognition and justice of redistribution approach. By calling attention to differences between people that, theoretically, belong to one oppressed group – for example, women – theories of intersectionality enable a social critique which is oriented towards different positions each individual occupies simultaneously. "Thus an analysis is attempted that takes into consideration the varied experiences of diverse constituencies without losing sight of the simultaneity, contradictions, and interdependencies of these perspectives.” (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016:16) In using an intersectional approach, I can both pay attention to the individual experience of discrimination and the overarching and productive power structures that bring about such instances.

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[5] Translated: "Between redistribution and recognition: theories of justice."

Intersectionality’s ‘founding’ text, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989), builds on the notion that race and gender are often treated as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis. Crenshaw, a US law scholar, examines how this concept of exclusive categories affects US anti-discrimination law as well as feminist theory and antiracist politics, who all tend to focus on a single axis of discrimination. By focusing on Black women herself, Crenshaw aims to document this group’s theoretical eradication, which also occurs within *white* feminist movements which fail to account for the specific experiences of women of color or Black women.[6] According to Crenshaw, research on discrimination very often focuses on privileged members of a group and runs a risk of succumbing to the pitfalls of single-issue politics. As a result, those who embody more than one aspect of discrimination are often not protected by laws established in line with this “single-axis framework” (Crenshaw 1989: 140).

Building on “the collective history of Black feminism in the US” (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 20), for example the Black lesbian Combahee River Collective (Combahee River Collective 1979) and authors such as Angela Davis (Davis 1981), Beverly Smith (Smith 1983), Audre Lorde (Lorde 1984), Crenshaw states that there is an exclusion of Black women from feminist theory and antiracist policies. This is because these movements, although progressive in principle, are built upon a distinct pool of experience which cannot accommodate the experience of multiple discrimination. Crenshaw pleads for a rethinking of the whole framework of turning experience into policies, in order to implement experiences of multiple discrimination. Intersectionality, as a theoretical approach, is especially salient for questions of social justice because it encompasses both calls for recognition of different lived experiences, as well as calls for material redistribution (Riegraf 2015: 69).

In her book *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990), Black sociologist Patricia Hill Collins, too, calls for an acknowledgement of the intersection of race, class and gender. Collins criticizes how theorists from the separate fields of race, class and gender studies have all tried to argue for the primacy of their specific analytic interest in regard to all others. Their unifying feature was that they treated racism, sexism and class exploitation as mere variations of more fundamental processes. Collins points out that each of the separate perspectives was accompanied by the according social movements, which provide for a fundamental link between these three analytic stances. “Each [social movement] reasoned that, if individuals could link their own experiences with oppression on a micro level with the larger macro forces constructing their social position, they could address some of the major social problems of our day” (Collins 1995: 492).

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[6] For an excellent account of this problematic, see: Lorde, Audre (1984): “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism.” In: Lorde, Audre (1984): *Sister Outsider. Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde.* New York: Crossing Press. 124-133.

Yet, as Collins recalls, all separate movements, or at least some theorists and activists that were part of them, eventually acknowledged the limitations that came with privileging one system of oppression over the others. She argues that the notion of interlocking systems of oppression essentially means two things that, together, shape oppression: firstly, it “refers to the macro level connections linking systems of oppression such as race, class and gender. This is the model describing the social structures that create social positions. Secondly, the notion of intersectionality describes micro level processes – namely, how each individual and group occupies a social position within interlocking structures of oppression described by the metaphor of intersectionality” (Collins 1995: 492).

This analytic separation of macro and micro level is important to keep in mind when analyzing accounts of situations that involve discrimination based on each one of these factors. On the one hand, it is important to ask what macro level systems of oppression are at play in a specific situation. On the other hand, it is important to shed a light on how individuals are in different social positions as a a result of these systems and the specific way they interlock. Note that none of these steps of analysis should take place without the other: it is, according to Collins, only in the acknowledgement of both levels that theories of social oppression can satisfactorily shed a light on the historical roots of each of these categories, and their contemporary manifestation in a specific situation (Collins 1995).

Since this thesis provides an intersectional analysis of experiences of discrimination within the university, a notable source to understand the way in which key concepts of intersectionality and academia are interlinked is Kimberlé Crenshaw’s text “Race Liberalism and the Deradicalization of Racial Reform” (2017). Crenshaw recounts how, following the 1982 “Harvard Law School boycott” (Crenshaw 2017: 2298), a split between those advocating for “race liberalism” (ibid.) and those in favor of a “critical race perspective” (ibid.) became apparent. The former, building on an allegedly “colorblind” model of racial justice, aimed to disenfranchise the latter, which was explicitly "focused on the distribution of racial power" (ibid.), making the acknowledgement of discrimination and racial hierarchies within academia and elsewhere the base of its argument (Crenshaw 2017).

Crenshaw gives an account of how students from a critical race background, by pointing out racist discrimination at universities and demanding a reconceptualization of the way race and law were "conceptualized as a field of inquiry" (ibid.), "challenged the deepest pretense of liberal sensitivity – that universities themselves are apolitical arbiters of neutral knowledge rather than participants in the struggle over how social power is exercised" (ibid.). Thus, by pointing out curricular shortcomings or structural inequalities between students of color and their *white* counterparts, advocates for critical race theory not only challenged social processes within academia, but also academic self-image. As a result of this struggle, Critical Race Theory and intersectional feminism/ antiracism emerged as a counterpoint to the academic ideals of colorblind meritocracy, setting the stage for a public discussion about faculty hiring and adequacy of curricula.

An important voice to highlight the above-mentioned intersection of *race* and class from a feminist background is bell hooks. Studies show university attendance to be statistically correlated with the level of education received by a person's parents – a phenomenon especially prevalent in Austria in comparison to other countries (Aumair and Theißl 2020). Yet, the class dimension of intersectionality, especially in the context of higher education, is often under-discussed. hooks' take is especially interesting in the context of this thesis since in her 2000 book, w*here we stand: class matters*, hooks sheds light on her experience as a Black working-class student in a predominantly *white* higher education context (hooks 2000).

hooks states that, as a nation, the U.S. is afraid of having a dialogue about the importance of class, even in light of an "ever-widening gap between the rich and poor" (hooks 2000: vii). She points out that the U.S. is highly segregated when it comes to class, with the poor and the rich living in enclosed communities far from each other. According to hooks, the inability to conceptualize power differences as a result of class stems from a long-held belief that "the United States is a class-free society – that anyone who works hard enough can make it to the top" (hooks 2000: 5). As hooks adds: "Few people stop to think that in a class-free society there would be no top" (ibid.) This shows the necessity of linking critiques of class oppression with challenges to the widely held belief that meritocracy is the guiding principle of U.S. academia and academia elsewhere.

The difference between sexism, racism and classism, to hooks, is that classism and its effects are far harder to challenge than sexism and racism. Often, the lack of economic capital goes hand in hand with a lack in representation (Fraser and Honneth 2003), and the struggles of these groups are discounted by attributing them to other factors, such as race. This makes the intersection between race and class a field especially important, yet difficult to address. “The neat binary categories of white and black or male and female are not there when it comes to class. How will they identify the enemy. How will they know who to fear or who to challenge” (hooks 2000: 6). hooks, by pointing out the struggle to identify and know one’s own or someone else’s class status, refers to the epistemic struggle that is tied to having to deal with categories such as wealth, that are hardly talked about, yet influence people’s abilities to operate in and on the world in fundamental ways (hooks 2000).

hooks recounts that, even though she read about the politics of the American left at length when she was in college, she felt her language to be inadequate as soon as she left the university context, mainly due to the dominance of male, *white* voices in the field of academic or intellectual discourse about class. She experienced how race and gender were used to deflect attention away from the harsh realities of class politics, and that her challenges to classism were often redirected to conversations about race and racial justice. To hooks, this is because “[a]cknowledging class difference destabilizes the notion that racism affects us all in equal ways. It disturbs the illusion of racial solidarity among blacks, used by those individuals with class power to ensure that their class interests will be protected even as they transcend race behind the scenes” (hooks 2000: 8). By introducing the category of class into the analysis, Black oppression, imagined as a unifying experience of Black people, is unmasked as being dependent on factors such as wealth and privilege (hooks 2000).

hooks diagnoses a lack of concern for the poor, which shows in a “class warfare that increasingly goes unnoticed in this society” (hooks 2000: 46). Social housing projects are being discontinued without the possibility of relocation for residents, and wealth-transfer programs are being actively limited. Oftentimes, conservative voices “deride, degrade, and devalue the poor” (ibid.), which leads to a general assumption that those who have less deserve so by virtue of not trying hard enough, i.e., by not making it in a meritocratic society. hooks states that, by the early eighties, “the idea that sexism and racism had been eradicated, coupled with the assumption that the existing white supremacist capitalist patriarchy could work for everybody gained momentum and with it the notion that those groups for whom it did not work were at fault” (hooks 2000: 66). This implicates the widespread belief that old notions of oppressor class and oppressed class were no longer meaningful in light of a capitalist society that held the same possibilities of success for everyone. This notion was especially amplified by token individuals who, even though they were from a poor background, made it to the ranks of the wealthy and powerful (hooks 2000).

hooks' statement is especially interesting in an academic context where the advancement of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as poor or immigrant communities or communities of color, is seen as proof that social inequality ceased to exist. It shows that, oftentimes, imagined realities help at masking the harsh realities of oppressed peoples. In turn, as I will show in this study, an analysis of individuals' phenomenal experiences can help at unmasking the constructed nature of this supposed equality.

2.4.3 Critical assessment of intersectionality discourses

Intersectionality is the theoretical perspective I use to think about experiences of discrimination at university. In order to further sharpen my tool of analysis, I will now assess possible problems or theoretical shortcomings that can arise from this perspective. Thus, I will now consider Gabriele Michalitsch's critique of intersectionality from a governmentality perspective by concentrating on her paper "Intersektionalität: Von Feminismus zu Diversität. Eine Akademische Neoliberalisierung"[7] (2013). From a perspective of economic re-/production of gender, Michalitsch distinguishes three core problematics of the concept intersectionality as it is currently used in some German language discourses. In a second step, I review a post-colonial take on intersectionality as proposed by Nikita Dhawan and Maria do Mar Castro Varela in their text "'What difference does difference make?': Diversity, Intersectionality, and Transnational Feminist Politics" (2016).

In the context of this thesis, it is important to highlight that Michalitsch's criticism specifically tackles a version of intersectionality that is prevalent in German language discourses. Her critique's main point of reference is Gudrun-Axeli Knapp's "Zur Bestimmung und Abgrenzung von „Intersektionalität". Überlegungen zu Interferenzen von „Geschlecht", „Klasse" und anderen Kategorien sozialer Teilung"[8] (Knapp 2013).

So far, I have avoided centering the methodological part of this thesis around the German language interpretation of intersectionality, since it is a concept that is the result of anglophone Black women and women of color protesting their epistemological and political disenfranchisement as unheard voices in predominantly *white* feminist contexts. In the following, I will briefly introduce Michalitsch's critique and then critically assess how far her notions of intersectionality are informed by an understanding of the context that differs from how it was conceptualized in its context of origin: Black feminist thought.

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[7] Translated: "Intersectionality: From Feminism to Diversity. An Academic Neoliberalisation."

[8] Translated: "About the Definition and Demarcations of Intersectionality. Thoughts on Interferences of 'Gender', 'Class' and Other Categories of Social Divide."

Firstly, Michalitsch criticizes that intersectionality, at least in the version provided by Gudrun-Axeli Knapp, focuses on whether someone belongs to a certain group: group identity is the primary focus of analysis, which is then used to further look at systematic features. For Michalitsch, in light of her background as a Foucault scholar and feminist economist, it is more suitable to first ask about the systematic mechanisms of the production of societal division. This way, an assessment of the conditions that constitute social inequality is possible. Michalitsch argues that the basis of this analysis must be social relations that show on a macro, meso and micro level in relations of power, and not categories. By working with set categories, intersectionality runs the risk of reproducing binary modes of classification. Michalitsch also points out that an understanding of power's productive force, for example in the form of subjectivization, is lost if an analysis focuses solely on oppressive structures. She concludes that a theoretical conception of any category of social division is necessary to uphold an intersectional perspective (Michalitsch 2013: 434).

Secondly, Michalitsch criticizes that the "intersection" metaphor produces a mechanistic understanding of social oppression. She points out that, by conceptualizing intersectionality as the mere overlapping of two or more different categories at a certain point, namely a person's lived experience, these categories are thought of as independent from one another in principle. She calls for the acknowledgement of the insurmountable interconnectedness of all social conditions. From this perspective, a reified conceptualization of essentialized categories can be avoided, since all social conditions are understood as interlinked. Michalitsch further criticizes that not all categories of difference are necessarily categories of structure. She argues that a pluralization of the triad race, class, and gender dissolves hierarchies within society into social differences, which makes it hard to point out power and domination, leading to a de-politicization (Michalitsch 2013: 434f).

Michalitsch's third annotation is that the two problematics cited above, firstly the substitution of power by inequality and, secondly, of structure by difference, can be traced back to the concept's genesis in the age of neoliberalism. As Michalitsch points out, neoliberalism does not only entail a restructuring of the economy, the state and society, but also a significant change on part of the subject: a redefinition of the terms of public and private increasingly places responsibility with individuals, and societal problems are addressed as individual issues. In this meritocratic mindset, emancipation, for example, is considered a task any woman can accomplish if she only works hard enough (Michalitsch 2013: 435).

I will now consider Nikita Dhawan and Maria do Mar Castro Varela's discussion of intersectionality from a post-colonial perspective, in order to map out some potentially problematic aspects of carelessly working with intersectionality. Dhawan's and Castro Varela's text addresses some of the issues concerning intersectionality that Michalitsch raised in the above-mentioned text. To bring those two texts together will allow me to concretize the notion of intersectionality that serves as my theoretical perspective.

In their paper "'What difference does difference make?': Diversity, Intersectionality, and Transnational Feminist Politics" (2016), Dhawan and Castro Varela investigate the terms 'diversity' and 'intersectionality', and in how far they are feasible tools for achieving justice. Firstly, they criticize how discourses surrounding these concepts oftentimes fail to include voices from a non-Euro-North American context, and ultimately fail at realizing their emancipatory potential by "unwittingly reify[ing] the hegemony of an entitled majority" (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 12). Michalitsch's critique seconds that claim, yet on another level: in the process of the concept's transfer from a Black anglophone to a *white* German language context, many nuances of the concept, and especially its deep rootedness in Black struggle against oppression, are lost, and a *white* conceptual hegemony is reinstalled. Despite intersectionality's goal to take different voices into consideration, under a seemingly progressive pretext, an omission of other voices is reiterated.

Michalitsch criticizes that contemporary intersectional approaches do not take into consideration relations of power but start their analyses by looking at individual experiences. As Michalitsch writes: "If 'axes of domination' turn into 'intersections', this implies a fundamental de-politicization, which occurs alongside a de-thematization of power and domination" (Michalitsch 2013: 435, transl. F.L.). To Michalitsch's statement, I would like to add Dhawan and Castro Varela pointing out that "the production of injustice is located in a range of interconnected socio-political institutions like the heteronormative family, the community, the market, and the state" (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 12). Unlike the intersectional German language approaches Michalitsch focuses on, Dhawan and Castro Varela place an emphasis on the need to look at the embeddedness of every experience of difference in a broader socio-political setting. Additionally, in their definition of intersectionality, Dhawan and Castro Varela highlight that an important aspect of intersectionality is that "power has multiple sources and is understood to operate dynamically within social and political arenas" (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 16).

It is notable that Dhawan's and Castro Varela's main point of reference in the above-mentioned paper is Sara Ahmed's concept of the "non-performativity" (Ahmed 2006) of intersectionality and diversity politics. In her text "The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism" (2006), using an argument similar to her stance in the earlier mentioned *On Being Included* (Ahmed 2012), Ahmed explores how institutional speech acts affirming commitment to diversity or racial equality do not bring about the material effects they name. In the context of this thesis, this diagnosis is especially relevant since universities are one of the institutions that routinely use anti-racist speech acts. Ahmed argues that the problem hereby is that such speech acts are perceived as a means of sufficiently tackling problems of institutional inequality, with no further action taken to actually reach the goals envisioned. Additionally, they render institutional racism and sexism unnamable, since institutions self-immunize through representing as anti-racist and diversity-friendly. “The effect is that the non-performative rhetoric prevents combatting that which it pretends to abolish” (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 21). Thus, the uttering of certain speech acts institutionally conveys the false feeling of security, and the expectation of a discrimination free environment.

Ahmed argues that, for diversity-oriented speech acts to actually fulfill their performative potential, practitioners need to “follow them around” (Ahmed 2006) and see how people take those texts up and transform them into action. In this thesis, I will examine at the level of the individual in how far these institutional speech acts actually fulfill their performative potential. Dhawan and Castro Varela take up Ahmed’s critique of the non-performativity of these institutional speech acts and, in their paper, aim at explaining in how far a theoretical approach to diversity is not enough: it is precisely the material conditions of life, and their embeddedness in overarching power structures, that go unchallenged if all good intentions remain in the text, and are not acted out elsewhere. As they paraphrase postcolonial theorist Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (1995), “race and gender are not simply questions of skin color or sexuality, but of exploitative sexual and economic relations and imperial servility” (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 17). Thus, factors of difference can never be separated from the power-ridden and historically constituted material conditions which lead to them making a “difference” in today’s world.

This historically grown process of differentiation is also relevant concerning conceptual work: Dhawan and Castro Varela point to Indian theorist Nivedita Menon’s critique of the global dominance of Western-coined concepts to highlight the importance of taking into consideration each theory’s spatial and temporal conditions. Menon argues that most Indian feminists have never operated under the dominance of a “single-axis framework” (Crenshaw 1989: 140), as diagnosed by Crenshaw, since India’s history of colonialism made the consideration of imperialism’s after-effects inevitable. Feminist *Dalit*[9] scholars, for example, reject radical feminist categories such as ‘sex work’ because, for their context, the concept’s connotation of ‘free choice’ “trivializes historical relations of coercion maintained by the hegemonic upper castes in sexually exploiting vulnerable *Dalit* women" (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 19). Accordingly, in Indian post-colonial society, due to the complex history of caste and its persistent relevance in today's India, gender issues should not be thematized separate from class or caste issues.

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[9] “Dalit is the self-chosen designation by groups traditionally regarded as ‘untouchable’ in the Hindu caste system.” (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 19)

Reading Menon's argument concerning *Dalit* feminist struggle in the context of the broader project of imperialism allows to pinpoint sexual exploitation as one of, as McClintock puts it, three governing themes of Western imperialism. These are "the transmission of white, male power through control of colonized women; the emergence of a new global order of cultural knowledge; and the imperial command of commodity capital" (McClintock 1995: 1f). In Western societies, which profited and still profit from these three forms of imperialist exploitation, these realities do not necessarily inform analyses, thus leading to a de-politicization of gender studies and intersectional approaches. Secondly, societies that self-conceptualize as post-racial might not take the aftermath of global imperialism into account when reflecting on social issues (Möschel 2011, Boulila 2019).

In her book *Race in Post-Racial Europe* (2019), Stefanie Boulila on the one hand, points to the political and epistemological resistances some continental European feminist discourses have against intersectional approaches. She argues that women of color's claims are often co-opted in order to fit hegemonic discourses, and that antiracist feminism is often framed as politically divisive, and thus dangerous and violent. Secondly, Boulila examines how the resistance to intersectionality's antiracist facets is prompted by European racial denial, i.e., the belief that continental Europeans live in post-racial societies. "The race idea has successfully externalized from European self-conceptualization" (Boulila 2019: 25): race, in a Europe deemed post-racial, has to unfold in the shadow of its erasure. This materializes, among other phenomena, in the "claim that race is of no analytical use in continental Europe" (Boulila 2019: 139). This thesis can be considered a challenge to this belief.

The criticism of Eurocentric interpretations of intersectionality that fail to account for the category race and Western imperialism is similar to Michalitsch's argument that intersectionality and diversity run a risk of aiding a de-politicized understanding of gender equality and the struggle for social justice, if there is no attention to over-arching power structures such as economic inequality. If economic relations, which pre-condition identity aspects, and the neoliberal embeddedness of the concepts of intersectionality and diversity, such as diversity management's role in allocating funding within the university, are not taken into consideration, intersectionality remains a construct empty of any real political potential.

In light of McClintock's critique, Dhawan and Castro Varela point out that all categories employed in intersectional endeavors need to be examined regarding their status as legacies of the modernist imperial project. They stress that, with intersectionality being considered a corrective methodology, "one can ideally hope […] to overcome the normative violence inherent in categories such as gender or sexuality" (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 23). Such a contextualization can also help to examine why "specific inequalities are given more importance than others in specific moments in specific spaces" (ibid.), lastly pointing to overarching power structures governing these specific discourses and their entanglement. (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016)

In line with Michalitsch's critique that a mere concentration on categories of difference omits power structures constituting these categories, Dhawan and Castro Varela add that "the debate surrounding intersectionality is at risk of fetishizing the race-class-gender-mantra without paying attention to what issues are rendered invisible and excluded because of this mechanical repetition and Eurocentric reduction" (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 25). Thus, they call for methodologies that take into consideration the dynamics of political power, in order to forego a comeback of universalist perspectives and essentialist tendencies which gain momentum by way of the dominant particular. (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016)

As an example of destabilizing the danger of essentialist categories, Dhawan and Castro Varela propose Jasbir Puar's 2012 mobilization of Gilles Deleuze's idea of assemblage. This proposition helps at clarifying some methodological questions I came across in the course of mapping out the methodological toolkit for this thesis. The concept assemblage "offers a mapping of fleeting, de-centered, and unstable bodies as opposed to politics of intersectional subject positioning." (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016: 26). Thus, human identity is understood not in ontological terms, but as a product of diverse lines of flight and decentralization. Puar argues that "intersectionality as an intellectual rubric and a tool for political intervention must be supplemented – if not complicated and reconceptualized – by a notion of assemblage" (Puar 2012: 50). This is especially necessary given her perspective that intersectional identities are the "byproducts of attempts to still and quell the perpetual motion of assemblages, to capture and reduce them, to harness their threatening mobility" (Puar 2007: 213).

The reduction of humans to essentialist categories can be understood as a counterpart to the notion that humans are, as Rosi Braidotti puts it in *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (2002), always in stages of becoming, thus transitioning from one ontological status to another by their mere existence in world's manifold overlapping contexts. This multi-dimensionality of human life and experience is oftentimes reduced to simplistic axes of analysis, without taking into account every human's specific historicity in various regimes of power and affect. In addition, the notion of human beings in different stages of becoming pays tribute to the notion that the idea of subjecthood itself is a deeply Western and highly presuppositional concept. By being attentive to power and affect, assemblage theorists ask, "what is prior to and beyond what gets established" (Puar 2012: 63), thus allowing for a critique of intersectionality's main cornerstones without calling into question that these intersections exist.

2.5 Institutional Space

Taking into consideration Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) is helpful to understand the way contemporary teaching at universities has evolved, and how norming functions as an important mechanism within this institution. Wendy Leo Moore's concept of *white* institutional space, by pointing to the racist implications of such norming practices, provides the logical continuation to this mode of order, and is considered in the second part of this chapter.

Foucault's historical observations are especially geared to account for the role of power in this context, and how it evolved to encompass more and more subtle mechanisms to exert control. According to Foucault, after 1762 in France, tuition style was flattened out: a teaching style flourished which individuals evenly distributed across classroom settings in a specific form of disciplining. Before, the reigning teaching style had been characterized by rivalry and war. Each class was divided up into two groups that were in direct competition with each other. From 1762 on, the classroom was homogenized, and the individual elements were deemed hierarchically equal, only subjected to the teacher (Foucault 1977).

Despite this superficial premise of equality, a reorganization of students within the order of the school and university took place. They were arranged in classrooms, corridors, and courses, according to age and knowledge. The model of the teacher who is able to keep an eye on all students simultaneously replaced a prior form of school organization, in which the teacher had turned to some students individually, with the rest of the class being unsupervised. According to Foucault, the ensuing spatial reorganization was rooted in several distinctions that were made between students: they were systematically reorganized according to their progress in learning, their character, zeal, cleanliness, and parents' wealth. Previously, parental class status had dictated a pupil's role in the classroom, and how much time the teacher would devote to them individually (Foucault 1977).

Under the guise of equality, class distinction, rooted in monarchy, faded to the background, but was substituted by more subtle ways of order. Accordingly, "[t]he first of the great operations of discipline is, therefore, the constitution of 'tableaux vivants' which transform the confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities" (Foucault 1977: 148). The tableau served the purpose of accounting for what exists, while constituting at the same time a technique of rule, and a way to gain knowledge in the form of organization and bookkeeping.

Foucault mentions a second measure of discipline which is important in the historical development of the university institution: "The power or the Norm" (Foucault 1977: 184). Influenced by attempts to form a unitary body of students, markers of corresponding to the "norm" or being "abnormal" substitute, by the end of the classical age, previous markers of class status and privilege. Within a system of formal equality, the power of the norm operates easily: "In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another" (Foucault 1977: 84). Consequently, the dealing with differences and their localization in a wider contexts, as well as the orientation by an existing norm, can be considered core characteristics of the university as an institution and form of discipline, and a necessity for its functioning (Foucault 1977).

According to Foucault, the whole apparatus of the learning institution is geared to operate by way of these distinctions: the discrimination of individuals is intended to promote the functionality of the whole system. Paradoxically, these distinctions and attested difference rooted in homogenization, often serve as excuses to exclude certain groups from the realm of education on the basis of characteristics that are outside of the norm. In their text "Impossible Burdens: White Institutions, Emotional Labor, and Micro-Resistance" (2015), Louwanda Evans and Wendy Leo Moreno illuminate the shared experiences of persons of color in elite law schools and commercial aviation industry, in order to point to connections between *white* institutional spaces, emotional labor and resistance. The authors map out the "broader patterns of racial dynamics" (Evans and Moreno 2015: 440) they discovered in two separate in-depth studies. Specifically, they point to "racialized structures, ideologies, and discourses that lead to the everyday micro-aggressions faced by people of color in […] 'white institutional spaces'" (ibid.).

The term "white institutional space", coined by Wendy Leo Moore, "provides an analytical tool with which to interrogate the intersecting mechanisms that contribute to the reproduction of white privilege and power within elite institutional spaces" (Moore 2008: 14). Moore highlights education's role in ideological reproduction. Her account is influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, who claims that education should be understood as a form of symbolic violence. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence is perpetrated by "every power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them es legitimate by concealing power relations which are the basis of its force" (Bourdieu 1990: 4). Even though education is, by and large presented as neutral, it imposes meanings and symbols of dominant culture, reproducing an ideological frame that rationalizes and reproduces structures of inequality. By combining the notion of symbolic violence with studies that focus on institutional space, Moore highlights how, in a society organized according to racist principles, racist relations can be reproduced without individuals' intentional racist acts (Moore 2008: 17).

The concept of *white* institutional space explicates how race privilege is produced and reproduced in organizations and institutions, and how it constitutes an, often tacit, *white* racial frame. (Evans and Moore 2015: 442f.) This frame is produced over time, and is embedded socially in order to seem natural. It is naturalized as a part of the normative, supposedly neutral working of the institution. As Evans and Moore point out, the contemporary manifestation of these processes of power is the practice of so-called color-blind racism (Moore 2008). Through the assertion of notions of equality and neutrality, "the racialized structure, practice, and ideology of white institutional spaces gets obscured" (Evans and Moore 2015: 443). When asked directly, actors within the university may deny that they hold any racial bias, asserting their color-blindness. Yet, their actions might still reproduce discriminatory patterns they are not aware of.

Ironically, it is the presence of people of color in *white* institutional spaces that brings about notions of color-blind racism. Evans and Moore argue that the inclusion of some people of color into historically *white* spaces is considered evidence for racial neutrality and/or equality. Yet the assumption that these places have changed in character is only true insofar as one ignores the extreme *white* resistance the inclusion of the marginalized is oftentimes met with. The presence of PoC in historically *white* spaces is often taken to be a sign of structures that have changed and are now less inimical to non-*white* persons. Evans and Moore argue that, in fact, these superficial signs of inclusion help the dynamics of *white* institutional space to become even more tacit and accepted (Evans and Moore 2015: 443).

However, as Evans and Moore argue – along with Sara Ahmed in *On Being Included* (2012) – these racist organizational dynamics are only tacit for those who are in positions privileged enough to not be inhibited by them. PoC "face an organization of institutional power that patterns along the lines of white domination and everyday racist practices (or micro-aggressions) on the one hand, and the contradicting ideological and discursive assertion of race neutrality and equality on the other" (Moore and Evans 2015: 443). People of color within seemingly equal and color-blind organizations are thus forced to face a de facto racist environment which discriminates them, while simultaneously denying its inherent racism. This makes it hard for the marginalized to contest the racist structures they encounter and from which they suffer.

2.6 Summary

In the course of this chapter, I have discussed various theories that form the background for my analysis of the interviews regarding discrimination at university. I now summarize the most notable points. Firstly, I want to highlight that an intersectional approach is able to account for both the recognition of cultural differences and the call for redistribution on an economic level, that Fraser calls for in her acknowledgement that these two processes are intrinsically linked (Fraser 2003: 92). By keeping this in mind when analyzing the interviews, I can avoid the pitfalls of a meritocratic pre-conception, which could lead me to place responsibility for their oppression with the individual that is oppressed in the current neoliberal system.

Secondly, I have refined my understanding of intersectionality. In light of Patricia Hill Collins' analyses, in my interpretation of the interviews I will look at both the macro level connections that link systems of oppression – the social structures that create social position – and the micro level processes which account for how every individual occupies a social position, which is informed by these interlocking structures of oppression (Collins 1995: 492). Keeping in mind bell hooks' critique that the factor class is oftentimes neglected in intersectional analyses, I will pay special attention to this factor, and how it influences the others (hooks 2000).

On a third note, in my analysis, I will take into consideration Dhawan's and Castro Varela's (Dhawan and Castro Varela 2016) as well as Ahmed's (Ahmed 2006) post-colonial critique of intersectionality. They show how every concept, even if it's coined from an underprivileged position, can be co-opted by more privileged perspectives, which then rid it of its original political potential. This approach shows that transformation of theoretical concepts into positive action cannot be assumed, and that a perpetual self-critique is needed, even among those who already use the concept intersectionality. This critique can, for example, happen by including other approaches, such as Deleuzian assemblage theory or theories of becoming (Puar 2012). When working with intersectional approaches, it is essential to keep in mind that all categories carry with them complex histories of oppression and violence, and that nothing is neutral and impartial, but always already an envoy of the world's manifold overlapping power structures.

In order to shed a light on the institution of the university, I have explained how a style in teaching came into being after 1762, which resulted in a spatial reorganization of those within the university. Under the guise of equality for all, the factor of class status was dropped in favor of other distinctions. The students were ordered according to these distinction, in an attempt to better exert control over them. The power of the norm was a significant tool of this operation, since it operates within this system of formal equality, yet makes it possible to distinguish according to how much someone adheres to this norm. Foucault shows that the orientation by existing norms can be considered a characteristic of the university: The discrimination of some individuals on the basis of their non-correspondence to the norm promotes the functioning of the system as a whole (Foucault 1977).

The concept of *white* institutional space helps to investigate the intersecting mechanisms contributing to the reproduction of *white* privilege and power within these institutions through the power of the norm. Highlighting education's role in ideological reproduction, one can emphasize the symbolic violence in presenting education as a neutral realm. The ideological frame rationalizes and reproduces structures of inequality, which results in a tacit *white* educational frame, where distinctions, such as detailed by Foucault, are naturalized, yet obscured. The resulting color-blind racism leads to the interpretation of the presence of PoC in *white* institutional settings as a sign of equality. Yet, this superficial sign of inclusion only serves the purpose of obscuring the racist structures of distinction, which are still in place. The persistence of discriminative structures, which is accompanied by their denial on part of the perpetrators, is hindering PoC's attempts to contest the institutions that are inimical to them (Bourdieu 1990, Moore 2008, Evans and Moore 2015).

3. Research Design

3.1 The Interviewees

My initial plan of approaching interviewees willing to open up about their experiences of discrimination failed due to Covid-19: I wanted to establish contact with them through the anti-discrimination offices located within the University of Vienna. Because they did not currently have clients, and were unable to establish contact with people who had previously gotten in touch with them, I used social networks such as Facebook and Instagram to circulate a flyer containing my contact details and the purpose of my inquiry (Fig. 1 in the Appendix). I opened up the possibility of participation to people who have not previously established contact with the anti-discrimination offices. I got emails and messages from 13 individuals who were willing to talk about their experiences of discrimination at university. Out of the 13, I established and maintained contact with four individuals.

Before reaching out to the interviewees and inviting them to participate in my study, I defined, the terms upon which I wanted the interviews to take place. Coming from a feminist epistemology background, the idea of conducting an interview in which I would solely occupy the subject position, and my interview partner would be reduced to a mere object of my observation, seemed counterintuitive. I came across the concept of "Queering Communication" as a means to subvert and complicate this initially hierarchical situation of researcher and researched.

In their text "Queer(ing) Communication in Research Relationships: A Conversation about Subjectivities, Methodologies and Ethics." (2010), Andrew Murray-Gorman, Lynda Johnston and Gordon Waitt critically discuss interview-based research methods. They advocate for a heightened sensibility concerning "networks of power between 'researchers' and 'research subjects'" (Murray-Gorman, Johnston, Waitt 2010: 98), and suggest that a queering of subjective binaries within research relationships, for example the insider/outsider category, "requires critical reflexivity on the part of the researcher about their own power and subjectivity in relation to those they are researching" (ibid).

In order to "queer" the classic research situation of researcher (subject) interviewing someone (object), I, the researcher, strived to create an interview setting wherein the interview participants were treated in a way that pays respect to their subjectivity, averting their reduction to mere objects of research. Every decision I take within the analysis of the interviews – e.g., which quote to concentrate on, which argumentative route to follow, which theories I choose to interpret them – already represents a comment from my subjective perspective. I have to take that into account, being aware of my own subject position as a *white*, able-bodied, cis, bi-sexual, middle-class Austrian. As Robyn Dowling suggests in "Power, subjectivity, and ethics in qualitative research" (2005), "critical reflexivity is the most appropriate strategy for dealing with subjectivity" (Dowling 2005: 25). Additionally, Murray-Gordon et. al. point out that in order to provide a ground for ethically, receptive communication, the researcher needs to be sensitive to difference, with special awareness of the fact that classic insider-outsider dichotomies are to be deconstructed following an understanding of "interview-based research as a spatially-situated practice" (Murray-Gorman, Johnston and Waitt 2010: 100).

This strategy of queering communication, the authors argue, helps to keep researchers alert to how subjectivities and space are always relationally co-constituted. It also sheds a light on how every narrative is told to a particular audience, at a particular moment, and in "circuits of social power" (Murray-Gorman, Johnston and Waitt 2010: 101), which constitute not only what can be said, but also what can be heard by the researcher.

> How narratives are told frames how meanings are shaped. Hence, a queer research positionality requires sustaining a research context that enables the exploration of the various possibilities that interviews provide rather than those constituted through a pre-established system. (Murray-Gorman, Johnston, Waitt 2010: 101)

In line with the consideration that the meaning of a narrative unfolds over the course of an interview and is actively developing following the interactions during the interview, it is reasonable to consider interviewers and interviewees co-researchers who work together in uncovering knowledges that would not have been seen the same way, were it not for the specific constellation of interviewer, interviewee and their unique positionality (Murray-Gorman, Johnston and Waitt 2010: 101). Murray-Gorman et. al. place special emphasis on how what is not said is of great importance for any scientific approach that considers itself queer. Whereas, in conventional research settings, only what is said and pointed out is taken into consideration, in queered research situation, "[l]earning to be alert to concealment is integral to the theoretical challenge posed by queer theory" (Murray-Gorman, Johnston and Waitt 2010: 103). In line with this thought, silences and their coming-to-be can be helpful in understanding other people's subjectivities (Murray-Gorman, Johnston and Waitt 2010: 104).

3.1.1 Introduction: Misha

Misha studies MA Gender Studies at the University of Vienna and is in her mid-twenties. She identifies as a female person of color. She grew up in a *white* family in the north of Germany, after having been adopted at a young age. Misha states that she has financial stability and a German citizenship because of her parents. Prior to moving to Vienna, Misha studied international social work in Germany. She did not mention her sexual orientation. I interviewed Misha in May 2020 via Zoom.

3.1.2 Introduction: Lisa

Lisa studies Spanish, Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Vienna, in order to become a high school teacher. She identifies as a female person of color and is in her mid-twenties. She grew up in rural Austria. Her mother is *white* and from the region, her father is a person of color. She holds an Austrian Citizenship. None of her parents studied. She did not mention her sexual orientation. Lisa contacted me because she wanted to talk about a specific experience she had. I interviewed Lisa in May 2020 via Zoom.

3.1.3 Introduction: Anna

Anna studies stage design at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna. She identifies as a Black woman and is in her mid-twenties. She grew up in a *white* adopted family in an urban area in northern Germany. She was part of an Afro-German youth group from early on. Her parents have not studied. We did not talk about her sexual orientation. I interviewed Anna in May 2020 via Zoom.

3.1.4 Introduction: Tanya

Tanya studies the mathematics MA program at University of Vienna. They were born in India and identify as a brown non-binary person. They are in their mid-twenties. When Tanya was two years old, their family moved from New Delhi to New York. They grew up in a working-class environment. Tanya attended the honors program at a middle tier North American college and subsequently moved to Vienna to pursue an interdisciplinary master's degree at the University of Applied Arts. After two years, they changed to Universität Wien. I interviewed Tanya in May 2020 via Zoom.

3.2 Conducting the Interviews

I held the exploratory interviews in the form of qualitative individual interviews. They were oriented towards a roughly structured guideline. To construct the guideline, I decided on overarching topics which I divided up into concrete questions. After an initial assessment of the concept of discrimination by the interviewee, and a talking prompt which lead to their first encounter with the phenomenon, I asked about their experiences while growing up, their present experiences, the emotions prompted by these experiences, experiences of discrimination at university and, lastly, how they deal with the topic discrimination in their social environment (Fig. 2 in the Appendix).

In order to enable the form of communication my interview partners felt most comfortable with, I let them decide on the interview language. The interviews with Misha, Lisa and Anna were held in German and later translated to English, the interview with Tanya took place in English.

I used Flick's method of the episodic interview (Flick 2011: 273), since it enabled me to ask for semantic as well as episodic knowledge in a combination of two different approaches. This is why my initial question concerning the interviewee's personal concept of discrimination was followed up by more in-depth questions, aimed at mapping out individual experiences that formed their specific concept of discrimination. Semantic knowledge is the type of knowledge constructed around concepts and their relation to each other, whereas episodic knowledge centers around specific situations. In order to ask for semantic knowledge, it is useful to employ the classic system of question and answer. In contrast, episodic knowledge is revealed through narrative impulses leading to stories. Flick points out that there is a significant connection between these types of knowledge, since the concepts recorded as semantic knowledge and their relation to each other often stem from situations a subject has experienced (Flick 2011).

The episodic parts of the interview are essential to my thesis, since discrimination is a personal experience with a strong connection to a person's biography. Depending on the context of a person's socialization and upbringing, they make different experiences throughout their lives. As Sara Ahmed points out in her book *Strange Encounters* (2000), differentiations between people don't occur because a certain person possesses a trait like an object, but because social processes have led to us noticing certain traits in people and not others, and consequently treating them differently from others (Ahmed 2000: 39).

As Ahmed, in line with theorists such as Judith Butler (Butler 1990) and Wendy Chun (Chun 2012), points out, factors such as gender or *race* are reflected mainly in how people relate to one another. Following distinct rules, people are gendered or racialized in specific ways, and receive a specific treatment in accordance with their attested difference from the imagined norm. Thus, differences arise in interaction with someone. The form of the episodic interview enabled me to ask how people have experienced the interactions that lead to them realizing they were read as 'different', specifically during their time at university and in the context of lectures and seminars.

Based on life experiences, every person establishes individual knowledge about discrimination. Depending on how they are perceived as 'different', every situation leads to different memories. This kind of knowledge is formative for how a person forms categories, and how they classify future experiences. By using a guideline which encompasses both narrative impulses and concrete questions, I shed a light on this complex interplay of individuals, their historicity, and the power structures that bring about specific experiences.

3.3 The Interview Setting

My original plan was to conduct the interviews in person, at a place of the interviewee's choice. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic however, I conducted the interviews online using the platform Zoom, which provides audiovisual connection. I was briefly considering telephonic interviews, but was cautious of missing out on the deeper emotional openness that normally comes with seeing another person's face. As philosopher Emmanuel Levinas puts it, "In the 'secondariness' in which, facing the face of the other person (and all the expressivity of the other body of which Husserl speaks is the openness and ethical exigency of the face), the primordial sphere loses its priority, subjectivity awakens from the egological—from egotism and from egoism" (Levinas 1998: 87).

Since the experience of discrimination is of a very personal nature, and some questions could have retraumatizing effects on the interviewees, I paid special attention to their wellbeing. I tried to establish an interview situation that resembled a personal talk rather than a direct questioning. For this reason, the interview guidelines served rather as a matter of orientation, than as a strict rulebook. I aimed at making the interviewees as comfortable as possible, explaining the aim and context of my study before we started. I also briefly recounted the incident that served as my initial motivation to explore the topic racist discrimination at university. Additionally, I informed the interviewees about the rules of confidentiality before we started the interview. I anonymized all personal data, use pseudonyms in the analysis, and will keep all the proceedings in line with Austrian data protection laws. I also informed the interviewees that, upon request, they can review a transcript of their interview. Lastly, I assured that the interviews will only be used for my MA thesis.

3.4 Method of answering research questions

To be able to answer the research questions posed at the end of chapter 2.1, and to pay respect to the interviewee's subjectivities and their specific positionality within intersecting systems of oppression, I will proceed as follows:

In chapter 4, I present my interview partners' accounts of experiencing being considered 'different', and the examples of being discriminated at university they shared with me. This is followed by an examination of their responses from a critical phenomenology and social epistemology perspective. In clustering their statements around specific phenomenal experiences such as stress, discomfort, exhaustion, anger and sadness, and examining them from a social epistemology perspective, I will answer research question RQ1: What are the challenges faced by people who experience discrimination at university?

In chapter 5, I present the expectations of university life my interview partners had before attending university, how they thought it would differ from elsewhere, and their accounts of in how far their expectations were met or thwarted. In conjunction with 2.5, where I map out the specific features of the institution of university, this allows me to answer RQ2: How does the experience of discrimination at university relate to experiences of discrimination elsewhere?

Lastly, in chapter 6, I present accounts of healing and transformation the interview partners shared with me. I will combine their knowledge with other author's accounts, in order to answer RQ3: What can people targeted by less or no discrimination do to improve the experience of people facing discrimination at university?

Note that, due to the size of the sample, the findings presented in this study cannot be generalized. They shall, however, serve as an incentive to conduct further research on racist experiences of discrimination at university.

4. Phenomenal Experiences of Discrimination

In the following, I present the material I have collected by conducting interviews with four individuals who study at Viennese universities. I reproduce the interviews in detail, to make the interview partners' accounts heard in their own words, and to give room to their individual stories. This first part consists of testimonies my interview partners gave of being made to feel "different", and of the experiences of discrimination they shared in the course of the interviews. Note that the accounts vary in length, depending on how much the interviewees shared with me. The aim of this part is to map out my interview partner's episodic knowledge, in other words, their specific and individual experiences that formed their particular concept of discrimination. The underlying hypothesis of this endeavor is that the categories you form throughout your life influence if and how you perceive different situations.

4.1 Experiences of being considered "different"

4.1.1 Misha

Misha grew up in a predominantly *white* urban context, and states that she did not want to engage with "being different" for a long time. She started to read more on racism around the age of 20, and even more when she moved to Vienna at 24 to study MA Gender Studies at the University of Vienna. She recounts that this learning process led to her demanding of her *white* friends to educate themselves in matters of racism: she would, as she states, "not remain friends with anyone who did not understand that they needed to be a good ally." Misha states that, for a long time, her way of dealing with racism was "weglächeln", "to laugh it off". This is a term that goes back to Black German theorist Noah Sow and names being forced to smile in light of racist remarks or jokes with the goal of fitting in with the predominantly *white* setting. (Sow 2008)

As a teenager, Misha was active in antifascist groups in her hometown. In those groups, there was some effort to educate the members on feminism. During one of these educational sessions at a conference Misha realized that not all women experience the same things, and that her experience of her surroundings differed from that of her *white* peers, even though, by gender categorization they were considered one group.

4.1.2 Lisa

Lisa grew up in the Austrian countryside, and recalls being confronted with daily racism from early on: “My sister and I really are the odd ones out.”. Yet, Lisa did not question this for a long time. It was normal for her to be in an ongoing “mode of justification” for looking “different” than her peers. Now, Lisa thinks it’s absurd that justification was her reaction to things, but she considers it a part of her socialization process.

Once Lisa was turned away from a Tyrolian nightclub under the pretense that “foreigners could not enter”. Even though she had a good relationship with her parents, Lisa recalls feeling ashamed of what had happened, and calling an aunt to pick her up that night, rather than reaching out to her parents. Her *white* friends went into the nightclub. She did not tell her parents about this event until long afterwards, and when she did, they were “shocked to hear of the incident”, and contacted an attorney. Unfortunately, the attorney turned out to be “right winged”, too:

> Recently, I found the letter the attorney sent to the night club, and it’s really flagrant what it says, one cannot even imagine, he really just wrote that it’s not ok that I was denied entrance because I am ‘Such a pretty girl’. That’s not a joke. That’s sooo…And back then, I did not even understand that that’s wrong, and years later, I find the letter, and am just thinking, what the fuck, my parents also didn’t get it, but they are also from a totally different, well…[voice trailing off, not finishing the sentence]

4.1.3 Anna

Anna states that, for her,

> […] discrimination starts when people see BPoC in contrast to themselves, this judgement of that’s me, and that’s everything else, with all the stereotypes that can be attributed. […] That BPoC are made to be something else from the perspective of *white* people in the context of racism, but that they are, at the same time seen as belonging to a bigger group, which does not have anything to do with the person, but with superficial markers like skin color or hair structure, or language. It’s in this way that ascription happens, and with it, depreciation.

Anna recounts that, when she was growing up, everyone wanted to touch her hair. Only after reading some race critical theory, she understood what that meant. She says that the unsolicited touching still happens, even though she has grown up. Anna remembers being called the N-word[10] in primary school and telling her teacher about it. She states that, when telling her teacher about it, she realized for the first time what it means to use that word:

> That opened up something that was different from when children just call each other names. Because one notices, oh, I am the only one that can be addressed that way, and the friend I was with [who is also Black], but not all the others who were also there.

For some time, the candy “Chocolate Kiss” was called “N-word-Kiss” in German language countries, and Anna, too, remembers that this was a moment when she realized that she was affected by something other people said, even though she could not point out why.

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[10] Note that the word in question will not be reproduced in this thesis.

> One notices that there is something one should identify with, or one has to, because it is thrown at you as an ascription. And somehow it hurts, somehow, it's something that's probably really heavy, and then one starts to be concerned with something, and asks Mama and Papa what it means, and then they explain, and then it's like: 'Oh, weird, and I am like that, and so on.' And everything that follows.

Anna states that what helped her was that her best childhood friend was also Black, and that they had been together since being babies. They went to primary school together, then to an Afro-German youth group. There, they learned the feminist self-defense tactics of Wen Do[11], and talked about the experiences they had individually, but that were all rooted in the same structural racism.

At 14, Anna joined the AntiFa, "leftist teenies who were not mega aware, but at least the dislike of Nazis was common ground". Only later did Anna understand why her parents did not want her to join the others at blockages against Nazi-marches: they were afraid that she, as the only Black person, would be an easy target for racist violence. Not growing up in a Black family held plenty of such moments of irritation – it made her realize that not everyone shares the same experiences.

> I did not understand this back then, because I think it changes a lot when your surroundings are 90% *white*. Looking back to my teenage years, there are many things where I now realize, well, that's crazy, because I think I partially forgot that I was Black. And only when someone reminded me that I am, it returned.

Anna developed her own strategies to deal with problematic situations at university. Oftentimes, she just ignores them not to spend too much energy on things she ultimately cannot change. But it was also a process to decide for herself that it's ok to not always react to something she considers discriminatory. She says that her being OK with not reacting is very dependent on others she finds herself in certain circumstances with.

> Concerning certain topics, my alarm bells ring, but I either walk away or ignore it away, because even if you are in a situation with three people who are your friends, you can't keep that up energy-wise. Suddenly I am occupied with discussing others all the time and am not caring about what I am actually there for [at university]. And the statement I just made is also one it took me a super long time to stand behind, because normally, with all of these *white* perspectives…'Right now it's not my topic and I can't be bothered to deal with that right now'… In order to be able to make a statement like that, and be understood by the other, the other needs to already have done some work, to accept that, and to not take it personally.

Anna associates the explaining she is expected to do on a day-to-day basis with labor:

> What kind of labor have I had to do since I was seven, and what kind of labor do I not feel like doing anymore, but have to do anyways, because you can't do anything else, because you are sad, and you think, that there is something wrong with you?

Anna states she expects different things from people who study Gender Studies and people "who lead different lives". Her *white* mother, for example, has once complained that she does not have enough time to read all of the books she would need to read in order to understand the experiences of her Black daughter. "Although a political person in principle, some things are not visible for her from her *white* perspective."

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[11] Wen Do is a self defense practice developed by feminists which is exclusively taught to women and girls.

4.1.4 Tanya

At Boston College (U.S.), Tanya attended the honors program in western cultural traditions. Even though they had not read many of the things their coursemates were familiar with, Tanya connected to some of the texts in a fundamental way. But: "My connection to it was never validated by any professors or students. And it's something I keep returning to." The lack of validation of their interest meant that Tanya had no one to talk to about these topics, since their Indian parents were not educated in Western cultural traditions. Even though "connecting for the first time in a very deep way" to this "foreign thing", Tanya was struck with the feeling that

> […] nothing you say makes any sense to anyone. In a weird way, you just feel like you are being crazy. And whenever you wanna talk about Non-Western traditions, or try to put it into your own context of life, it's immediately dismissed.

During their undergrad program at Boston College, Tanya was questioning their own experience of discrimination a lot:

> Well, yeah, maybe I am just a fucking oversensitive person who doesn't know when to stop; because you start seeing it all the time; and then, how do you even function? How do you go through it? And then, slowly, I had to figure out: you can have allies who see you.

This is why Tanya considers discrimination a lot in relation to

> […] the way we are made to feel uncomfortable in a university environment; and then you start questioning, because you are like, 'Well, I shouldn't feel uncomfortable! In a university environment, I am there to learn! Why would my professors dislike me? I am trying to be a good student. And then you just start seeing them as people who have these biases; and then you think: how am I ever gonna make it through, if I have to constantly figure out how to change myself slightly to work through that system?

Still, Tanya is of the opinion that the kind of feeling "different" she encountered in Austria differed from her experience in the U.S.:

> When you deal in the academic setting, at least from my perspective, in Austria, it's more blatant [than in the U.S.]. If people are racist, they'll just say it. […] In Austria, I just know that when I enter a place, sometimes everyone in the space turns their head at me.

Tanya states that, in Austria

> […] people don't pretend in certain situations, about, like the way they think about you, because, like, if you come to Vienna and you are brown you are immediately seen as other. You don't even have a chance. Like in America, I am a well-adjusted American citizen, and that is something that you work at your entire life. Cause you realize yourself you can interact with *white* people, like the educated *white* people. And then you come to Vienna and you don't even have a chance most of the time.

The same applies to the academic context:

> If I enter a classroom, I am usually the only brown person in the classroom and usually one of two women. And then what happens is you immediately get all these stares. And then you get so much added pressure whenever you speak, of always being right, so it's not exactly discrimination, but it is this feeling of being an outsider. Completely othered. And that's always uncomfortable. If you show up late, it shows. You don't wanna be seen in that way.

Tanya differentiates between at least two different kinds of discrimination: the one they feel and the one that is even invisible to them. “Sometimes people are talking about me in a room that I am not even invited to, and so for me, to understand discrimination is to understand how my relationship to it developed.”

When Tanya tried to go more into the direction of art, there, too, they noticed being treated different than their peers:

> I realized that later, with art, too, how I was being treated differently from other people in terms of the type of art I wanted to make, where, when I would make art, people were like, ‘that’s so audacious for you to try to make it that way, for you to try to say something at this age.’ Whereas my friend, Thomas, wouldn’t get that same treatment and people would be like, ‘Oh, Thomas, he’s really shooting for the stars, he’s talking about these biblical aspects, Michelangelo, and all these things, and it’s so good, he’s gonna be a great artist’, whereas for me, it was like, ‘Whoa, why don’t you do something smaller?’ […] And that also makes you go a little bit crazy because you’re like, maybe they’re right. And you don’t know to what extent. You try to figure it out: What’s this thing because of my identity versus what’s that thing in terms of the work. And if you see me and you know that I made a work, you can’t separate it. I would wonder what they would say if they just saw the work, and not know it was by me.

Tanya remarks that one of the effects being seen as “different” had on them was a change in their path in life.

> I think about it now in terms of how that impacted my later decisions: Now I am more interested in writing, and I am trying to pivot from math into writing, into other stuff. And if only I had those conversations and validations, and just being invited to the table, would have changed my entire four years after. So I think sometimes discrimination is a way to predict what you’re gonna end up in.

Tanya, growing up in an Indian immigrant family, also learned from their parents how they should deal with being considered different.

> With my parents, it’s about translating my experiences into their experiences. They always felt like, when you learn enough, and you’re educated enough, then you don’t get treated as an other. The way I speak is fluid English, and that will protect me. And trying to explain…And my parents have experienced so much discrimination in so many different ways, and they thought it would end with their kids, as first generation educated Americans, and then trying to explain to them: It does not end. It just shows up in a different costume. And then I have to walk them through what it means to be discriminated against. They believe it, obviously, but I believe it’s interesting for them to understand that it never ends. With every generation, you can’t protect you children against it.

Tanya was educated by their parents not to spark anyone’s attention, to keep their head down and adjust.

> And don’t draw attention to yourself. Because your first strike is already, like, for me, it’s that I’m brown. And my second strike is that I’m a woman. And then they can use anything as your third strike against you. So you’re going out, but there have already been some strikes against you. So don’t bring more attention to yourself, because you are already a target.

Tanya recalls how this need to adjust, in order not to spark confrontation, can be hurtful at times: “When the entire world wants to destroy you, you don’t exist. You just disappear”. Yet, this imperative to be invisible, and to seamlessly adapt to a society which is hostile towards you, does not sit right with Tanya.

> And the second generation…Well, I’m still first generation American, but second generation with my parents… well the difference is, you want to get heard. And when you are heard, you are a bigger target. But you also wanna be heard because you feel like, I don’t wanna. I am all these things together, and I wanna say something,

> like, anything. And I just wanna be myself. Openly. And there becomes this total disconnect between the two generations, and I think it becomes a thing of fear for your parents. Which is like, oh, if you're gonna put yourself out there like that, that makes you very vulnerable. And they don't want you to be so vulnerable, because it's scary for them. And it's a different kind of discrimination. Whereas, even if I'm good enough, I am still not good enough. So I think it puts them into question about the things they taught me about everything.

4.2 Examples of Discrimination at University

4.2.1 Misha's Experiences

The first account Misha gives of experiencing discrimination at university were the manifold hurdles she needed to overcome in order to be able to find a supervisor for her Gender Studies MA project about racist police violence. The Gender Studies department provides a list of eligible professors from within the University of Vienna, from which the MA students can pick a supervisor that suits their topic. Yet, as Misha soon realized, none of the persons on that list was from a political science background with a focus on postcolonial or decolonial theories, or antiracism. Misha states that she is under the impression that the topics that students can write their master theses on are heavily predetermined and limited by the pool of eligible supervisors.

Misha started to look for someone suitable for the job at other universities. Yet, she did not find any BPoC or PoC in a professorial position that would be able to supervise her thesis. Misha thinks it would have been important for her project to work with a person who shares the same or similar experiences of discrimination. She argues that this lack of non-*white* professors – and thus, her inability to write her MA thesis under the best conditions – occurs due to structural racism within the university.

Misha states that, during the course of her MA, she only encountered "one course or so per semester where the literature was not exclusively *white* authors". She argues that the topic of *race* seems to be bracketed in most courses, and when it is tackled, it amounts to the following: "We have to quickly cross intersectionality off our list, or postcolonial studies, but in lecture number 11 [at the very end of the semester], and only using the 'standard' literature." She recalls that, in her first semester, during the course "Introduction to Gender Studies", when there was a session that thematized Muslim women's headscarves and their relation to feminism, two *white* persons without headscarves were invited to talk about the subject.

Misha states that this is evidence of a continuity in lack of education on matters of racism, which she could feel within the whole MA course. She states that this lack is reflected in the literature provided, in the thematic focus, and in what is considered the foundation. Postcolonial theories and methods are routinely taught by *white* persons, which results not in the rupture of old structures that these theories demand, but in keeping the structures intact. At the same time, the lack of representation and encouragement in the form of PoC who manage to survive the racist selection process of academic institutions makes it hard for BPoC and PoC to struggle through the MA program.

Misha recalls a specific seminar which she found problematic: it took off in a rocky way when, in the first session, the teachers asked the students to approach others that seemed "unfamiliar" to them. This resulted in the question "Where are you from?" being asked many times, reproducing, as Misha states, exclusion. In the second session, students were asked to position themselves according to the cardinal direction of their place of upbringing. Misha was in the second northernmost location, which seemed to surprise many of her peers, who repeatedly asked her: "Oh, you are from Germany?".

When everyone was positioned, one of the teachers went through the room, approached everyone, and briefly talked to them. This is when, as Misha recounts, some "problematic statements" happened: upon approaching two students from Turkey, the teacher exclaimed: "Ah yes, then you must have a lot in common!" Misha says the teacher was lucky none of them were Kurdish, because being lumped in with a Turkish person could potentially be offensive to a Kurd, due to the ongoing conflict they have with Turks.[12] One person in the class was from Guatemala. To her, the teacher said: "Oh, you would actually need to stand even further down South."

Misha spoke up about considering the "game" problematic, yet the teacher did not acknowledge the rightfulness of her objection, and many other in the class remained passive spectators:

> When I spoke up, and when others joined in, and I think only two *white* people did really also enter that argument with her, she vehemently dismissed the notion that this game was problematic, and I think this is really wicked, this argument continued for a really long time and she just did not accept it. There never was an apology either by her or the other person that led the course, and I think this is so blatant.

Misha states that having to discuss with the teacher as to why the "game" reinforced racist notions, was very tiring, and resulted in a feeling of powerlessness:

> Professors and other teachers utilize the fact that they have more experience discussing, in a technical sense, that they can just discuss you into the ground, partly, because they just know more words, and secondly, because they have been doing it for what feels like 20 more years than me, and that they discuss from this position of power, from the position of teaching. They shamelessly use this to talk you to the ground. Or rather, in the end, they have the upper hand. And this is what she constantly did, and we found ourselves in a position where we were only able to react.

On another occasion, after a course where students were to give anonymous feedback to their professor, Misha was approached by the professor to comment on some of the supposedly anonymous statements.

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[12] Ünal, H., Uluğ, Ö. M., & Blaylock, D. (2020): "Understanding the Kurdish Conflict Through the Perspectives of the Kurdish-Turkish Diaspora in Germany." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology.* Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pac0000485

> The professor approached me and said she had received a feedback that she was ableist and racist and other things, and she wanted to ask if this was really true. And she explicitly approached me, even though the feedback was anonymous. And she practically questioned me. And did not manage to reflect on this herself. And was so hurt in her *whiteness* that she wanted to check again, and she actually wanted to hear from me 'No, that is not true.' These are university teachers who are not only way above me because of their salary, but also in so many other aspects.

Misha recounts feeling like being expected to act as the representative of all PoC, and states that this frequently happens. In the "game" example, the same was the case: even though all PoC in the course experience racism and discrimination differently because of their different vantage points and privileges, they were lumped together as "those who experience racism". Additionally, the teacher placed the responsibility with those who felt discriminated by the game: in the discussion after the "game", she stated that they could have just withdrawn from the classroom if they felt uncomfortable. "It would have been our responsibility to withdraw from the discrimination she did not consider discrimination. And I find that problematic."

4.2.2 Lisa's Experiences

Lisa contacted me to be interviewed because she had a specific experience that she wanted to share with me. She recounts going to a book presentation at university hosted by a female professor that Lisa really liked and admired. Ten to fifteen people were in attendance, and Lisa and her friend were the only students present. Afterwards, the professor invited them to stay for a buffet and wine. Lisa noticed a male professor repeatedly looking over at her. At some point, she and her friend ended up in a conversation circle with him and some others. He asked what her diploma thesis was about, and Lisa answered that it was about Cuban cinema. Upon this, he asked: "Are you from Cuba?" This is how Lisa felt about that question:

> Then I said, no, and did not react to it. In principle, this was not a weird question, but I think it's unpleasant to have to state in a context like that where one is from – or where one is "really" from, and I – I don't know. I really thought the question was inappropriate, because we could have easily talked about something else. He could have asked more about my thesis, but he didn't.

The professor continued to ask questions aimed at figuring out where Lisa was from, and, at some point, she felt really uncomfortable. When the group split up and her friend went to the bathroom, he used the opportunity to talk to her alone, pouring her more wine. He asked where her dialect stems from, if she's, for example, from Tyrol or Switzerland. Lisa recalls what happened next: he said

> 'Oh, I already thought you were a Swiss Pocahontas', and I….I was so perplexed! I just thought, what the fuck, come on. I later regretted so much not saying anything, but I was so perplexed, and I just…I think I just said, well I think, – NO, and then he directly asked, where I am originally form, and I told him, yes, my dad is from Sri Lanka, and my mother is from Tyrol, and then he just added, 'Ah, then you are a mongrel.' And I just thought, 'What the fuck, so what?' That's….that's just sooo bad. I just thought, I feel soooo gross on so many levels, and it was…I did not know what to do with that.

When Lisa's friend came back from the bathroom, she took her outside to recount the incident that had just taken place.

> And the most annoying thing was: we went outside, and in the beginning, I was not sure if I had imagined the whole thing, that had just…also the looks and that there was too little distance….And then she [my friend] said: She can't believe what just happened, that gross asshole, and I thought: 'No, I did not imagine that, that was real, and it was not ok.' – and I am pretty sure that it was also for the others in that context…that they surely must have noticed, and no one said anything, and it's so many, like THE feminists, and he is also posing to be THE guy, and that's when I thought: 'Fuck, this is really a structural problem, to do something like this so naturally.', and then…That I am being called 'Pocahontas'! You know, if someone says that at a Tyrolian village fête, I am not surprised, that's…I don't hear this for the first time. But for that to happen in the university context, amongst people who have for sure dealt with postcolonial theories and feminism, and with whatnot else, and for them to nevertheless reproduce stuff like that is just so gross. Why does one say something like that, it just made me soooo….[does not continue because of anger]

Afterwards, Lisa and her friend talked for a long time about what to do. Lisa recounts that, at the time of the event, she needed to finish her studies, to work on her thesis, and to be at the library all day. Going to the book presentation was a special thing which should have distracted her from work, a moment to relax and enjoy. Yet, it did not have the desired outcome. Lisa states she was pre-occupied with the incident for three days after the event, and could not work properly.

> The fact alone that I am upset about it for three days, and that it is me who needs to deal with this, because he was such a gross pig, and he does not even think about it anymore, really upset me. I was really in a "rage mood", and I really did not know what to do with it, and I also did not have the capacity to deal with it at that moment in time, as I also needed to write my diploma thesis at the same time.

Lisa decided to make a written record of the incident and use it after finishing her studies. She recounts running into the professor multiple times after the incident because of the size of the institute and her working on her thesis at the library. She felt "disgust" every time she saw him.

4.2.3 Anna's Experiences

Anna recalls that, in one class that had an anti-imperialist stance, a person gave a presentation on a book whose title featured the N-word. At the beginning of the presentation, the presenter asked if anyone had a problem with her using the word to refer to the title of the book. Anna objected to the use of the word, and yet the person tried to talk her out of her objection. Though the teacher was on Anna's side, Anna still felt let down because there had been no prior statement on the teacher's part which would have demarcated what was clearly off-limits, and what was ok in terms of what sort of statements one could make in the seminar. Anna states that "people expect others to know what they can and should d, and what not, but the reality is different and people still repeat racist patterns."

The discussion of whether or not using the N-word was OK in this context ultimately resulted in Anna leaving the classroom. Yet, she is sure that the situation would have been different if she would have not been the only BPoC in the room:

> This is always immediately clear if there are more than one BPoC in a room, because then you look at each other, and you know what's going on. And that's a specific mode…What are the preconditions, what is

> established beforehand, what is established as natural, but is in fact ignoring all sorts of everyday differences in power und differences in discrimination that permanently happen on the whole planet. And how should they not be in this one room.

Anna remembers another occasion where she decided to leave the classroom: they were discussing a play that featured the N-word in its title. Everyone, except for Anna, had previously seen that play at the theater, and Anna remembers thinking for a moment of joining them for the communal experience, but then deciding to stay at home. She already expected that a piece which openly featured the N-word in its title would also be enraging in other aspects.

In the discussion of the play, Anna's classmates called the only Black actress on stage a "stylistic device". This prompted a discussion about Black actresses in German language countries, which led to several racist remarks by her colleagues. Anna was the only BPoC in the room and felt very uncomfortable and "talked about". The teacher tried to communicate between the two sides, yet, as Anna states:

> There's a point where it's no longer a discussion, nor a conversation, but only a reproduction of violence. And then I tried to communicate that, and it did not work out. And then I had to leave the room, I was so angry, and that rarely happened to me at Uni, that you find yourself in the bathroom, crying, and just thinking, "How could this happen?"

In situations where even those she considers friends cannot listen to her experiences without relativizing them, Anna feels helpless. Many times, it's about friends saying, "I did not mean it that way", ultimately placing the responsibility for being hurt by their statement with Anna, who could have, in their opinion, also decided to ignore the statement or to interpret it differently. This is why she sometimes feels conflicted. Anna states that it is difficult to

> […]find a mode of living where you don't take on all the responsibility, but some in specific situations, because you want to contribute, not just as a representative for someone, but just as the individual sitting in front of you.

Another thing that bothers Anna are experiences with people she considers her friends who deny that her perspective as a BPoC matters more than that of her *white* friends when it comes to certain topics, like racism. For her, it's about delineating which symptom can be linked to which power structure.

> I would also not have this interview with just any person, because I would not know if the other supports a perspective that only aims at treating the symptoms, and who does not want to talk about the structure, but who is like, just tell me,….and we don't see skin color and we are all equal. The point is that it is really hard to evaluate who you can talk to about it, or how you can actively work against it, without exhausting yourself all the time, without knocking yourself out, and also, on the other hand, without intellectually expecting the same of everyone, to even be able to have a conversation.

4.2.4 Tanya's Experiences

When moving to Vienna from the U.S. to do their MA in Vienna, Tanya noticed that Viennese professors were making racist remarks about Black people on multiple occasions. In Tanya's opinion, there is “not really a conversation about discrimination in the field of mathematics”, and those who address it are considered “different”.

Yet, Tanya’s experiences with discrimination at university already started when they were attending Boston College in the U.S. At first, Tanya was in a humanities honors course which they enjoyed, but were not really encouraged to further pursue by peers or professors. There were occasions where Tanya noticed being on the losing end of a double standard:

> When I’d submit essays for my papers, in honors, I would get more edits back than my peers. Off of simple grammar stuff. They would have the same grammar mistakes, but the professor wouldn’t care about it, so my stuff was more interrogated. […] Their knowledge of the grammar was already assumed to be perfect; So that’s a very specific thing, that I can confidently say was just being done because of how I’m seen. And that affects your future! If you’re not assumed to already know the language…I guess people just see themselves as the gatekeepers, and then they get to decide who is the person of color who gets to be allowed into this. The academic gate keeping. And sometimes they wanna make sure, they are doing something like: Ok, she’s smart, but is she really smart, or how much more, how much smarter could she be; And then that’s the thing where you’re like, you don’t know, maybe it was my work, but maybe it wasn’t, and then you start going crazy! And you know, you want good criticism; but then it’s always hard to figure out like…Because I used to believe all that criticism too, and it shaped a lot of the ways that I— You know, I learned to write in a certain way, but, I don’t know, it was just so weird, because you do start feeling like you’re going crazy. And how do I even make a work of Art? Or, like, write something down?

Tanya states that the feeling of “going crazy” because of a different treatment they were aware of, but could neither do anything about, nor thematize, was one of the reasons they went into mathematics: “If I can prove something on the board, I am getting something out of it. I am not going crazy”. Yet, this decision did not result in the discrimination-free academic environment Tanya desired:

> I thought I could right out [the] argument. And then that argument would hold, and I would get my grade. Yeah, it’s pretty neutral. And you get older and you realize: it’s neutral in some extent. When I present in my master’s in mathematics, I get asked ten times more questions than my peers who did poor presentations. […] [T]hey try to make sure that I know what I’m saying […]. [E]ven tough it’s supposed to be objective information, they don’t treat you in the same way as others.

Tanya attended a three-month summer program at Brown University, where they were the youngest participant, and the only brown person attending.

> There was a PhD student who was more my age group than the prof’s age group; and she would just say fucked up things all the time; about how your race should not matter; and all these things. Just weird things that made me feel like I’m crazy […] I think discrimination is just something you just start feeling crazy about; because once you start seeing it, there is no bottom cap to it; because that’s a question of how far can you go down, and am I crazy to think that this is because…on one hand it’s like, you’re a woman, and you are not representing as a typical type of woman, and then you’re brown, and then you have this background experience, and then you’re like: whoa, which one of the things is it? and maybe they all play together; and I wonder if I am just going crazy about it.

4.3 Bodily Impressions of Discrimination

In the following, I give a more comprehensive picture of how my interviewee’s individual situatedness as individuals who are treated as “different” is experienced on a bodily level. I highlight the accounts of bodily reactions to racist remarks or treatment the interviewees shared with me. The felt bodily reactions that I will explore over the course of this chapter are stress, discomfort, exhaustion, anger and sadness. The literature from which I draw to highlight the possible causes of these symptoms are mainly from social epistemology, but also from a wide range of race critical theories, history, psychoanalysis and medicine.

4.3.1 The Stress of Being Othered

At the beginning of our conversation, my interview partner Misha states that "racism should be considered the source for illnesses; as a diagnosis: this was racisms doing." Misha's statement, derived from personal experience, is backed by what various scholars have scientifically proven over the last years: experiencing racism can have a severe negative impact on a person's wellbeing, a circumstance that literature describes as "race-related stress" (Khayalis, Waelde and Bruce 2008: 95). This is also reflected in Lisa's statement: After the book presentation happened, where she was quizzed about her origins and called two racist names, her mind was occupied with the incident for "three days", which resulted in not being able to work on her diploma thesis properly, which she was supposed to finish at that time. The incident added to her overall stress level.

In 2002, and focusing on the "insidious effects of racism on health outcomes among Black college students" (Bowen-Reid and Harrell 2002: 30) in the U.S. university system, Tara Bowen-Reid and Jules Harrell showed that 97% of their sample indicated that they were "stressed by their racist encounters" (ibid.). They point out that this is very alarming: On the one hand, stress can have harmful effects such as "hypertension, strokes, respiratory problems and other social ills" (ibid.). On the other hand, experiences of racist discrimination are often accompanied by somatic complaints such as headaches, chest pains, nausea, and negative affect like depression and anxiety. (Bowen-Reid and Harrell 2002)

As another study shows, racist stress can lead to PTSD, or post-traumatic stress disorder, which is classified as "(a) physiological and psychological reexperiencing of the event, (b) avoiding stimuli perceived to be associated with the traumatic event, and (c) increased and persistent arousal" (Helms, Nicolas, Green 2012: 65). This study is notable since it points out that there are two different factors that can trigger PTSD: either a "person's recent exposure to life-jeopardizing events or historical memory of such events as they pertain to her or his racial or ethnic membership group's experiences of trauma" (ibid. 65f.). In pointing to the possible source of PTSD symptoms in generationally transmitted traumas, the study's authors correct an epistemic bias that influences many studies on why the U.S. population of color has an overall lower life expectancy than their *white* counterparts (Chang et. al. 2014). The authors acknowledge the "implicit racial/cultural bias inherent in attributing symptoms provoked by racism and ethnoviolence to individuals rather than to the pathological contexts in which they are situated" (ibid. 66). By pointing to the structural reasons for experiences of racist treatment, the study's authors acknowledge that every individual is situated in a power-laden environment, which preconditions how they can act in and on the world.

The global Covid-19 pandemic highlights how people of color's life expectancy is fundamentally shaped by their living conditions within a predominantly *white* society. Sharrelle Barber points out that, even though Blacks only make up about 13% of the U.S. population, by August 2020, roughly a quarter of U.S. Covid-19 deaths were from this group. "Blacks across all age groups are nearly three times more likely than *white* people to contract Covid-19" (Barber 2020: 903). As Barber elucidates, this mirrors societal developments at large: individuals caught within "interlocking systems of racism" (ibid.) are subjected to conditions which make them more likely to be exposed to, transmit or die of Covid-19.

Consider, for example, the 43% Black and Latino workers employed in positions that were considered 'essential' during the pandemic. "Employees in these industries have been forced to work with inadequate personal protective equipment, crowded working conditions, and inadequate income protections such as paid sick leave and hazard pay, putting them at increased risk of exposure to the virus" (Barber 2020: 903). Additionally, marginalized communities exceedingly live in overcrowded housing conditions, and have limited access to quality healthcare, because health institutions show racist bias and often turn Blacks away when they seek medical attention (Barber 2020).

Medical studies proof that the level of psychological stress a person has to endure is significantly influenced by their "experience of otherness" (DeWilde et. al. 2019: 478). Otherness here signifies "the experience of feeling marginalized and/or excluded because of visible differences from the population majority or dominant group." (ibid.) In a process of othering, those who are perceived as differing from their peers are being "othered", which has detrimental effects on their physical and psychological wellbeing. "Not only does the process of othering identify or mark those who appear outwardly different than the majority, the experience also influences views of self in relation to the society" (DeWilde and Burton 2017). Othering, as a practice that is routinely practiced towards PoC and other people from marginalized parts of society, is something that shows in interaction.

What, then, are the individual experiences this stress is caused by, and how do they show in the interviews? One of the experiences all of the interviewees give an account of is being considered "different" from their peers. Very early on in the interview, when asked what racism means to her, Anna states that "othering is racism". It is her experience of being singled out from a group of *white* people: for example, someone touching her hair without approval, an act that would be clearly crossing boundaries if a *white* person did it to another. Or in kindergarten, when she realized, after someone had used the N-word: “I am the only one who can be addressed that way”. For Anna, “discrimination starts when people see BPoC in contrast to themselves, this judgement of that’s me, and that’s everything else, with all the stereotypes that can be attributed.”

As historian George Fredrickson argues in his book *Racism. A Short History* (2002), racism depends on two components: ‘difference’ and ‘power’. “It originates from a mindset that regards ‘them’ as different from ‘us’ […]. This sense of difference provides a motive or rationale for using our power advantage to treat the ethnoracial Other in ways that we would regard as cruel or unjust if applied to members of our own [*white*] group” (Fredrickson 2015: 9). Othering is thus the result of a power-laden environment in which one group holds more social power than the others, to the effect that the same norms that govern in-group behavior don’t apply towards those deemed ‘different’.

Othering is also present in Tanya’s account of first arriving in Austria: “If you come to Vienna and you are brown, you are immediately seen as other. You don’t even have a chance.” They describe their experience of “usually [being] the only brown person in the classroom”, and how this entails that they “immediately get all these stares. And then you get so much added pressure whenever you speak, of always being right, so it’s not exactly discrimination, but it is this feeling of being an outsider. Completely othered. And that’s always uncomfortable.”

The same feeling of “being an outsider” was triggered in Lisa when she was singled out to be the target of the “where are you from” question in a power-laden environment. The person who posed the question was a professor, and the incident took place at a university book presentation she attended with a friend:

> In principle, this was not a weird question, but I think it’s unpleasant to have to state in a context like that where one is from – or where one is ‘really’ from, and I – I don’t know. I really thought the question was inappropriate, because we could have easily talked about something else. He could have asked more about my thesis, but he didn’t.

Lisa’s answer, too, was met with surprise: the interlocutor, who later proceeded to call her both “mongrel” and “Pocahontas”, acted astonished when her answer was not the ‘exotic’ origin he had assumed, but Lisa’s statement that she was Austrian. He had stereotyped her and had used what he made out to be ‘different’ about her an excuse to voice his racist assumptions.

As bell hooks writes in *Killing Rage. Ending Racism* (1996), stereotypes are “a fantasy, a projection onto the Other that makes them less threatening. Stereotypes abound when there is distance. They are an invention, a pretense that one knows when the steps that would make real knowing possible cannot be taken or are not allowed” (hooks 1996: 38). Indeed, the professor’s remark and his questions about Lisa's descent probably served the goal of bridging a distance he felt between them. What he failed to notice was that the distance existed because he constructed it through his racially biased imagination, which footed in the *white* dominated society he was socialized in: Patricia Hill Collins, in *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), remarks that othering relies fundamentally on the implicit presupposition of a binary order, an 'us' versus 'them'. "In such thinking, difference is defined in oppositional terms" (Collins 1990: 77), and objectification is a central element of this process of othering, because it allows for one person to be objectified as the Other of a naturalized norm, in this case, of *whiteness*.

The probably most pervasive of such binary oppositions is between nature and culture, which, too, serves the construction of a racialized and hierarchically lower Other. As I outlined in chapter 2.1.2, in the process of modernization, culture was defined as the opposite of objectified, and thus exploitable, nature. In *Man of Reason* (1984), Genevieve Lloyd shows how, throughout the history of western philosophy, these dichotomous ideas about nature and culture shaped the perceived dichotomy between female and male: Femininity, by way of its association with childbirth, is associated with powerless and controllable nature, and women's intellectual abilities are routinely denied. Masculinity, in contrast, and by virtue of its assumed ability to control and order the world through reason, is imagined to be unbound from its physical conditionality (Lloyd 1984). This analysis is helpful in understanding why the *white* male professor, speaking from a hierarchically higher position, did not hesitate to make racist assumptions about Lisa, a woman of color.

Collins refers to a large body of scholarship of color who has shown that, by way of the dichotomy nature/culture and female/male, people of color have been, as a tool in their exploitation, associated with nature. "[D]efining people of color as less human, animalistic, or more 'natural' denies African and Asian people's subjectivity and supports the political economy of domination that characterizes slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism" (Collins 1990: 78). The naturalistic reading of people of color by *white* dominant groups entails a set of stereotypical figures that serve as "socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood" (Collins 1990: 79) and personhood. The word "mongrel", which the professor used to describe Lisa, is an example of these colonialist assumptions about human nature, since it presupposes a racist biologism which lies in the assumed distinguishability of different "races" prior to their discursive and societal construction. The association with Pocahontas, a historical Native American person, too, serves the purpose of highlighting the connection between othering and ideas of nature as represented by people of color.

Consider Anna being labelled "angry Black woman" when contesting racist behavior: as Collins points out, "[b]ecause the authority to define societal values is a major instrument of power, elite groups, in exercising power, manipulate ideas about Black womanhood" (Collins 1990: 76). Mechanisms that elite groups, such as the *white* majority population, use to assert their interpretational sovereignty, are the exploitation of existing symbols or the creation of new ones. "These controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (Collins 1990: 76f). "Angry Black Woman" is an example of such stereotyping: by pretending that the stereotypes attached to someone 'Other' are observations of reality, and not imaginary constructions aimed at mystifying objective social relations, the *white* interpretations serves as a justification for a mistreatment of the Other.

Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* (1994), elaborates how the colonial stereotype functions as a discursive strategy within the colonial discourse, which is an apparatus of power. According to Bhabha, the colonial stereotype "is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha 1994: 66). The stereotype is marked by this ambivalence, which ensures that its derogative patterns are clearly recognizable across changing historical and discursive circumstances. Yet, the stereotype also influences processes of subjectification, by informing processes of individuation and marginalization in a display of productive power.

Bhaba is interested in the "regime of truth" (Bhaba 1994: 67) which influences such ambivalence: the regime demands the "articulation of forms of difference" (ibid.) – sexual or racial – and aims to deny the original identity and singularity of the object of difference. The "colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an 'other' and yet entirely knowable and visible." (Bhabha 1994: 70f). Along these lines, manifold encounters at the University of Vienna are testaments of the prevalence of colonial discourse within this institution, where *white* individuals assume someone else's identity.

Consider, for example, the interviewees' accounts of being met with surprise when stating they are from Central Europe: the professor assumed Lisa was of foreign origin, from Cuba or Switzerland. The racialized figure he compared her to, "Pocahontas", can be considered both a display of sexualization and exotification. Pocahontas, a historical Native American figure, heavily influenced colonial fantasizing about Native American women after the 1995 Walt Disney movie of the same name, which focuses on the relationship between her and a *white* colonizer. This portrayal, too, extenuated the violently colonial history of the early 1600s in North America, and fails to acknowledge that Pocahontas was only twelve years old when the story took place (Barker 2017: 31).

A mechanism closely linked to othering, and a practice often perpetuated under the guise of admiration, is exotification: it describes a specific mode of aesthetic perception "which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and [..] effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its mystery" (Huggan 2001: 13). Exotification is present in the account Tanya gives of first meeting with their mentor at the University of Applied Arts: He inappropriately commented on their appearance, saying "oh, you have such a beautiful face, and you have dark skin", which constitutes an act of exotification, and fetishizes otherness to "mask the inequality of power relations without which the discourse could not function" (Huggan 2001: 14). A reverse situation, in which Tanya commented on the professor's light skin, would have been unacceptable within the realm of *whiteness*. Note how this situation is influenced by a pervasive difference in power between Tanya, a young, brown, non-binary person from a working-class background, and the elderly, *white*, cis, male university professor.

Exotification is often accompanied by sexualization of individuals. Tanya, for example, was sexualized by their university colleague when he refused to work with them unless they went on a date. Yến Lê Espiritu points out that "Asian women […] have been racialized as sexually immoral, and the 'Orient' – and its women – has long served as a site of European male-power fantasies" (Espiritu 2003: 164). Tanya, an Indian-American, was expected to be sexually or romantically eligible to anyone who made an attempt. Note how the way Tanya was sexualized also takes place within a heteronormative framework: the person in question was expecting Tanya, who was neither outed as non-binary nor had previously discussed their sexuality in the university context, to refuse to go on a date because of personally not being interested. He was unable to imagine that Tanya could have non-heteronormative sexual desires, which made his offer unattractive.

In their final email, when Tanya stated once and for all that they refused to go on a date with their colleague, they also explained that they had a girlfriend. His answer was that he, too, had a girlfriend, and that his offer had never been intended to be sexual. Tanya later found out that he did not have a partner at that time, and hadn't done so for some years prior. This betrayed his statement, intended to seem honest, as an attempt to mask his own wrongdoing, implicitly placing the responsibility with Tanya: He suggested she might have wrongly interpreted a principally neutral situation, and, on top of that, he insulted her by calling her a "bitch", a term colloquially used to point to women who are sexually promiscuous or unwilling to follow men's orders.

Misha's account, too, references the mechanisms of othering that group those who are central-European and typically *white* as "normal", and confines those who do not conform to this norm to the margins. In the case of the "game" played during a Gender Studies course, the notion of outsider and insider was involuntarily taken literally, and translated into a spatial division, by placing people all over the room according to their "location of growing up", a huddled center appeared, where all those of Austrian descent were grouped together. The 'others', who grew up outside of Europe, were confined to the margins of the room, having to endure comments by the teacher that were amplifying the moment of othering, such as "Oh, you would actually need to stand even further down South". The statement "You two must have a lot in common", directed at two women who grew up in Turkey, proves not only to be culturally insensitive, but also reiterates notions of othering by highlighting how they must have a lot in common by virtue of their foreignness and 'otherness', in contrast to those who are *white* and grew up in Austria whose "having something in common" does not need to be specifically pointed out.

Yet, as the case of the 'game' illustrates, not even her placement in the European 'center' saved Misha from being othered: some participants openly voiced their surprise at the fact that Misha, a person of color, grew up in the North of Germany. Misha betrayed their assumption that PoC necessarily hail from outside of Europe, producing what Fatima El-Tayeb calls a 'queer' moment: "Europeans of color are produced as 'queer', 'impossible' subjects in heteronormative discourses of nation as well as migration" (El-Tayeb 2011: xxxv).

There is another important aspect of othering which Anna points to:

> […] BPoC are made to be something else from the perspective of *white* people in the context of racism, but […] are, at the same time, seen as belonging to a bigger group, which does not have to do anything with the person itself, but with superficial markers like skin color or hair structure, or language. That this ascription happens, and with it depreciation.

This form of othering is present in the accounts my interview partners give of being considered the 'representative' of all PoC, with *white* people "expecting a statement that is representative for all Black people [or PoC] on the planet". Anna mentions that she often forgets that she is Black, and often only thinks of it when she is reminded of it from the outside, for example when *white* people suggest something is "her topic" because she is Black. In these moments, she finds herself involuntarily grouped with all others who are expected to have the same experiences, despite possible differences in class, gender, sexuality or ability-based privilege.

Likewise, Misha felt like she was expected to represent all PoCs' opinions when a professor asked her if she was "really" racist and ableist, after receiving an anonymous statement stating so. She mentions how upsetting it is to be routinely lumped together with others as "those who experience racism", even though their vantage points might be totally different. Misha points out that, with two *white* parents who provide financial support, she is still relatively privileged. Tanya, too, had the same experience, that their Indian background counted more than their interests. Their mentor grouped them together with another person on the basis of skin color, referring to the other with the words “he’s like you”. The moment when Lisa was turned away from a Tyrolian night club under the pretense that “foreigners could not enter”, also constitutes an experience of severe othering: she was considered as “other” than her group of *white* Tyrolian friends, even though she was herself Tyrolian, having grown up in the same village and attended the same school.

The stress of being othered is a factor which fundamentally influences how individuals decide to react to racist encounters. Lisa describes the aftermath of the experience of racist discrimination and the process of deciding what to do about it as a balancing act: “If I don’t do anything with this, then it feels like I would encourage it by just accepting it. […] You want to do something about it, but not in a way that’s too stressful […]. To look after yourself and to, at the same time, deal with the shit that happened.” Anna, too, wants to “find a mode of living where you don’t take on all the responsibility [to react to racist treatment], but some in specific situations because you want to contribute”. Tanya, too, gives an account of this paradox: “You want to get heard. And when you are heard, you are a bigger target. But you also wanna be heard because you feel like, I don’t wanna. I am all these things together, and I wanna say something, like, anything.”

The responses to persistent forms of othering are as individual as humans. Yet, there are certain reactions of which the interviewees give accounts, that further underline the connection between othering and perceived stress. Lisa, for example, states that she was in a constant “mode of justification” when growing up, and that she always had the need to defend herself for being considered “different”. Tanya, too, states that they were trying to fit in. Yet, they still doubt that their efforts will ever be sufficient: “How am I ever gonna make it through, if I have to constantly figure out how to change myself slightly to work through that system?” Being othered can severely impact a person’s wellbeing, such as exemplified by Tanya’s following statement: “when the whole world wants to destroy you, you don’t exist. You just disappear.” Being constantly othered can render a person hopeless, and as if there was no space in the world where they are allowed to exist. It’s a Sisyphean challenge. In Tanya’s words: “Even if I’m good enough, I am still not good enough”.

4.3.2 The Discomfort of Injustice

One of the factors that was recounted in every interview was the discomfort that results from racist discrimination. Albeit this might not seem a life-impairing sensation, it is notable that the interviewees mostly related this feeling of unease back to the fact that they found themselves in a situation where they were fully aware that something ‘wrong’ happened, yet were not able to satisfyingly understand it, address it, or communicate it. As Tanya states: “nothing you say makes any sense anymore”, which in turn, “makes you go a little bit crazy because you’re like, maybe they’re right. And you don’t know to what extent. And you try to figure it out”.

Lisa, for example, after recounting a professor using a racist slur towards her, states that she was “not sure if I had imagined the whole thing”, and Tanya remarks at multiple occasions throughout the interview that questioning why they felt uncomfortable led them to place the responsibility for what had happened with themself. They said they were wondering which one of the factors they represent made people react to them in a weird way, and the inability to pinpoint why a certain reaction had occurred lastly led them to question their own sanity: “[Y]ou don’t know, maybe it was my work, but maybe it wasn’t, and then you start going crazy.” Anna, too, states that the constant need to explain racism to others often leads her to think that something is wrong with her.

My interview partners’ feelings of discomfort with themselves was mostly followed by frustration at not knowing where to turn or what to do with this feeling. Tanya also refers to frustration when finding something they were interested in – in their case, Western cultural traditions and art –, yet being discouraged to further pursue it due to reasons connected to their identity as a brown person from a lower middle class Asian immigrant background. “I think discrimination is just something you just start feeling crazy about; because once you start seeing it, there is not bottom cap to it; because that’s a question of how far you can go down, and am I crazy to think that this is because…”

An attempt to explain Anna’s, Tanya’s and Lisa’s discomfort in regards of the situations they found themselves in is literature from social epistemology. In *Epistemic Injustice* (2007), Miranda Fricker distinguishes between two different forms of eponymous injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. At this point in my thesis, I will concentrate on the latter, but will come back to the first concept in chapter 4.3.4 when I treat anger.

Hermeneutical injustice “concerns the specific ways in which cognitive resources for interpreting one’s experiences are maldistributed in accordance with the background unequal power relations governing identities” (Giladi 2018: 144). This means that those “hermeneutically marginalized” (Fricker 2007: 153) are not able to make adequate sense of their powerlessness, for example by being structurally denied access to education or other sources of information due to their class status. They feel that something is at odds with how they are treated in society, and that they lack certain benefits others have, but cannot address that this is due to their societal status resulting from structural discrimination, and because they lack the adequate hermeneutical tools.

In consequence, hermeneutical marginalization leads to a sort of "propositional paralysis" (Giladi 2018: 144), thus, the inability to meaningfully address in language the mistreatment one has to endure. One of the examples Fricker uses is the case of a survivor of sexual assault, Carmita Wood, who was not able to make what had happened to her understandable to herself, even in the face of grave consequences. Susan Brownmiller recounts the incident in her book *In Our Time. Memoir of a Revolution.* (1990), which focuses on the U.S. Women's Liberation Movement. Fricker uses Wood's example as the basis of her reflection on the connection between powerlessness and social interpretation (Fricker 2007).

Wood left her job after being sexually harassed by her boss. When she tried to file for unemployment benefits, she could not produce a reason for leaving the job: she knew that her boss had overstepped personal boundaries, but lacked the conceptual tools to adequately address or call out what had happened. Because she, instead, referred to "personal reasons" for leaving her job when applying for unemployment money, she was left without any financial aid. Only after she shared her experience with a group of other women, who had experienced similar things during their holiday jobs, did it become evident that the women lacked the adequate terminology to address what had happened to them. They decided to break the silence about the incidents yet realized quickly that, "the 'this' they were going to break the silence about had no name" (Brownmiller 1990: 281). After some brainstorming, they came up with "sexual harassment": a wording that encompassed all their experiences, yet left room for more variations (Fricker 2007).

Fricker points out that the hermeneutical inequality Wood and the other women suffered from was an epistemic inequality directly linked to social inequality, thus a product of "subordination and exclusion" (Fricker 2006: 99). The women experienced an exclusion from the space of reason. According to Paul Giladi, who looks at Fricker from a perspective of recognition theory, this amounts to "discursive abuse" (Giladi 2018: 147). By being denied the ability to develop the epistemic capacities to properly put a name to their experience, Carmita Wood and the other survivors of sexual harassment suffered further harm: they were denied the recognition as significant participants in the processes of a normative community who decides which acts are acceptable and which are not. This exclusion, which Wood and the others tried to reclaim by finding a name, and protesting using this name, has an effect on a person's self-confidence and their testimonial credibility in further instances. As Giladi puts it, "there is a significant danger that testimonial non-recognition and the lasting effects of discursive abuse can be so systemic to the extent that a victim can end up thinking he or she is at fault or that she or he deserves such treatment" (Giladi 2018: 147f).

Sometimes, the toxic mechanism of self-blaming is amplified from the outside: consider, for example, the story of the "game" Misha had to participate in during a university class. After Misha and some other people voiced their discomfort and their frustration at how racist mechanisms of othering were reproduced, the teacher suggested that it would have been up to them not to partake in the activity. She placed the responsibility to evade discrimination with those who experienced it, implying that the "game" was only problematic if one found it problematic. Further, the teacher did not take into consideration that a classroom is a power-laden environment, wherein the teacher is an authority figure, which influences the possibility of deciding to withdraw from a collective activity.

This is mirrored in Anna's account of a *white* friend suggesting that victims of discrimination have a choice in how to interpret remarks that they find discriminatory: he implied that the fault is really with those who experience discrimination and not with those who discriminate. Note how the friend made this statement from the privileged position of being a *white*, male person. Lisa, too, mentions defending herself in a "mode of justification" whenever she had to endure racist discrimination growing up, secretly making herself responsible for the racist treatment she received. This is also reflected in her account of how, when she was not admitted to a Tyrolian night club due to its racist door policy, she was too embarrassed to tell her parents about what happened, implicitly blaming herself.

Humans, as social beings, are trained to continuously check their individual commitments and judgements against the beliefs of the humans surrounding them. If they experience "systemic testimonial non-recognition" (Giladi 2018: 148), as is the case with people who are made to doubt their own experience because the adequate vocabulary does not yet exist, or is not available to them, they are made to self-blame for not being perceived as credible enough. Especially when it comes to experiences that are linked to personal traits, e.g., the experience of racism within a majorly *white* society, this can lead those affected by racism being at loss for words and in doubt of their own experience of reality.

Checking your own perception against others', and them failing to notice something that you see, can also lead to blaming yourself for being overly sensitive. In an act of victim blaming, the societal structures that bring about disenfranchisement are ignored, and those who experience discrimination attribute the negative effects of mistreatment to something that they have previously said and done, and which motivates the acts that were committed. Prominent examples of this practice are miseducated children in slum schools that are blamed for their own miseducation, or to blame a person for not succeeding in society while they were growing up in a dysfunctional family.

William Ryan, in *Blaming the Victim* (1976), argues that "[t]he generic process of Blaming the Victim is applied to almost every […] problem" (Ryan 1976).

4.3.3 The Exhaustion of Explaining

Another bodily sensation accounted for in the interviews is bodily exhaustion. This feeling frequently occurs due to the constant explanatory labor others demand. Interview partner Anna recounts her experience of trying to balance between not draining herself physically and emotionally while explaining racist behavior, and the urge to intervene if something racist happens. Misha, too, states that having to defend herself, by explaining why she considers something discriminatory or unjust, is tiring.

There are numerous studies and personal accounts that back up that view, such as Columbia University graduate, Amari Gaiter, who in a 2018 article pointedly remarks that during her time at Columbia she felt like she was teaching an additional course titled "Free Black Emotional Labor" (Gaiter 2018), and that her emotional vulnerabilities were used "for the greater sake of education and awareness" (ibid.).

Sentiments like this are also present in Reni Eddo-Lodge's influential book *Why I'm No Longer Talking (to White People) About Race* (2017). Notably, Eddo-Lodge, in 2020 and in wake of the global Black Lives Matter movement, was the first Black British author to top the UK book charts. One of the reasons she gives for forming the eponymous resolution of no longer talking to *white* people about race is the following: "I cannot continue to emotionally exhaust myself trying to get this message across, while also toeing a very precarious line that tries not to implicate any one *white* person in their role of perpetuating structural racism" (Eddo-Lodge 2017: 8). Eddo-Lodge argues that, by demanding explications for why their behavior is racist, *white* people reassert their dominance over PoC, displaying the entitlement that is the source of instances of racist behavior. Another reason for her refusal to talk about race in informal conversations with *white* people is an imbalance in power: "The balance is too far swung in their favor. Their intent is often not to listen or to learn, but to exert their power, to rove me wrong, to emotionally drain me, and to rebalance the status quo" (ibid.)

The exhaustion Anna feels can be attributed to the extra responsibility *white* people often place on PoC through their demand that they "provide resources, education, guided discovery and emotional support to their non-Black peers" (Boykin et. al. 2020: 777). C. Malik Boykin et. al. state that this exhaustion is amplified by the risks PoC face who are not willing to perform this task. When they "share genuine feelings of outrage, [they] risk being labeled as angry and unwelcoming" (ibid.), and *white* peers might react defensively. This furthers the effects of a "depletion of executive attentional resources" (Richeson, Trawalter, Shelton 2005: 349), an effect which directly influences how a person can interact with their environment, and how they can direct their attention. Consider, for example, Anna's frequent decision to ignore racist treatment that happens to her. She states that reacting to every racist incident would simply be too energy-consuming: "Suddenly, I am occupied with discussing others all the time and am not caring about what I am actually there for." Others demand so much of her attention and explanatory labor, that she cannot focus on her university work. Yet, ignoring such instances often leads to more labor: she states that her *white* friends, out of the need of political correctness, often protest her decision to ignore a racist incident. This often leads to lengthy discussions in which Anna feels pressured to explain that it's her agency to decide how she wants to deal with a situation, since it's her energy resources at stake.

This paternalism on the part of her *white* peers subtly tries to undermine Anna's subject position. Her exhaustion from having to persistently explain that "how to deal with racism" is her decision, is caused by what Charles Mills calls "White Ignorance", a form of "structural group-based miscognition" (Mills 2007: 13), which encompasses both false belief and the absence of true belief. Mills argues that, even though PoC have been struggling with racism and loudly resisting its threats on many levels and for centuries, *white* people are still in disbelief concerning the amount of struggle PoC face, demanding a constant iteration of explanatory tasks. In Anna's case, one might argue that her friends' ignorance stems from a principally benevolent place – the wish to counteract discrimination – yet, they make the mistake of ignoring to consider how Anna, who is the target of discrimination, decides to deal with it. Their ignorance of her subject position adds up to her exhaustion.

Mills' investigations on "white ignorance" take off from the observation that there is an epistemic asymmetry between the typical *white* view on people of color, and PoC's view on *white* people. This asymmetry is rooted in *white* supremacy: *white* ignorance is an elaboration of a central concept of Mills' book *The Racial Contract* (1997). Using arguments from standpoint theory (Harding 2004), Mills argues that the relation of dominant and non-dominant groups to one another is heavily influenced by their unequal hierarchical standing in society. This is mirrored in what and how much they know of each other. He outlines that, to survive in a world structured in a way to fit the needs of the dominant *white* population, people of color have needed to learn what the world looks like from their oppressor's perspectives, adapting to their rules and norms. *White* people, on the other hand, never needed to be able to consider the world from the point of view of the oppressed, since the pervasive ideology of *white* supremacy made them see people of color as non-humans (Mills 2007).

As bell hooks writes, “[o]ne mark of oppression was that black folks were compelled to assume the mantle of invisibility, to erase all traces of their subjectivity during slave and the long years of racial apartheid, so that they could be better, less threatening servants” (hooks 1996: 35). *White* people, however, did not need to be able to adapt to the view of the population of color, since the whole world is working according to their principles anyways (Mills 2007: 17f.; Pohlhaus 2012). Consequently, “[w]hat people of color quickly come to see – in a sense, the primary epistemic principle of the racialized social epistemology of which they are the object – is that they are not seen at all” (Mills 2007: 18).

Interestingly so, hooks, in “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination” (1996), makes the observation that *white* people, in *white* supremacist society, often imagine that they are invisible to Black people, “since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over Black people, accorded them the right to control the Black gaze” (hooks 1996: 35). They are shocked to find out that Black people think critically about *whiteness*, since their “racist thinking perpetuates the fantasy that the Other who is subjugated, who is subhuman, lacks the ability to comprehend, to understand, to see the working of the powerful” (ibid.). Members of the dominant class, rather than investigating and acknowledging their own, assume the ignorance of those they are oppressing (hooks 1996).

Mills delineates ten features and dynamics of *white* ignorance: First, socio-structural mechanisms that generate *whiteness.* He points to the “‘uneven development’ in the process of racialization in different countries at different times” (Mills 2007: 20), and to theories which detail how *race* as a concept only emerged in the modern period, when societal development and budding imperialism created hierarchical distinctions between different populations (Fredrickson 2015). Second, he proposes a distinction between *white* ignorance and other forms of ignorance, which rests on the evaluation of how and if race is responsible for lack of knowledge. The third feature ties into the second: how to delineate what counts as *white* ignorance, and what does not? In face of cases where the racial causation might not be visible at first glance, Mills argues that “the existence of such problematic cases at the borders does not undermine the import of more central cases” (Mills 2007: 21). Fourth, *white* ignorance is not necessarily caused by bad faith: rather, the racialized causality it depends on can be both the result of “straightforward racist motivation” (ibid.) and “impersonal social-structural causation” (ibid.), or a combination of the two.

Sixth, non-*white* people too, can manifest *white* ignorance by virtue of societal power relations and ideological hegemony, which make them adapt the dominant point of view (Mills 2007).

Seventh, Mills argues that *white* ignorance includes “moral non-knowings, incorrect judgements about the rights and wrongs of moral situations themselves” (Mills 2007: 22). Improvements in cognitive practices, such as pointing out this form of ignorance, should reduce and ultimately eliminate racial oppression which shows in faulty moral cognition. Eighth, Mills highlights that there are, of course, also other forms of “privileged, group based ignorance” (ibid.), such as male ignorance. The under-theorization of race-related issues in the *white* academy, in comparison to feminist literature which tackles gender-based ignorance, is why Mills chose to focus on this phenomenon (Mills 2007: 22).

Ninth, *white* ignorance is not uniform across the entire *white* population. Mills points to the fact that “people have other identities beside racial ones” (Mills 2007: 23), such as class, gender, nationality and religion, “and these factors will modify, by differential socialization and experience, the bodies of belief and the cognitive patterns of the subpopulations concerned” (Mills 2007: 22f). This implies that *white* ignorance is not indefeasible – rather, it is a cognitive tendency which people can overcome due to their individual histories. Mills’ tenth and final point is that his endeavor of trying to understand *white* ignorance is normatively motivated: as in most of social epistemology, which focuses on “supra-individual processes, and the individual’s interaction with them” (Mills 2007: 23), the goal is to arrive at an understanding of how social structures influence flawed processes. This, in turn, should lead the individual to critically question their own being-complicit in these processes, with the goal to stop reproducing them and, lastly, also undermining them in a broader context (Mills 2007).

Excerpts of the interviews show that PoC are aware of the *white* ignorance they are confronted with. This is especially evident in moments where interview partners refer to gradual differences in the ignorance they encounter: Lisa, for example, talks about the fact that she does not expect her rural grandmother to know much about racist discrimination and the lived realities of PoC because she lives in a remote location – and Lisa, her dad and her sister are some of the only people of color she has ever met personally. Likewise, she states that she is not surprised to encounter racist discrimination at a “Tyrolian village party”. In contrast, when entering places like the university, she assumes that people have overcome this form of ignorance. Mills delineates this possibility in his ninth point, where he states that it is possible to overcome *white* ignorance by actively engaging with the matter of racism and unequal standing in society (Mills 2007: 22f). Lisa expects people who attend university to have engaged with the topic. In the same vein, Anna states that she expects different things from people who study Gender Studies and people “who lead different lives”. Yet, this acknowledgement does not lessen the struggle she faces, rather adding on to the explanatory labor demanded of her.

Due to a persistent *white* ignorance, the problems and challenges PoC face in *white* dominated societies remain a matter of constant explanation, and the responsibility to conduct this explanatory labor is often shifted upon PoC, leading to their exhaustion. There are some lines of research that look into why and in which contexts PoC voice the exhaustion they feel. As a recent study by Akwugo Emejulu and Leah Bassel suggests, to speak about “exhaustion” can also be a way for women of color activists to look for and find recognition in like-minded activists. They state that “[d]eclaring exhaustion requires no explanation and no justification of distinctiveness” (Emejulu and Bassel 2020: 400), and that this statement is often used to denote that activists are doing meaningful work – even to their almost breaking point. Exhaustion, in this context, signifies both “a moment of reflection and rebirth of activism in different configurations” (ibid. 406), and to be open about it is a way of transcending the notions of ‘end’ and ‘beginning’ by proposing the grounds for a transformative solidarity. (Emejulu and Bassel 2020)

Regarding the transformative effort, it is imperative to reflect on the context in which Anna voiced her exhaustion: it was not towards another PoC, but in a conversation with me, a *white* researcher, that she brought up the feeling of being exhausted by the emotional labor she was expected to do at university. It may be too quick of a conclusion to say that Anna intended the potentially liberatory power that Emejulu and Bassel attach to this utterance. Yet, it is a way of communicating her bodily condition of literal exhaustion in light of the need to persistently deal with racist discrimination, and my work as a researcher is to shed light on this condition – hopefully, too, with a liberatory outcome.

4.3.4 The Anger at Not Being Believed

Another bodily felt reaction to racist discrimination that I received a testimony of was anger. When Lisa shared with me the story of a professor calling her a racist slur at a book presentation, she could, at some points, not continue to tell the story because anger left her, quite literally, speechless. Already ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, expressed that “anger is an appropriate response to perceived injustice” (Aristotle 1135b28-9). Yet, as Boykin et. al. point out, this display of emotion can come at a cost for those who express it. Anna, for example, recounts being read through the lens of the stereotype “angry Black woman” when contesting racist behavior she witnessed at university, and how being associated with this stereotype made her feel at unease (Boykin et. al. 2020).

Boykin et. al. confirm that in spaces where *white* dominance forms the ideological framework, PoC are often constructed "as overly emotional and/or angry *prior to* any actual emotional reaction to racist organizational dynamics" (Boykin et. al. 2020: 441). This malignant classification can be traced back to the racist distinctions introduced by colonialist norms which María Lugones points to. Following a colonial logic, those who were not *white* Europeans were deemed "bestial" (Lugones 2010: 743), and constructed as peoples who did not possess the ability to reason. They were classified as "uncontrollably sexual and wild" (ibid.) in order to justify their abuse at the hands of the exploitative colonial order. PoC, being socialized in an environment where these colonial imaginaries are the governing norm, fear stigmatization, which leads to them not expressing anger they feel in light of problematic situations.

The fear of stigmatization is present in Misha's and Lisa's childhood strategy to "laugh off" racist jokes that were made in their presence. The fear that expressing one's anger might lead to negative consequences is probably also what led Tanya's parents, themselves immigrants from India to the U.S., to urge their children not to attract too much negative attention. Tanya recounts being told to "keep their head down" and adjust. They state that their parents' fear is understandable, because they themselves did not possess the ability to potentially verbally defend themselves against abuse. Yet, Tanya feels a strong need to be "seen and heard", which their parents seem unable to understand.

In line with Tanya's wish to assert a place for themself in the world, and to contest racism where they encounter it, there are scholars who point to the beneficial aspects of anger. One of the first to thematize this complex emotion, and its necessity in light of racist treatment, is Audre Lorde. In her 1981 text "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism" (2007), she describes how, in interactions between her, a Black woman, and *white* women, "my anger and your attendant fears are spotlights that can be used for growth in the same way that I have used learning to express my anger for my growth." (Lorde 2007: 124) She states that acknowledging women of color's anger is necessary to facilitate a dialogue about racism, and that anger "can become a powerful source of energy serving progress and change" (ibid. 127). Anger can be used as a tool to distinguish between those who are allies and those who shy away from an emotional expression that does not fit with their expectation of how marginalized peoples should deal with the discrimination they face (Lorde 2007a).

Lorde argues that the mainstream wants racism to be "accepted as an immutable given in the fabric of your existence" (Lorde 2007a: 128), and that angry voices are especially threatening to this supposed 'normality' of social oppression because they are hard to ignore. In face of these challenges, Lorde states that "[w]e cannot allow our fear of anger to deflect us nor seduce us into settling for anything less than the hard work of excavating honesty" (ibid.). Within Lorde's writings, the demand for honesty is often present in her pointing out the need to acknowledge the differences that exist between people, and especially among women that aim at forming feminist alliances.

As Lorde points out, reactions to anger are informed by people's upbringing in a patriarchal society, where another person's angry reaction can easily mean the threat of death:

> In the male construct of brute force, we were taught that our lives depended upon the good will of patriarchal power. The anger of others was to be avoided at all costs because there was nothing to be learned from it but pain, a judgement that we had been bad girls, come up lacking, not done what we were supposed to do. And if we accept our powerlessness, then of course any anger can destroy us. (Lorde 2007a: 131)

In "The Master's Tool Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1979), Lorde reflects on how ignoring the differences between people's socio-cultural positioning, and the differences in privilege they encompass, leads to so-called 'distortions' which inhibit a dialogue that is profitable to all parties. This is why Lorde's ideal of a creative, empowering collaboration is deeply rooted in an "interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences" (Lorde 2007b: 111), which lastly enables women to conceptualize their being dependent on another not as a threat, but as a chance.

Often, differences manifest in "separation and suspicion" (Lorde 2007b: 112) between women, yet Lorde conceptualizes this initial reaction to their acknowledgement as a symptom of the western, heteropatriarchal and racist system of norms we live in. She places herself firmly against a stubborn academic rationalism whose devaluation of affect and feeling are brought about by the western dichotomous opposition between thinking and feeling. She states that "survival is not an academic skill. […| It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*" (Lorde 2007b: 112).

The eponymous statement, also rendered cursive in the original, marks not only Lorde's poetic abilities, but also her fierce demand for a change that occurs on a structural, and not just on a representational level. Only if the *master's tools*, meaning the norms that we were brought up to consider irrefutable, like the hierarchical distinctions between people on the basis of their skin color, are challenged, and, lastly, discarded, will any attempt to destroy the *master's house*, namely the societal structures that are responsible for discrimination along many lines of difference, be possible (Lorde 2007b).

The interviewees point to the need to acknowledge differences between people and talk about when they first became aware of this necessity: Misha and Anna, for example, were both part of antifascist youth groups when growing up. Misha gives an account of realizing in a seminar focused on feminism that there are differences between women, and that feminisms which assume a unified female subject run the risk of obfuscating the specific struggles of women of color. Anna makes a similar comment with regard to her *white* parents: as a teenager, she wanted to join an antifascist protest, and her parents refused to let her go because they were afraid that something might happen to her. At first, she was angry at their refusal to give her permission to participate. Later, she understood that it was a protective mechanism: her parents realized that she could easily be singled out from the group of *white* protesters, and was thus a bigger target for violence and harassment. Their acknowledgement that she was different from the others served the purpose of guarding her against those who would use her 'difference' to harm her.

Another author that points out the potentially liberatory force of anger in light of discriminatory situations is Alison Bailey: in paying tribute to Audre Lorde's writing, the epistemologist classifies anger as the "emotion of injustice" (Bailey 2018: 93), pointing out that "[t]his is how injustice *feels*" (ibid.). The injustice in question here is epistemic injustice: Miranda Fricker analyzes how differences in social power impact a person epistemically, and how this can lead to a wrong done to someone in their capacity as a knower. (Fricker 2007: 1) She distinguishes between, on the one hand, how they are attributed credibility by their peers (testimonial injustice), and, on the other hand, how someone is at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experience because of a gap in collective interpretive resources (hermeneutical injustice). The latter was discussed at length in chapter 4.1.2 in the context of discomfort. Here, will turn to the first kind of injustice Fricker gives an account of: testimonial injustice, which "occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word" (Fricker 2007: 1).

There are manifold quotes throughout the interviews that account of instances where the interviewee's experiences of discrimination were questioned, and their testimony was discredited. Misha, for example, reports how calling a *white* person racist is most often met with dismissal and a lack of understanding, and that, very frequently, this leads to defensive reactions, or a feeling of being attacked on part of those whose racist behavior attention is drawn to. She noticed this when she called out the racism inherent in the educational "game" used in a seminar: only two *white* people of more than 15 present in the classroom backed her argument, whereas all PoC agreed with her. Until the end of the semester, the *white* teachers did not acknowledge their role in upholding a racist system.

Anna gives an account of how even people she considers friends aim at relativizing her experiences with racism as a Black woman. The same happened in the university seminar where Anna objected to the use of the N-word during a book presentation: she ended up having to defend her position. When Anna's class went to see a play that featured the N-word in its title, this, and Anna's refusal to join them, did not keep them from discussing the play in class. Anna's fears proved to be true: the play, whose inherent racism was apparent to Anna from the second she read the title, served as a gateway to a lengthy discussion filled with even more racist tropes and statements, ultimately resulting in Anna exiting the hurtful situation: "And then I had to leave the room, I was so angry, and that rarely happened to me at Uni, that you find yourself in the bathroom, crying, and just thinking, "How could this happen?""

Tanya, too, gives an account of being misbelieved after receiving sexist and racist treatment at the hands of two personnel at the University of Applied Arts they were academically dependent on: their mentor grouped them with another project employee with the explanation "he's like you", indicating a person of color. They did not get along professionally: the person in question refused to work with Tanya unless they went on a date, which Tanya declined, leading to half a year where they couldn't do the work they were supposed to do. Relating their experiences to people proved to be further disillusioning: Tanya states that the sentiment they were met with was mostly: "'A young person wants to do all these ambitious things and I just don't trust it.'" Their account was discredited on the basis of their age, their perceived gender, and their non-*white* identity.

Bailey, in taking up Fricker's theory, examines how emotions come to play in instances where a person suffers from an epistemic injustice that consists in discrediting their experience. She argues that anger, more specifically "*knowing resistant anger* – offers marginalized knowers a powerful resource for countering epistemic injustices" (Bailey 2018: 94). Bailey's argument takes off from the observation that testimonial injustice often takes the form of silencing practices that aim at obscuring marginalized people's testimonies. She quotes Fricker's and Christie Dotson's work on epistemic violence, who distinguish between four different techniques employed to silence people: firstly, "*pre-emptive silencing*" (Fricker 2007: 130), consists in not even asking someone's opinion concerning a certain topic. Consider, for example, Anna's class not discussing with her beforehand if attending a play which featured the N-word in its title was offensive to her. She was preemptively stripped of a possibility to voice her concern.

Some silencing practices use marginalized knowers as "*epistemic objects, or as truncated subjects*" (Bailey 2018: 95), which means that their testimony and knowledge are co-opted to serve the asker's cause, obscuring its origin. Fricker calls this technique "epistemic objectification", drawing a parallel to cases of sexual objectification, where those who objectify another person cannot conceive them but as a sexual object, which renders their accounts invalid (Fricker 2007: 133). As Gaile Pohlhaus points out, naming what happens in the circumstances of epistemic injustice 'objectification' does not aptly describe the epistemic harm that is done. She argues that, in dropping the distinction subject/object in favor or subject/other, one can highlight how testimonial injustice "does not just prevent information from being circulated, but rather prevents a particular information from being circulated" (Pohlhaus 2014: 109): the information and knowledge non-dominant knowers hold, and that dominant knowers fail to conceive of because they are outside the scope of their immediate "experiences, desires, and interests" (ibid.), does not appear as rightful knowledge.

This mechanism is reflected in Misha's testimony of the *white* university professor asking her whether she was racist and ableist, right after a session where the class had handed in anonymous feedback and the exact same thing was stated:

> The professor approached me and said she had received a feedback that she was ableist and racist and other things, and she wanted to ask if this were really true. And she explicitly approached me, even though the feedback was anonymous. And she practically questioned me. And did not manage to reflect on this herself. And was so much hurt in her *whiteness* that she wanted to check again, and she actually wanted to hear from me 'No, that is not true.' These are university teachers who are not only way above me because of their salary, but also in so many other aspects.

The professor intended to use Misha's knowledge and approval as PoC to further her own intention of appearing, at least to herself, less discriminative. Yet, she disregarded, firstly, that she had already received the information she desired via an anonymous, yet, from their perspective, seemingly 'uncredible' source. Secondly, she did not take into consideration what effect this question would have on Misha, especially in how it reproduced problematic power structures: Misha could not outright refuse to answer her question, and was, again, assumed to be able to answer in the name of all PoC. Additionally, the professor's inquiry betrayed her façade of offering an anonymous form of feedback as a way of getting confirmation of her self-conception of not acting discriminatory.

Epistemic exploitation comes to mind here: it occurs "when privileged persons compel marginalized persons to educate them about the nature of their oppression" (Berenstain 2016: 569). It constitutes a kind of epistemic injustice in which "speaker's claims are not rejected or ignored *en masse* but are selectively affirmed and denied by the hearer according to how well they confirm the hearer's existing doxastic commitments" (Congdon 2017: 247). The professor deciding to question the truth of the negative feedback she received is an example of her denial to receive feedback that was not in line with her self-conception.

There are numerous instances throughout the interviews that serve as a proof that epistemic exploitation happens to PoC and Black persons on an almost daily basis. This is especially worrying since epistemic injustice can have pervasive influence on BIPoC's lives: Anna, for example, gives an account of her exhaustion and frustration at always having to explain her experiences as a Black woman to her classmates: "Many things became 'my topic' because I was the one to point them out. [… A]s soon as it's about racism and discrimination, everyone turns around to stare at the BPOC, expecting a statement which is representative for all Black people on the planet." Note how Anna's statement highlights the same form of negative representationalism Misha gives an account of.

The third silencing practice Bailey mentions was introduced by Christie Dotson (Dotson 2011): "*Testimonial quieting* happens when an audience fails to recognize the speaker as a knower who is worth hearing" (Bailey 2018: 96). The speaker's words seem not to have been heard at all: they spark no attention and create an effect "as if she never spoke" (ibid.). Consider, for example, Misha speaking up to call out the racist nature of the "game" that was used as an educational tool: if it wouldn't have been for the other students of color who also objected, and the privileged position of the two *white* persons who backed up their argument and got angry too, the teacher would have just brushed the comment aside. She intended to silence Misha by implying that she could have just decided not to partake in the "game" if she considered it problematic, implying that Misha's statement was only addressing an individual and subjective problem that could easily have been avoided. Yet, the teacher's attempt at silencing did not work out, and the discussion lasted until the end of the session. Additionally, Misha used the final session of the seminar to performatively reclaim the space of contestation she and the other PoC in the classroom were previously denied.

"*Testimonial Smothering*" is the fourth silencing technique Bailey points to. Also introduced by Dotson, it denotes a form of testimonial injustice wherein a speaker 'smothers' their own testimony in order to "ensure that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence" (Dotson 2011: 244). Marginalized knowers oftentimes consider how 'risky' something they might say to dominant knowers is and attune their accounts to the ability to listen and comprehend they assume of their conversation partners. They attune their statements about racial injustice to their audience, in order to avoid potentially dangerous our upsetting situations (Bailey 2018).

This is reflected in Anna's statement that it poses a challenge to find out "who you can talk to about it": here, the 'it' that 'it's about' are her own complex experiences with and emotions toward racism. Dotson argues that testimonial smothering, a form of self-silencing, ought to be considered a form of coerced silencing: it is rooted in the marginalized speaker detecting that their audience lacks competence and awareness to fully understand the scope of what they are saying, or indicates through micro-aggressions, for example microinvalidations, that they are non-benevolent listeners (Dotson 2011: 247).

The frequent experience of testimonial smothering manifests in the way Anna decides how to react to certain provocations. In circumstances where she does not want to confront racist treatment, but chooses to maintain her distance and calmness, her explanation of the situation, and her need to justify her decision to stay passive in light of injustice, depend on who is with her: "In order to be able to make a statement like [I just don't want to deal with it right now] and be understood by the other, the other needs to already have done some work, to accept that, and to not take it personally." The "work" Anna refers to in this context is the self-conscious recognition of racist power structures, and the corresponding self-distancing from them, that Charles Mills refers to in context of his treatment of *white* ignorance (Mills 2007: 23).

Bailey argues that experiences of being silenced are connected to anger because anger "pushes back against the weight of imposed silences" (Bailey 2018: 96). It reinstalls some agency with subjects who were previously subjugated to violent epistemic contexts. In line with Lorde, Bailey points out that anger is a justified response to "social and cultural habits, ideologies, institutions, and laws that dehumanize, erase, and do violence" (ibid.). Yet, it can also come at a cost: she points out two methods that are often employed to further silence individuals who angrily contest their mistreatment. "*Tone policing* and *tone vigilance*" (Bailey 2018: 97) are often used to discredit statements by the oppressed by implying that statements were issued in the wrong tone. This brings us back to the beginning of this chapter, where Anna reported of being read through the lens of the "angry Black woman" – a comment others use to discredit what she is saying by criticizing the way she voices her discontent, and an effort to silence her rightful anger.

4.3.5 The Sadness of Feeling Powerless

Another emotion frequently recorded in my interview partners' testimonies is sadness. Anna, for example, shares how, after an especially upsetting university class in which others could not accept that there are certain boundaries to respect in classroom conversations, and certain expressions that should be off limits, she found herself crying at the toilet. Anna also mentions being sad when reflecting on the fact that she had to do the labor of explaining racism to those around her from an early age on, and still today:

> What kind of labor have I had to do since I was seven, and which kind of labor do I not feel like doing anymore, but have to do anyways, because you can't do anything else, because you are sad, and you think that there is something wrong with you?

Sadness, a biologically based negative emotion, goes, according to Laura Di Giunta's article of the same name, often hand in hand with the feeling of "having minimal control over events and their outcomes" (Di Giunta 2018: 1879). Often, it is an individual's reaction to a felt powerlessness in changing a significant aspect of their life. Through this lens, the sadness that Anna gives an account of can be attributed to her inability to change the structural discrimination she faces as a Black woman in a predominantly *white* institutional context.

Sara Ahmed, in *The Promise of Happiness*, comments that "to inherit feminism can mean to inherit sadness. There is a sadness in becoming conscious not only of gender as the restriction of possibility, but also of how this restriction is not necessary" (Ahmed 2010: 75). Ahmed, too, links sadness to the impression that something is evitable, yet appears to be unchangeable from the individual position. She gives the example of gender posing the threat of disadvantage and restriction. From an intersectional perspective, the same ability to restrict possibilities can be attributed to all factors that negatively influence a person's standing in society.

The struggles PoC face because of their perceived difference from the dominant norm of *whiteness* and the struggles of women, trans and non-binary people under patriarchy result in manifold experiences that are as individual as humans and their specific historicity and social location, and this should not amount in an effort to equate the two. Yet, I suggest that, in the same way that "inheriting feminism" is tied to "inheriting sadness", living as a PoC in a *white* society is connected to the becoming-conscious of the restrictions of one's possibilities due to factors that are attributed from the outside – such as how one is gendered or racialized according to societal rules.

This line of thought, which links sadness to powerlessness, and feminist to antiracist struggles, is especially salient since, from this point of view, other examples that were shared with me in the course of the interviews are categorizable as moments of sadness. Consider, for example, the powerlessness Misha felt when receiving no apology or understanding from the teacher she was confronting about how the "game" she used as an educational tool reiterated racist ideas. The teacher refused to acknowledge the game's negative consequences for Misha and the other PoC present, and Misha felt "discussed into the ground". She could only react to what the teacher was saying, and not make her own points. As Rae Langton argues, "one mark of powerlessness is an inability to perform speech acts one might otherwise like to perform" (Langton 1993: 314). Misha not being able to say what she wanted to say can, thus, be considered an attest of her experiencing powerlessness.

Or consider the many examples my interviewees give of having a feeling of responsibility that they could not choose, which limits their choices in how to act. The choices available to them were limited from the outside, by forces beyond their willpower. If one understands power, such as Zillah Eisenstein, as an "activity of trying to limit choices" (Eisenstein 1981: 16), the interviewees' accounts of their feelingly limited choices are a testimony of how the unequal distribution of power along lines of difference influences their lives.

Tanya, for example, was discouraged from doing arts and further pursuing western intellectual traditions, and recalls pivoting into mathematics because they considered it a safer space: "I thought I could write out argument. And then that argument would hold, and I would get my grade." They were under the impression that the choice to pursue a career in Arts or in humanities was not available to them because of the negative feedback they got from their peers and mentors over the course of several years. This discouragement happened despite their interest in and enjoyment of work in both fields, and their academic grades and artistic abilities being adequate for the effort.

Tanya attributes these limitations to both their working class, immigrant family background and their perceived female gender: in the following statement, they point out how their colleague Thomas, a *white*, male artist, was encouraged to try out bigger formats, and praised for including references to classical Western and Christian traditions. Tanya, on the other hand, was asked to limit their artistic endeavors to smaller scale projects.

> When I would make art, people were like, 'that's so audacious for you to try to make it that way, for you to try to say something at this age.' Whereas my friend, Thomas, wouldn't get that same treatment and people would be like, 'Oh, Thomas, he's really shooting for the stars, he's talking about these biblical aspects, Michelangelo, and all these things, and it's so good, he's gonna be a great artist', whereas for me, it was like, 'Whoa, why don't you do something smaller?'

The experience of powerlessness can render an individual sad at their limited choices. As Ahmed points out, there are two different mechanisms at work in such moments: "Not only is there sadness in recognizing gender [or *race*] as the loss of possibility but there is also the sadness of realizing that recognizing such loss does not necessarily make things possible" (Ahmed 2010: 78). In other words, the acknowledgement that certain power structures have an inhibiting impact on one's life, for example in limiting the choices available, is not sufficient to alter the structural preconditions that produce inequalities.

Yet, as Anna points out, the pervasive feeling of sadness can be lifted a bit by understanding the reasons for feeling a certain way: she states that, when she was small, she and her best friend, who is also Black, attended an Afro-German youth group. Through the community there, she learned that the experiences they all made individually could be traced back to structural racism. She considers herself lucky to have learned to attribute the discrimination she experienced to impersonal power structures at an early age. Lisa, too, gives an account of coming to this conclusion: “Fuck, this is really a structural problem, to do something like this so naturally.”

An author who offers a reading of sadness as a dynamic process, highlighting both its “coercive and transformative potentials for political imagination” (Cheng 2000: xi), thus challenging the “simplistic division between power and powerlessness” (ibid.) which is often stereotypically to situations where oppression occurs, is Anne Anlin Cheng. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, and building on Sigmund Freud’s insights into grief, Cheng uses the concept “racial melancholia” (ibid.) to denote a “dynamic of rejection and internalization” (ibid.) which structures the lives of both dominant and non-dominant members of a society. Racial melancholia describes the dynamics that constitute the mutual definition of dominant *white* culture and racial others, which happens through exclusion. The concept serves to destabilize narratives that place the responsibility for melancholic experiences in a deficit of those who experience it (Grenage 2019).

Using the U.S. as an example, Cheng argues that a melancholic introjection of non-*white* others into *white* American identity secures the dominant authority. The racialized *other* is a “ghostly presence” (Cheng 2000: xi) by virtue of the traits and cultural habits that are picked up and made part of American *white* identity. Both sides of this struggle suffer from the ensuing racial melancholia, but the mechanism takes on a different form in the lives of both parties: Those considered *others* in this process of identity building, “the so-called melancholic object[s]” (ibid.), suffer because their “racial identity is imaginatively reinforced through the introjection of a lost, never-possible perfection” (ibid.). This belief in never being able to fulfill the demands of perfection – which would consist in being *white*, and, thus, fully accepted – informs their subjectivity and takes on the form of melancholic incorporation. Thus, Cheng provides a framework to consider the role which grief plays in the subject formation of racialized identity. This sentiment is present in Tanya’s following statement: “Even if I’m good enough, I am still not good enough”.

Cheng’s analysis offers the possibility to understand how internalized racism, and the sadness at not being “enough” to succeed that it is accompanied by, fundamentally shape the existence of non-*white* persons in predominantly *white* contexts. Note, for example, how Tanya points out that their classmates at Boston College would get different corrections for the same mistakes, because Tanya was “not assumed to already know the language”, in contrast to those *white* classmates whose minor mistakes were not corrected. Even though Tanya was in the honors program, which serves to give recognition to exceptional undergraduate students, their teachers demanded a different level of perfection from them than from their peers. Or consider how, at the University of Vienna, Tanya did not dare to show up late to class, in order to avoid sparking even more attention than they already did by virtue of being a brown person in a *white* institutional setting: “That’s always uncomfortable. If you show up late, it shows. You don’t wanna be seen in that way.”

4.4 Summary

In their testimonies, the interviewees frequently speak of being stressed out by racist encounters. As shown in various studies, the stress people experience because of racist discrimination can lead to bodily symptoms such as hypertension, strokes, respiratory problems, social ills, headaches, chest pain, nausea, and other negative affects like depression and anxiety. It can also lead to PTSD, which is caused by a combination of traumatizing events a person experiences during their lifetime, and the historical memory of such events as they have happened to the social group a person associates themselves with. A study which thematizes that PoC in the U.S. suffer more often from Covid-19, in comparison to *white* persons, points to the increased health risks the marginalized face because of being forced to work in unsafe work environments due to structural reasons (Bowen-Reid and Harrell 2002; Helms, Nicolas and Green 2012; Barber 2020).

Oftentimes, the stress PoC experience is caused by mechanisms of othering. By way of a binary distinction between an imagined “us” and an imagined “them”, PoC are conceived to be the “others” in an act that installs *whiteness* as the societal norm. PoC are assumed to represent nature, and their intellectual abilities are discredited. Othering leads to people being grouped together and expected to make the same experiences. Often, individuals are supposed to act as representatives for all other PoC, despite their different position in regard to overlapping systems of oppression. This can lead to even more stress (Lloyd 1984, Collins 1990, hooks 1996, DeWilde et. al. 2019).

Stereotyping and exotification are two of the ways in which othering occurs discursively. By way of stereotyping, the colonial discourse is installed as the norm, painting PoC at once as ‘other’ and entirely knowable. Those targeted by racial stereotypes are forced to make sense of themselves through the lens of this normalization. Others often fail to conceive of them as individual subjects, because they assume to already know a person based on the racist stereotypes they have internalized. Both stereotyping and exotification go hand in hand with ideas of heteronormativity, and often overtly sexualize those targeted (Collins 1990, Bhabha 1994, hooks 1996, Huggan 2001, Espiritu 2003, Barker 2017).

People targeted by othering are confronted with a paradoxical situation if they wish to minimize the stress it causes. Their options are to potentially face even more stress after confronting a racist other, or to be questioned as to why they don’t react to a racist provocation by their benevolent, yet uninformed, peers. Often, an internal conflict occurs, in which a subject desires to be heard and contest a treatment they receive, yet has the need to look after themselves and avoid such confrontation, since it is potentially dangerous.

As the interviewees' testimonies show, people targeted by racism are often in situations where a feeling of discomfort alerts them that an injustice is taking place. Yet, they often cannot exactly pinpoint what is happening. They report having the feeling of going "crazy", and of doubting their own experience of a situation. Since the discomfort most often takes place in social situations with an uneven distribution of power, theories from social epistemology are helpful in explaining this experience. Using Miranda Fricker's theory of epistemic injustice, these moments are classifiable as instances where the subjects experience a form of hermeneutical injustice. Caught in a propositional paralysis, they lack the hermeneutic tools to make what is happening understandable to themselves or others. Note that this lack is due to structural reasons, which privilege the knowledge of the dominant over that of the marginalized. Often, society gives no space to marginalized voices, and their experiences remain unheard (Fricker 2007, Giladi 2018).

Propositional paralysis frequently results in a toxic mechanism of self-blaming, because those who experience hermeneutical injustice cannot conceive of the societal processes that marginalize them and prevent them from developing the tools they need to express their discomfort and its source. The interviewee's testimonies show that this process is often amplified from the outside, when those in dominant positions suggest that the marginalized could just decide not to be hurt or offended. The ensuing victim blaming often leads those who suffer from systemic testimonial non-recognition to further doubt their experiences (Fricker 2007, Giladi 2018).

The testimonies show that PoC are expected to do free explanatory and emotional labor on matters of racism. When PoC decide not to engage in these conversations, and decide to set boundaries, others, especially *white* others, often do not respect these boundaries. Additionally, PoC run the risk of being perceived negatively if they refuse to perform the emotional and explanatory labor demanded of them. In moments of voicing a refusal to explain or engage with racist treatment, PoC are often expected to explain why they do not want to explain something, which is even more exhausting (Richeson, Trawalter and Shelton 2005; Eddo-Lodge 2017; Gaiter 2018; Boykin et. al. 2020).

The reason explanatory labor is demanded over and over, even though PoC have been protesting their marginalization for decades, is, as Charles Mills argues, *white* ignorance. He outlines that there is an asymmetry of perspective between *white* people and PoC, which is rooted in historical systems of oppression. In a *white* dominated society, the problems PoC face remain a matter of constant explanatory labor because *white* people do not need to assume their vantage point in order to manage their own lives. On the other hand, those in marginalized positions need to adapt to the norms and perspectives of the dominant. Consequently, the struggles PoC face because of racist structures are rendered invisible, and their subjectivity and individuality is strategically denied (hooks 1996, Mills 2007, Pohlhaus 2012, Fredrickson 2015).

The interviewees' testimonies highlight the connection between anger and perceived injustice. Voicing their anger can come at a price for BPoC and PoC, something of which they are aware. Through stereotypes such as the "angry Black woman", *white* logic constructs BPoC as angry prior to any interaction. This mechanism can be traced back to the pervasiveness of colonial logic, which associates those deemed 'other' from the *white* European norm with barbarity and an inability to control their emotions. These violent assumptions have an extensive effect on PoC, who out of fear of stigmatization, are raised to employ avoidance strategies such as "smiling away" or "keeping their head down" (Aristotle, Lorde 2007, Lugones 2010, Boykin et. al. 2020).

Some interviewees state that being brought up to ignore anger at injustice conflicts with their desire to be seen and heard, and to make a change to the racist structures that shape their lives. In a similar vein, Audre Lorde argues that the expression of anger in light of injustice is necessary to facilitate a dialogue about racism: angry voices possess the power to destabilize the normality of racism within a *white* dominated society. She points out how the fear of expressing one's anger is influenced by being raised in a patriarchal society, where male anger is associated with the danger of violence. Yet, being honest and angry about the differences that exist between people due to their unequal standing in society enables the forging of lasting alliances aimed at social transformation. Often, differences are ignored, which leads to distortions in the perception of realities. Their acknowledgement is necessary to deal with them productively, and to enable structural change (Lorde 2007a, Lorde 2007b).

Alison Bailey argues that the anger that is felt in light of injustice is often prompted by not being believed when raising one's voice about discriminatory practices. She relates anger to testimonial injustice, and points out that knowing resistant anger can be used as a resource for transformation. Testimonial injustice often works through silencing practices: pre-emptive silencing, testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering constitute some of the ways that prevent accounts of discrimination from being heard. Epistemic exploitation and the use of marginalized knowers as truncated subjects are other strategies dominant knowers use to strategically appropriate knowledge about discrimination in order to appear less discriminatory (Fricker 2007, Dotson 2011, Pohlhaus 2014, Bailey 2018).

At many points, the interviewees directly address being sad in light of situations where they realized that there are structural reasons for the discrimination they encounter. Racism seems so inherently entrenched in *white* dominated societies that it feels almost impossible to counteract it pervasively. They report feeling like having no control over the outcome of certain situations, like discussions where they remain unheard, situations where they receive no apology for being mistreated, or choices they are prevented from making. The realization that these restrictions are not necessary, yet still exist, makes them feel powerless (Eisenstein 1981, Langton 1993, DiGiunta 2018).

From the perspective of psychoanalysis, Anne Anlin Cheng proposes the concept racial melancholia, in order to destabilize the notion that melancholia or sadness are due to a deficit in those who experience it. Reconfiguring sadness as a dynamic process, she argues that dominant and non-dominant members of society mutually influence each other. The majority population suffers from the ghostly presence of those whose right to exist it performatively denies. The marginalized, in turn, suffer because they come to the conclusion that, no matter how big their effort, they will never be ‘enough’ within a society that is centered around the ideality of *whiteness* (Cheng 2000, Grenage 2019).

5. University Life: Expectations versus Reality

In the following, I outline the expectations my interview partners Misha, Anna, Lisa and Tanya had of university life, and their accounts of in how far these expectations were met or disappointed. In a second step, I will describe emerging patterns from an intersectional perspective, in order to answer the question how the experience of discrimination at university relates to experiences of discrimination elsewhere.

5.1 Narratives of Expectation and Reality

At 19, Misha had what she calls the “naive” expectation that the university would be a political, leftist and well reflected environment. She studies with “the goal of social transformation, and in order to reflect more on what surrounds us, and to discover more problematic things in order to topple over governing systems of power”. Soon, she found out that “it is possible to study social work without ever dealing with sexism, racism and classism, and that, on top of that, the texts routinely handed out as educational material reproduce stereotypes, racism and classism.” When starting her MA in Gender Studies at the University of Vienna, Misha expected to be surrounded by more mature students than in her Bachelors. Yet, she states that there was no real difference to the people she had met at the German university she attended before.

What Misha encountered at the University of Vienna was not the antiracist teaching she expected and wanted: rather, she noticed that the social transformative aspiration of Gender Studies seems to be limited to "the empowerment of *white* cis women". Therefore, as Misha muses, it should rather be called "Women's politics", or even "*white* women's studies". Gender Studies at the University of Vienna are, according to Misha, "less diverse than they think": teachers fail to take postcolonial and decolonial theories serious, and don't make space for people from marginalized groups by giving up their privileges. But even if anti-racism trainings for *white* university teachers were offered, Misha doubts that they would be sufficient, since, in her opinion, a complete transformation of the system which allows the existence of hierarchies has to be facilitated.

Similar to Misha, Anna states that, when she started to study at the Art university, her expectation was "to meet a bunch of critically thinking people and to discuss the relation between art and theater and the structure of the world". She went into it politically motivated. Soon, Anna realized this was not everyone's expectation of art school. She has the feeling that, in her class, stage design, she had to do a lot of explaining on the topics racism and discrimination. Anna also remembers being read through the lens of the image "angry Black woman" when she was not ok with something:

> Many things became 'my topic' because I was the one to point them out. I think this is a phenomenon in all sorts of groups, not just at Uni, that, as soon as it's about racism and discrimination, everyone turns around to stare at the BPoC, expecting a statement which is representative for all Black people on the planet.

Lisa, too, states that her decision to move to Vienna and attend university was fueled by her desire to live in an environment where she had to endure less racist discrimination. Staying in Tyrol was never an option for her "because the mindset there […] is just different." She says the loves her village and her family, but that life there would just have been too frustrating in the long run. In her opinion, one should evaluate every situation where discrimination takes place in light of whether the people that are part of the situation had more or less access to education.

> That does not legitimize racism, but people there [in Tyrol], farmers, they just have different chances of access to education, and then my expectations are different, and I am like, OK. Or my grandma, for example: she does simply not have a clue, but she also never had the chance to think about it, und she gets a little bit of input from me, bit I could also not be mad at her, because I know that she's also stuck in that structure. But then someone is a prof at Uni Wien, and I am just thinking: You have all the possibilities, and you know better, and you could do better, but you are not going to.

This presumed safe space at the University, among people who are well read and educated, is why, when something discriminatory happens, it feels, to Lisa, "especially disappointing": even when people in these supposedly progressive contexts do or say something racist, this might not change anything about their self-conception as exactly the kind of well-read and educated persons who would not do such things. Lisa is sure that, even after approaching her at a book presentation, asking her questions about her ‘origin’ and calling her a racist slur, the professor in question considers himself a feminist:

> But that’s just fucking staged, because he should not behave like that, and should not stay stuff like that with such ease. With such self-confidence, in front of all the people there, who could have also seen it and could have said something, but hey, don’t know, maybe they are all friends and I think – well, as soon as this happens in a framework like that, you start not to see it anymore.

Tanya, the fourth interviewee, had a quite optimistic vision of university life before attending university. They expected the university to be a meritocratic place, “that, when you are just good enough, the color of your skin or where you come from don’t matter”. Yet, by their senior year of undergraduate studies at Boston College, Tanya started questioning certain practices they witnessed. As an example, they cite “the differences about how I would get criticism versus how my peers would get criticism” and “how my white friends and classmates would get invited to these lunches with profs as mentors”, whereas Tanya would not be invited, even though their grades and presence in class were the same as their peers’. This double standard treatment is especially salient in the context of the U.S. American university system: Attending an U.S. academic institution typically involves many informal events and invites with professors and future mentors, and Tanya noticed they were getting way less of that recognition and those possibilities than their *white* colleagues.

Tanya states they were lacking this experience throughout their entire college career, and that they had the feeling of not fitting into the environment because they were from a working class immigrant background. They did not read ‘classics’ while growing up, which influenced how people would react to statements they made:

> Immediately, you get pushed out of most conversations because nothing you say seem so legitimate to other people. […] I would say something and then someone else would say the same thing and then I noticed how they would get a different reaction or criticism directed toward them versus the criticism with me was mostly dismissive.

In other instances, for example at the University of Applied Arts, Tanya noticed that the ‘difference’ they were attested had the effect of being grouped with people others thought to be similar to them. When forming teams, their mentor inappropriately commented on Tanya’s appearance: “[H]e’s like, you should really work with P., because he’s like, P.’s just like you, he’s brown as well.” But it did not end there, since P. also turned out to be problematic: “P. would refuse to work with me if I did not have dinner with him. This happened for two years. So I got nothing done in two years, because I refused to have dinner with P.” After some time, Tanya agreed to the dinner, but had a longer e-mail conversation with him to establish that they were in a relationship with another person and not looking to date him.

> I sent him an email, being like, well, maybe you did not have an intention for it to be romantic, but I just have to let you know for the sake of myself that I have a girlfriend, and like all these things, and then he sent me a long email about how I am a bitch and how I'm totally unprofessional and he hopes to never see me again and all these things, adding, by the way I do have a girlfriend, which, by the way, he did not have for like one and a half years.

Tanya recounts trying to talk to people about this experience, but that their experience was not trusted. "They were like, 'A young person wants to do all these ambitious things and I don't trust it.'" They state that, at the University of Vienna, or at The University of Applied Arts, they would not know who to talk to about incidents like this. "So it's just, you deal with it and you move on. I don't know the infrastructure and I don't trust the infrastructure to help me if I feel like something's bugged up."

Misha considers the discrimination at university different from elsewhere because "the university is a centuries-old institution which is formative for the scientific elite". She highlights that universities were also briefly considered a place of resistance, when, during the 1960s, students joined with workers and made it seem like systemic change was possible. Yet, what Misha detects now is merely a continuation of old power structures, of opaque hierarchies that make students who decide to contest the norms give up. This is, in Misha's opinion, also linked to the fact that universities hold a lot of power due to their role in determining which kind of knowledge counts as legitimate knowledge. This shows, for example, in how results of studies influence what kind of measures are supported politically.

> If science is only done by *white* cis men, and they research something they have never been afflicted by, and they don't have any clue about, and they are looking for problems…Because you are looking for the problems that are relevant to you. You don't pose certain questions that others would, because they have a whole different experience.

Anna, in contrast to Misha, does not perceive the situations she encounters at university to be distinctively different from those she would experience someplace else:

> Everywhere, you have people that are hierarchically above others or who should take on certain responsibilities due to their positions, but who mostly don't. I would not consider the university a safer or more dangerous place – but I think many people expect that this won't happen at university. Like, 'we are intellectuals, we are cultivated people who deal with society.'

When she experiences discrimination at university, she says that it is often a question of people needing to better inform themselves. In many cases, it's also a failure on part of the teachers: in Anna's opinion, it would be their job to moderate discussions in a way that everyone feels comfortable, and to "draw a line" when it's needed. Tanya, too, states that feeling discriminated is a question of what kind of comments or behavior university teachers give space to in their lectures.

> I always think about a curriculum and about how things are taught and how conversations are being had. And I think that's so fundamental to teaching, isn't it? If you're gonna do a class on gender communication and not talk about intersectionality, then of course you're opening this discussion for discrimination. You are giving discrimination a space. I think it's impossible to separate the two. And if discrimination does not have a space, then it's not because of the professor, it's because the students are creating that space for themselves.

5.2 Examination of Interviewees' Expectations

In this part, I summarize notable findings from the interview passages wherein my interview partners speak about their expectations of university, and whether they were met. A statement that occurs in almost all of the testimonies I received is that my interview partners expected the university to be a place where little or no discrimination happens, in comparison to elsewhere. Misha, for example, entered university anticipating it to be a "political, leftist and well reflected environment", and that she would "meet a bunch of critically thinking people". Lisa's decision to come to Vienna to study was, too, motivated by her desire to live in an environment with less racist people, and she assumed the university to be a safe space. Tanya entered university life believing it is a place where meritocracy reigns, which is reflected in their following statement: "When you are just good enough, the color of your skin or where you come from don't matter". Anna states that she had the expectation that people will "know what they can and should do and what not, but […] reality is different and people still repeat racist patterns".

The disappointment present in Anna's last statement is also reflected in Lisa's account. She, too, voices her frustration, stating: "You [as the professor] have all the possibilities, and you know better, and you could do better, but you are not going to." Anna thinks that there is a gap between the self-conception of those who teach and study in a university context, and the societal reality they are born into and profit from: they see themselves as open minded, self-reflective intellectuals, and forget to look into how they are influenced by and profiting from *white* supremacist power structures that bring about racist or other discriminatory behavior, regardless of their neutral self-conception. These structures, by unequally distributing the ability to hold others accountable and for statements to be taken seriously, allow *white* people to ignore rightful critique and potentially better themselves.

This is one of the reasons why Anna regularly feels let down by her *white* teachers: in principle, they would hold the power to organize the classroom in a manner that is not discriminatory towards anyone. An observation that Tanya makes can elucidate this: oftentimes, a lack of discourse on intersectionality or racism opens the floor for disrespectful conversations. Tanya, for example, states that their professors in mathematics routinely made racist remarks about Black people, and that there is a lack of conversation about racism in the natural sciences, because they are believed to be value neutral.

The lack of discourse on racism within the university is not only visible on an individual, but also on a structural level. Misha brings up how she was unable to locate a supervisor of color who could supervise her MA thesis on racist police violence. In the end, she had to challenge institutional boundaries to get an external supervisor that was adequate. She attributes the lack in suitable personnel to the structural barriers PoC face in the academy. Even within Gender Studies, a subject that actively promotes its intersectional aspirations, *race* seems to be bracketed as a topic, and is mostly only given space to at the end of the semester. There is, too, a lack of available courses and professors or instructors with a race critical background. This lack, in turn predetermines what students can get interested in. If reading lists feature predominantly *white* authors from a European/North American background, this kind of knowledge is reproduced indefinitely. Political insensitivity is also present in university's invitation politics: Misha gives the example of two *white* persons without headscarves being invited as experts on the topic.

The structural problem of who can make it in the academy is, in parts, due to those who teach. Misha criticizes that *white* teachers routinely teach classes on intersectionality, instead of giving space to people from marginalized backgrounds. The ensuing lack of representation leads to a lack of encouragement for other PoC to enter and complete university studies. Tanya, too, is under the impression that "people see themselves as gatekeepers, and then they get to decide who is the person of color who gets to be allowed into this". Their statement implies that, in order not to seem exclusionary, the marginalized are allowed into the institutions, but only under conditions of which *white* and established members of the academy approve.

My interview partners' statements allude to the fact that the university, as a place of knowledge creation, holds power over what counts as legitimate knowledge. Misha, for example, states that,

> […] if science is only done by *white* cis men, and they research something they have never been afflicted by, and they don't have any clue about, and they are looking for problems…Because you are looking for the problems that are relevant to you. You don't pose certain questions that others would, because they have a whole different experience.

Misha is aware of the university's role as a century old institution formative for the scientific elite and criticizes that old structures of power are in places which are masked by and expressed in opaque hierarchies. These hierarchies are also present in how teachers and students relate to one another. Tanya, at one point during the interview, states that, for them, it was important to start seeing teachers as people who have biases. These biases are revealed in the provided literature, in the thematic focus a person chooses, and in what is considered foundational knowledge, as Misha remarks. Tanya's statement implies that, for the time before they became aware of teachers' biases, they believed that university teachers, by virtue of their education and their relative position of power, did not hold any biases. Tanya perceived them as neutral, all-knowing figures who hold authority over what counts as knowledge.

The interviewees highlight the power-laden nature of the classroom environment: there are certain hierarchies in place, but some seem to forget that being in a superior position, e.g., as a teacher, comes with responsibility towards those in hierarchically lower positions. Anna, for example, states that she would expect of teachers to "draw a line" when it's needed, and to moderate discussions in a way that everyone feels comfortable. She detects a failure on part of teachers who are not able to draw this line, and when it's not clear what is acceptable and what is not: "there is a point where it's not anymore a discussion, no conversation, but only reproduction of violence".

What happens when discriminated subjects call out how they are treated? When confronted with accounts of racist behaviors, some teachers refuse to acknowledge their students' challenges, rather entering into discussion, trying to talk them out of their understanding of a situation as discriminatory. This oftentimes highlights a pre-existing power imbalance. Misha, for example, states that teachers have more experience in arguing and are therefore more powerful in dismissing claims that a practice was discriminatory, which leaves her feeling powerless because she can only react to what the teacher is saying.

Another struggle the interviewees voice is a lack of knowledge about where to turn to in case of racist discrimination: they know that, in principle, universities offer such possibilities, yet refrain from using them because they do not know what to expect. Lisa, for example, did not know what to do with the fact that a professor had called her a racist slur, and feared that reporting it would have uncomfortable consequences for herself. Tanya outright states: "I don't know any professors at Uni Wien who I could talk to."

5.3 Summary

Before attending university, the interviewees had the expectation that university was a place where little or no discrimination occurs. Upon entering the institution, they noticed that discrimination also occurs at university, and not only in an interpersonal way, but also in a structural way. These are their observations: Firstly, they observed that *white* teachers, despite their education, are embedded in and profiting from the racist structures within society, while simultaneously denying them. One of the effects of these racist structures is a selection of who can teach: the interviewees noticed that only few of the university teachers they encountered at either the University of Vienna or The University of Applied Arts were persons of color. They state that who can teach also influences who is encouraged to learn, since many are discouraged when there are no role models who show that a person of color can succeed in a specific field.

Secondly, they noticed that a teacher's bias shows in the literature, in the thematic focus, and in what is considered foundational texts: theories by people of color are rarely taught, and the curricula seem predominantly *white.* If space is given to discourses around intersectionality or racism, it is often only at the end of the semester, when student attention is already diminished. Thus, the space allocated to these topics conveys a negative symbolic value. This lack of discourse on racism opens the floor for discriminative behavior.

Thirdly, the interviewees account that most of the *white* teachers they encounter at university seem not to be conscious of the responsibility they have towards all students: they seem not to be aware of their function as the person who can determine what acceptable in-classroom behavior looks like, in order to create a safe space for all students. This shows, for one, during in-classroom discussions between students, where *white* teachers often fail to moderate discussions in a way that is promoting PoC's sense of their points being taken seriously. Secondly, their lack of awareness shows in their obliviousness to tacitly discriminatory practices they themselves employ, and in their frequent inability to respond to criticism by students of color in ways that is not dismissive. Rather, most teachers seem to use moments of criticism by marginalized members of their classrooms to employ pre-existing power imbalances in order to silence those who address insensitive or unfair behavior.

6. Towards Healing and Transformation

In the following part, I gathered the accounts of healing and transformation my interview partners shared with me. First, I will reproduce their individual testimonies. In a second step, I will analyze their statements and supplement them with theorists who provide strategies to counteract discriminative behavior at university. Note that this list is by no means complete, and that these approaches only reflect my limited perspective as a *white* researcher.

6.1 Personal Accounts of Healing and Transformation

6.1.1 Misha

Misha states that being in a community with PoC and BPoC strengthens her self-confidence and gives her the ability "to fight fights differently". She expresses that, when finding others who experience the same day-to-day discriminatory instances, she "finally […] knew that I was right, [and I] was not so sure about that before". Misha states that one of the reasons she never learned to acknowledge her own body and to be proud of it was the lack of other PoC in the media, in popular culture and in her community: "If you never see a person that looks like you, it really changes you".

Some of Misha's friendships with *white* people did not survive her acknowledging racism, for example "people that could not deal with the new demands", like to stop telling or laughing at racist jokes, and the responsibility to hold those who do responsible. Now, Misha does not have personal relationships with people anymore who do not understand political work as a part of their lives. This is due to the danger to her life that racism poses on a daily basis, and studies that show to what extent people suffer from PTSD because of racist treatment.

A practice of resistance Misha actively thought of in collaboration with other PoC was her challenge to the racist "game" she witnessed in a seminar. In the last session of the course, Misha and the other PoC who were targeted by racist comments during the introductory "game", staged an intervention. They used the privileged position of *white* allies to create an environment in which they would feel safe. In order to complete the seminar, every participant had to give a presentation related to communication. Misha states that she and the others affected by racism talked about the problematic session a lot afterwards, and spent much time and energy analyzing what had happened. Eventually, they came up with a plan for a presentation whose goal it was to show in more detail the problematic aspects of the session.

They brought "six or seven *white* allies" to the session in which they were scheduled to give a presentation. The four presenters placed themselves in the middle of the room, while the *white* participants of the seminar, the *white* allies and the *white* teachers were confined to the outlines. None of them were allowed to comment on what was about to happen or to speak during the presentation. Misha and her co-presenters opened a bottle of wine and staged talking about the session with the "game" and addressed the *white* teacher's refusal to accept criticism as if they were just four friends unwinding after a long day. They provided a context for the experiences they were recounting by supplementing them with bits of theory and relating them to accounts of similar instances. As a graphic element, they projected quotes from the session and decoded their problematic content.

When they were done, the four presenters left the room and told the others that the *white* allies would stay behind and discuss the presentation on their behalf. If they wanted to, the other seminar participants could come and buy them a beer after the class was over. The outcome of the intervention was, however, not what they had had in mind: Still, the teacher who had conducted the "game" did not acknowledge that her method was problematic. Rather, she continued to defend herself and felt personally attacked. One positive outcome of the intervention was that "at least some of the other students said thank you". Misha states that she did not learn anything in the seminar except for what she taught herself, and that she felt like that after many seminars. She states that, “often, at uni, I have the feeling that I am directly or indirectly attacked, and that I do not have a choice but to defend myself, which is really tiring.”

6.1.2 Lisa

Lisa states that her family has always had her back when it comes to racist incidents, and that she has the feeling that they went through the stuff that happened together. Yet, coming to Vienna felt like entering a “bubble”:

> It was like a safe space, it was really good, that the people had already thought about certain things that I had thought about a long time myself, and that they had written it down, and that one could talk about it, but not in a manner that amplifies it or reproduces it, but at least in a way that tries to decrease it.

For Lisa, it was very important to talk to someone after the incident at the book presentation had taken place:

> Because, in the beginning, I did not even know if I was exaggerating, if I had interpreted the situation wrong, or if this was not justified that I felt like that, or that it seems like that to me, and that I…And it felt really good to hear, no, this is a really shitty situation, and to hear what other people thought was shitty about it.

She says she knew she needed to do something with her experience, but was unsure what exactly, and that her friends were a big help in processing the incident.

> I was thinking about what to do – you have to weigh up the situation, also its effects: will this become public? Will this again be really uncomfortable? Yeah, I don’t know. What kept me from doing something in that moment was also the question of the effects this would have on me. And, of course, also the question of what I can do.

Lisa on what bugged her most about the incident:

> The fact that I had to deal with it, because I felt like, well, if I don’t do anything with this, then it feels like I would encourage it by just accepting it. And as if I…And then I thought, well, I cannot blame myself for something that he fucked up. It’s a really tough process: you want to do something about it, but not in a way that’s too stressful, just a balancing act. To look after yourself and to, at the same time, deal with the shit that happened.

6.1.3 Anna

When coming to Vienna, Anna for some time joined a BPoC group that was aimed, in her words, “not so much towards political activism, but more towards healing”. But, as Anna points out, it was not less political than the groups she was part of before, only in a different way:

> This may sound pathetic, but it means to be able to distance yourself a bit from the identity you made yourself to manage day to day life – someone says something weird here, someone there, there is another such situation, oops, another othering that secretly takes place – just to have a space where you can be one hundred percent sure, that this won’t happen, and that’s just…well that just makes it really special, and it’s sad that this has to be special.

6.1.4 Tanya

Tanya states that it was only with time that they started to be able to properly see the structural discrimination they were facing. Once they started to read more on feminism and intersectionality, they became more aware of their surroundings.

> I did not know how to call out any of this shit. I did not even know representation and all this shit. […] And then I finally had this vocabulary. And I think once you start having the vocabulary, and you deepen it, and you read more books, and you understand how to name things, is when you can start reflecting on things. Because until then you just want to survive and you want to get through something, and then when you start reading more about discrimination you can start pinpointing it more because you get the language for it. […] Because it's so invisible and so engrained. And to really piece it out and take it apart, to start seeing it, to start naming it and calling it out, you have to have language for it. And I always think about people saying, well, what's the point of protesting, what's the point of this and that, and I do feel that jadedness sometimes.[…] [Y]ou tried so hard and then, where does it go to? And then you realize, oh, wait, you feel so much more now. You are more aware than ever. And I think that's really what it is. You start changing people's vocabulary very slowly.

This realization that vocabulary can change her perception of the world is why the "strategic forgetting" of former days is something Tanya can no longer uphold:

> I think 26 was when I started finding really like-minded people. Who don't make you feel crazy, people you can have all of these conversations with, who understand the bullshit of academia, and then, once you have that as a reinforcing thing, you're like, oh, I don't have to put up with all of that bullshit anymore. So it's really about finding community and a support network. It helps you be like, well, that's bullshit, and I can have like 15 people back me up on why this is bullshit.

At Uni Wien, and especially in the math department, Tanya "did not find any friends". Yet, they try to stay in contact with people who work in the same field in other ways, using, for example, modern media and technology, which lessen the physical barriers between likeminded people:

> I talk to Math grad students in America who are of color and navigating this system and have different challenges, and then you just feel more sane. Twitter is a great space to make connection. I have an amount of discourse on Twitter with academics of color, it's just been the most amazing experience. You just feel like, ok, I am not the only one, I am not crazy.

Finding new friends and PoC who also work in academia was important for Tanya to feel less alienated from their environment. For them, this step also required a change of place, like going to Brown University for a summer school.

> When I was at Brown, I made all these friends, and just the conversations we had: I could use the same word… even just the fact that you could use the word intersectionality to another human being and they'd get it, they're at that level, it's so freeing, it's so interesting, because then you feel like, holy shit, whoa, like, I don't know how to describe this experience really. But it's that feeling when you can use a word that is very specific and then someone else listens to you and also has a relationship with the word and also uses it, it really helps.

Tanya never discussed their experiences at The University of Applied Arts, Boston College and in high school with anyone in a higher position. Yet, at their summer course at Brown University, they were confident enough to take on a different approach after a discriminatory incident had happened:

> I did reach out to a professor about it and that was such a great process because I could see it in the moment, call it out, talk to a professor, and then that professor, who's on my side, sees me, and he cried after I told him, and he was like, I'm so sorry you have to deal with this. And it just made me feel so seen and so heard, that I've never…And I was just realizing I could rely on other people. Whereas I don't know any professors at Uni Wien who I could talk to.

Tanya states that the feeling of safety they experience in context where others are educated in matters of racism transcends what one would generally name the positive effect of community: "I would say community is not sufficient. It's bigger than that. It's an acknowledgement of something. The willingness to acknowledge something."

6.2 Approaches to Healing and Transformation

6.2.1 Self-Reflectivity

Both Misha and Tanya give accounts of educating themselves through literature on matters of racism, and that this process helped them to deal with the racist treatment they are confronted with. They state that it helps them to know “how to call stuff out”, and that their altered vocabulary enables them to reflect on things they did previously not see. Things become visible that were not visible before, which leads to a change in affect, in Tanya’s words: “You feel so much more now. You are more aware than ever.” Tanya describes the relief they feel when talking to others that are educated in matters of discrimination as “that feeling when you can use a word that’s very specific and then someone else listens to you and also has a relationship with the word and also uses it”. All of the interview partners stated that the company of and conversation with others who experience discrimination reassures them of not of not being “crazy”. For Tanya, these people are allies “who don’t make you feel crazy, people you can have all those conversations with”.

In social epistemology terms, Tanya’s and Misha’s experiences can be considered the righting of an epistemic wrong which consists in the hermeneutical injustice of being unable to name what was happening to them, and of having a central part of their experience obscured form collective understanding due to a lack in hermeneutic resources (Fricker 2007). Finding the vocabulary to name their experience, and then realizing that others both made the same experiences or could attain the vocabulary to address and understand the problems they were facing, made them realize that they were neither going crazy, nor over-interpreting things up that were no problems at all. They received reassurance that their struggles were not due to individual shortcomings or being overtly sensitive, but were grounded in structural conditions.

How can others who are targeted by less discrimination, help in the process of righting epistemic wrongs committed at university? In “The Challenge of ›Race‹: Intersektionale Gender Studies in der Amerikanistik” (2018), Eva Boesenberg thematizes the dominance of *white*, able-bodied, middle-class and cis positions within American Studies at Humboldt University, Berlin, where Boesenberg teaches. She urges for a building of consciousness among those teaching at universities in order to better understand their hegemonic position and the way in which they themselves are embedded in social structures (Boesenberg 2018: 118).

Boesenberg thematizes that teachers need to acknowledge the influence of their position on what they can perceive. This knowledge should serve as a reminder to formulate statements in a cautious manner, and to explicitly state that their perspective is limited. By reflecting on their own position, everyone can discover that racist instances are produced in power laden environments, often by epistemic processes the perpetrators of racist violence are not aware of because they display epistemic ignorance.

In the preface to the anthology *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (2007), Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana speak in more detail about epistemologies of ignorance. As a field of research, epistemologies of ignorance examine the complex phenomena of ignorance, identifying their different forms, how they are produced and sustained, and how they play into knowledge practices. Most often, epistemologies of ignorance are applied to issues of race, racism, and *white* privilege (Sullivan and Tuana 2007: 1).

Sullivan and Tuana point out that sometimes what we do not know are not accidental gaps in knowledge, but that these gaps are actively produced in order to sustain domination and exploitation. Such "unknowledges" (Sullivan and Tuana 2007: 1) support *white* privilege and supremacy. Sullivan and Tuana argue that epistemologies of ignorance are a tool to "reveal the role of power in the construction of what is known and provide a lens for the political values at work in our knowledge practices." (Sullivan and Tuana 2007: 2) They reference Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract* (1997) and his concept of *white* ignorance I spoke about in more detail in chapter 4.1.2. There, I thematized the exhaustion PoC often experience when they are expected to over and over explain their experiences of racism, and account for why it is wrong they have to endure discriminatory behavior. Mills argues that, by tending not to understand the racist structures they have themselves created, *white* people are able to fully benefit from the racial hierarchies, ontologies and economies resulting from these structures (ibid).

When racism is considered an epistemological question, as Boesenberg does in her account, its perpetrators can take action by reflecting on their own position and what they are able to see or not see from their unique vantage point. Further, they can ask themselves how they profit from structures that might be invisible to them. If, for example, a method used in class is perceived unproblematic from the teacher's side, this might not necessarily be universally true for all participants in a diverse classroom setting. By virtue of their own position, teachers might be ignorant of different positions within the classroom, and of how certain settings are experienced from positions other than their own, or the perspective of students who fulfill the norm of *whiteness*. Especially *white* teachers should take that into considerations when planning their sessions. Using bell hooks' approach to education as the practice of freedom, proposed in *Teaching to transgress* (1994), one can argue that it is the responsibility of teachers to be conscious of their potential epistemological shortcomings. As hooks writes: "[T]he professor must genuinely *value* everyone's presence. There must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes" (hooks 1994: 8).

With valuing everyone's presence comes the responsibility to reflect on how persons within a classroom will individually react to methods employed in teaching: How, for example, can situations be avoided that are triggering to some? hooks stresses that the classroom should be considered a communal place wherein excitement is generated through collective effort. What should be at the heart of community, and at the heart of this collective? Maybe an openness towards perspectives that are not one's own, and a willingness to reflect on the difference between these perspectives and one's own.

6.2.2 Acknowledging Difference

Misha states that for her, setting boundaries was important in dealing with discrimination. This is reflected in her statement of removing racist friends and people who were not fully committed to an antiracist agenda from her life. A form of setting boundaries is acknowledging the different treatment some people receive because of intersecting categories of oppression. Yet, dealing with difference is dependent on doing some work. as Audre Lorde points out in "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" (1980), an active acknowledgement of the differences between people is pivotal to every emancipatory project, for only then humans can relate to each other as equals (Lorde 2007c: 115). What needs special attention, in this context, is the notion that the *mythical norm*, which serves as a point of reference for "deviation", is itself only a cultural construct.

Lorde points to the circumstances that prevent the acknowledgement of difference: "[M]any white women are heavily invested in ignoring the real differences. For as long as any difference between us means that one must be inferior, then the recognition of any difference must be fraught with guilt" (Lorde 2007c: 118). If difference is detected, those who would be considered 'superior' in 'traditional' hierarchies are often unable to relate to this difference in any way except for guilt. As Lorde argues, guilt is immobilizing and oftentimes prevents subjects from further engaging with the differences in perception they encounter.

In order to use difference in a productive way, Lorde's appeal is to "identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference" (Lorde 2007c: 123). Individuals need to shed a light on what separates them experience- and otherwise, and to make these differences of perception the starting point for change. But how to spot these differences – and how to thematize them in a non-harmful way?

In their article “becoming non-Swedish: locating the paradoxes of in/visible identities” (2012), Redi Koobak and Suruchi Thapar-Björkert explore how difference operates and how race and ethnicity are discursively homogenized and articulated. Their foundational observation is the following: “In Western societies discursive visibility is often equated with power. […] [V]isibility connotes attention and recognition, which is desirable to many but accessible to few.” (Koobak and Thapar-Björkert 2012: 127) They consider the phenomenon of heightened visibility due to an attested difference, and the effects this has on people who are observed with scrutiny because of said difference. Koobak and Thapar-Björkert reflect on their experiences as non-Swedish persons who receive varied reactions once people find out they are non-Swedish. Koobak, an Estonian PhD student, is able to pass as a Swede in everyday life, whereas Thapar-Björkert, an Indian scientist with a history of living in the UK, is habitually perceived as an ‘other’, with people oftentimes assuming she is from southern Europe or the Middle East. Yet, both researchers share the fact that it is through language that they “are unmistakably made visible and marked as foreign” (Koobak and Thapar-Björkert 2012: 129).

Koobak and Thapar-Björkert point out that both being identified as a foreigner and passing as a Swede, entails situations that are ambiguous and contradictory. These instances reveal how identities are “constituted, constructed and interpreted in and through our social relations, locations, and contexts” (Koobak and Thapar-Björkert 2012: 132). As Sara Ahmed puts it, “the very materialization of bodies in time and space involves techniques and practices of differentiation” (Ahmed 2000: 42), and we normally need to rely on these differentiations in order to find our way in the world. Yet, Koobak’s and Thapar-Björkert’s example illustrates that one should be aware that the differentiations one undertakes mainly reflect one’s *own* ability to differentiate, and might not necessarily tell us anything about a person except our own perception of them.

Considered in the context of Lorde’s appeal to take seriously the differences between us in order to enable true solidarity, the crucial moment, here, is how difference is spotted and verbalized. It’s a matter of epistemology, and thus, of hierarchy. Who is the subject making a statement, and who is merely the object of the other’s observation? Who gets to speak? Maybe the easiest way of bypassing the pitfalls of over-eager identification is self-reflexivity: Is it my task to speak about the other and make assumptions? Or is it rather my responsibility to open up about my own self-perception and position, before I can demand the same of the other? And to ask them what they have to say, and listen with the intent of understanding? All while acknowledging that some things are not comprehensible from a privileged position? In making an unsolicited statement about another's origin or racial identity – no matter if thought of as 'positive' or 'negative' – there is always an implicit demand for a clarifying response, which amounts to a reinstallation of a relation of power.

6.2.3 *White* Allyship

In her account of how she decided to counteract the racist discrimination she encountered in a Gender Studies class, Misha highlights the beneficial impact of *white* allies: she used their presence to take back space, and to have a support group when she felt vulnerable due to how she was previously treated by a *white* university teacher. In the presence of the allies, and with support of other PoC, she staged a performative intervention, which served the purpose of taking back the space she was previously denied. Another important aspect of this act was that interventions by *white* students and teachers were forbidden. This deliberately set the scene for how Misha and the other people of color wanted to discuss what had happened, and symbolically reasserted the agency they were previously denied.

William Aal, a *white* antiracist trainer and organizer, highlights how a move from guilt to action is necessary for *white* persons in order to enable positive change. He states that, due to his *whiteness* and the ensuing status of being a beneficiary of this system, "the impact of racism is almost entirely invisible to me" (Aal 2001: 294). Thus, the premise of Aal's work is the definition of *white* identity as the privilege of not needing to see the atrocious effects of racism. This distinction of *whiteness* as privilege is important as it denormalizes the *white* self-image as neutral, impartial view from nowhere.

Aal builds on his experience from years of work in anti-racist campaigning when he states that, in order to eradicate racism, "activists and organizers need to start working with those who benefit from racist structures and who play the biggest part in maintaining them" (Aal 2001: 295). The first step of making the beneficiaries of racism realize that their success comes at the cost of someone else's oppression or discrimination is, according to Aal, to show that "structures of injustice are not natural phenomena […] but were created by humans in specific historical contexts and therefore *can be changed*" (Aal 2001: 296).

This approach usually brings about a lot of "avoidance and defense strategies" (Aal 2001: 305) by *white* people who are confronted with how their internalized privilege helps them in almost every aspect of their lives. This defensiveness is often accompanied by a "paralysis of guilt" (ibid.). One method against this feeling of historical guilt one cannot escape by virtue of one's own person is knowledge about the historical emergence of racialized privileges. Aal references Noel Ignatiev's book *How the Irish became white* (1995) as a helpful resource when it comes to understanding *whiteness* as a socially constructed concept.

Aal argues that it is pivotal to get in contact with “the grief from which they [*white* people] spend so much time and energy dissociating” (Aal 2001: 306). This dissociation, which helps to jauntily navigate life as a privileged person, results in blindness towards one’s own privilege, as discussed in chapter 6.2.1, where I discuss self-reflexivity as a possibility for *white* actors to counteract discriminative behavioral patterns. Part of this critical examination of one’s grief needs to be an evaluation of the historical and collective psychological processes which have led to some phenomena being more in/visible than others, thus helping all actors to understand that the energy they spend on dissociation should rather be spent on an active engagement with their cultural surroundings (Aal 2001).

Aal’s appeal is to see *whiteness* as a “crippling condition” (Aal 2001: 306) which makes it hard for people to “imagine what a racially just society could be about” (ibid.). In order to get a better grip on the reality one lives in, Aal advises a four-step self-analysis which can help as a critical map to the power circuits one is embedded in. These are the following markers: *position* – what social strata you come from, *stand* – whom you are accountable to, *bias* – whose interests your attitudes serve, and *impact* – who benefits and who loses from your actions. When it comes to moving from guilt to action, it is, according to Aal, especially the distinction between impact and intention which is a novel discovery for most subjects (Aal 2001).

6.3 Summary

One conclusion to be drawn from the interviewees' accounts on healing and transformation is that the attempt to reduce the harm of racism at university should be connected to the attempt of righting epistemic wrongs that were previously committed: everyone involved in a classroom setting can start by investigating the ‘unknowledges’ they hold, and to reflect on how their own perspective was shaped. Each actor needs to become aware of their embeddedness in a racist system which prevents them from acknowledging the struggles others face. Identity-based ignorance, for example *white* ignorance, frequently prevents *white* teachers from acknowledging the struggles PoC face within their classes, and obscures the added pressure that comes with the need to navigate a racist environment. By reflecting on their own unknowledges, teachers can act as examples for their students. It is also advisable to include classroom activities which are directly targeting what *white* students do not know by virtue of their privileged perspective (hooks 1994, Mills 1997, Fricker 2007, Sullivan and Tuana 2007, Boesenberg 2018).

Another helpful strategy to combat racism at university is to acknowledge difference, but not in a paternalistic way that assumes someone else's identity. In the context of this acknowledgement, there should be awareness that PoC can set boundaries at their volition, and that these need to be respected by everyone involved. If differences in privilege are spotted, the way of relating to these differences should not work through guilt, because this emotion often immobilizes. Rather, new definitions of power should be identified and developed, and new patterns of relation across these differences should be employed. Further, there needs to be an acknowledgement that seeing difference is telling about who attests it, and that, even if "difference" is detected, it is not an ontological given, but rather the product of a social process of distinguishing (Ahmed 2000, Lorde 2007, Koobak and Thapar-Björkert 2012).

In this context, it is crucial how difference is spotted and verbalized: *white* individuals should, for example, rather denote their own positionality and their limitedness of perspective, than speak for someone else about how they are made to feel or be seen different. Additionally, they should avoid speaking for others, rather asking them about their experience with the aim of understanding. An important aspect is, too, to acknowledge the differences in privilege – and, thus, perspective – that might prevent you from fully comprehending another's experiences (Ahmed 2000, Lorde 2007, Koobak and Thapar-Björkert 2012).

White allies play an important role in making Austrian universities a space that is less hostile towards people of color. Allies can, for example, be helpful in taking back space that was previously denied to someone because of an identity prejudice. In order for allies to be effective helpers, they need to reflect on their positionality and their privilege, and to think of ways in which they can use the latter in a productive way. When they are attempting to be helpful, they need to respect that the ultimate decision concerning how *white* privilege can be used in support of the marginalized should remain with the PoC in question (Aal 2001).

7. Conclusion

In the following, I will answer the research questions I posed at the beginning of this thesis. The first question (RQ1) is: What are the challenges faced by people who experience discrimination at university? I aimed at answering this question by looking, within the interviews, for markers of bodily reaction to the circumstances they found themselves in. The resulting bodily sensations figured as my key points of analysis within this study: my interview partners gave testimonies of experiencing stress, exhaustion, discomfort, anger, and sadness when confronted with racist discrimination at university.

Stress poses a challenge insofar as it can have pervasive negative influence on a person's bodily as well as mental health. Often, the feeling of stress occurs in situations where the interviewees are made aware that *whiteness* constitutes the tacit societal norm: othering, which is often accompanied by exotification and stereotyping, strategically denies people's individuality by grouping them with those who are also considered the 'other' in relation to a societal norm, such as *whiteness*. Frequently, people who are othered experience the paradoxical situation that they can either confront the stressor, which could potentially lead to even more externally caused stress, or ignore it, which can lead to internal stress such as self-blaming (Lloyd 1984; Collins 1990; Bhabha 1994; hooks 1996; Huggan 2001; Bowen-Reid and Harrell 2002; Espiritu 2003; Helms, Nicolas and Green 2012; Barker 2017; DeWilde et. al. 2019; Barber 2020).

Discomfort poses a serious challenge to people who experience discrimination at university, since it can have a severe negative influence on a person's emotional wellbeing. It is often experienced in moments where the interviewees face hermeneutical injustice: due to structural reasons, those marginalized often lack the conceptual tools to explicate what they are experiencing, and to pinpoint in how far what they are experiencing is discriminatory. Additionally, these tools are often not available to dominant others, who fail to understand a person's experience of discomfort in a situation that might seem unproblematic from their perspective. This can lead to self-blaming behavior, wherein those affected by racism ask themselves whether they are going crazy, often doubting their assessment of a situation (Fricker 2007, Giladi 2018).

The interviewees report being exhausted by the free emotional and explanatory labor they are expected to do. This poses another challenge at university: they feel that they run the risk of being perceived negatively when refusing to perform such labor, and that their decision not to engage is oftentimes not accepted by their *white* peers and teachers. The cause of this persistent need to explain their experience, and their ensuing exhaustion, is *white* ignorance. The struggles of PoC are rendered invisible in a *white*-dominated society, which has mechanisms in place that uphold the image of a discrimination free environment. This results in PoC's subjectivity, individuality and unique vantage points on societal relations being strategically denied in order to uphold the normalcy societal power relations (hooks 1996; Richeson, Trawalter, Shelton 2005; Mills 2007; Pohlhaus 2012; Fredrickson 2015; Eddo-Lodge 2017; Gaiter 2018; Boykin et. al. 2020).

Anger, and, especially, how to deal with it, poses another challenge for PoC at university. In order to forego stigmatization, which could occur when they voice their anger, the interviewees accounted for frequently using avoidance strategies in order not to let their anger at injustice surface. Yet, this often results in an internal conflict between being brought up to ignore anger, and the desire to be seen and heard in order to change the unjust structures. Anger can be used as a tool to destabilize the normality of racism, and to counteract testimonial injustice which denies PoC's ability to account for their experiences within an oppressive system. In the form of knowing resistant anger, it can lead to societal transformation. Nevertheless, the attempt to angrily voice the contestation of existing structures is often preemptively thwarted by silencing practices (Aristotle, Fricker 2007, Lorde 2007, Lugones 2010, Dotson 2011, Pohlhaus 2014, Bailey 2018, Boykin et. al. 2020).

The last emotion that came up in the interviews as one of the challenges the interviewees face at university is sadness. It is often experienced when structural reasons for discrimination become obvious, yet the discrimination at hand seems unavoidable. Sadness is the result of the aporetic question how to effectively counteract racism under the premise that it's so deeply entrenched in *white* dominated societies that it becomes invisible to *white* others. The interviewees give accounts of having the feeling of losing control over situations in which they find themselves, of being prevented from making their own choices, of not receiving apologies when they are due, and of remaining unheard when voicing their contempt. Sadness, conceived as a dynamic process, structures their lives in a way that they have the constant feeling of not being 'enough', which can have pervasive negative effects on their well-being (Eisenstein 1981, Langton 1993, Cheng 2000, DiGiunta 2018, Grenage 2019).

My second research question (RQ2) is the following: How does the experience of discrimination at university relate to experiences of discrimination elsewhere? The answer to this question lies in the relation between how the interviewees imagined university to be different from elsewhere, and the experiences they made upon entering university, which contrast the expectations they previously had. The interviewees give accounts of experiencing racist discrimination from an early age on, and persistently in their lives outside of university. For many of them, attending university resulted from the desire to be in an environment where little or less discrimination happened. They expected that meritocracy would be the defining feature of university, and that they would be able to learn in a safe space. These expectations were thwarted, and the interviewees report encountering discrimination on both an interpersonal and a structural level.

It became apparent to the interviewees that structural conditions heavily influence who can teach at university, and what kind of knowledge is accepted. The lack of diversity in teachers influences if and how PoC are encouraged to themselves pursue careers within the university, and how motivated they are to pursue their studies in light of discrimination. The structures, by way of influencing what kind of people can succeed in the academy, also predetermine what kind of topics are eligible as research focus: the lack of established professors working on racism from a political science perspective, for example, nearly prevented one of the interviewees from conducting a study on racist police violence.

On an interpersonal level, the interviewees were frustrated that *white* university teachers and professors are embedded in and profiting from the racist structures around them, while simultaneously denying these structures' influence. They routinely conceive of themselves as non-discriminatory. Their racist bias shows in the literature the teachers choose for their courses, in the thematic focus they set, and in the amount of space that is allotted to topics such as racism and discrimination. This lack of discourse on racism invites discriminatory behavior to the classroom, because awareness about it and the tools to call it out are not being distributed evenly at the beginning of the classes. By not providing these conceptual tools or encouraging *white* peers to engage with the matter on their own, teachers fail to create a classroom environment which is not inimical to people of color.

The interviewees testify that they feel that many *white* teachers lack the awareness of their responsibility towards those present in the classroom. They fail to create a classroom environment that people of color can consider a safe space. An example for this failure is discussions where the *white* teachers presume that there is a middle ground on which both parties – the discriminated and those discriminating – can meet, instead of asserting that discrimination is not welcome within the classroom. Another example is the frequent inability of *white* teachers to respond adequately to criticism that is targeting their own racist behavior. When being confronted with internalized racism, and how it shows in teaching, they often employ silencing techniques in order to uphold the image that they do, in fact, provide a discrimination-free learning environment.

In total, the difference between the discrimination the interviewees experience at university and elsewhere is the expectation they had of university life as a non-discriminatory space. Their disappointment at the discrimination that occurs in a university setting is amplified by the image as an open, diverse, and critical place the institution university aims to promote and uphold.

The third research question (RQ3) was: What can people targeted by less or no discrimination do to improve the experience of people facing discrimination at university? As the answers to RQ1 and RQ2 have shown, one of the major struggles PoC face in a predominantly *white* institutional setting is epistemic injustice: often, their experience is discredited, and others lack the tools to understand the discrimination they are subjected to. People targeted by less or no discrimination can improve the experience of PoC at university by righting the epistemic wrongs that were committed. *White* actors within the university should investigate their own 'unknowledges' in regard to other's experiences of discrimination. They should reflect on how their perspective was shaped. Oftentimes, *white* ignorance prevents *white* students and teachers from being aware of the struggles PoC face. By actively engaging with the matter through educating themselves, they can accomplish to be more aware of perspectives different from their own.

The acknowledgement of differences between people is crucial for this undertaking. Instead of ignoring them, differences in privilege should be acknowledged in a non-paternalistic way. All actors within the university should think of new ways to relate across difference. This should encompass the formation of new definitions of power, and the establishment of new relations across difference. For *white* actors, this means denoting their own privileges, to avoid speaking for others, and to acknowledge the differences in privilege present within a classroom setting. It also means actively asking PoC about their experiences within the university, and trying to understand their accounts without drawing on defense mechanisms and silencing practices.

In line with the above points, *white* teachers and students within the university should strive to become active allies of PoC. Note that allyship, in this context, denotes not a status, but an ongoing activity: allies should ask PoC what they need in order to feel safe and accepted, and use their own privilege in productive ways. They should actively engage with the struggles PoC face, and point out discriminative behavior they see, especially in spaces where no PoC are present. However, *white* allies should be aware that the last word in where and how to use their privilege, for example in order to confront situations that reproduce racist structures, is up to those in less privileged positions.

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Appendix

Interview Guidelines

Entry

1. Please tell me what you understand by discrimination.
2. Please tell me about your first encounter with discrimination or when you first heard of it.

Start of the experience of discrimination

1. When was the first time you had the feeling you or another person were being discriminated?
2. What happened next?
3. Please describe how you were dealing with discrimination when growing up. Is there a situation you can recount to exemplify this?

Present Experiences

1. Please tell me about the last time you were discriminated in the university context or where you were witness to a discriminating act or structure affecting another person.
2. Do you think that discrimination takes on different forms? If so, what are they?
3. Has the way you deal with discrimination changed over the course of your life? Please tell me about a situation that clarifies this.

Subjective Experience and Emotions

1. How does being discriminated or witnessing the discrimination of another person affect your mood? Please recount an exemplary situation.
2. When you think back, did this change over the course of your life?

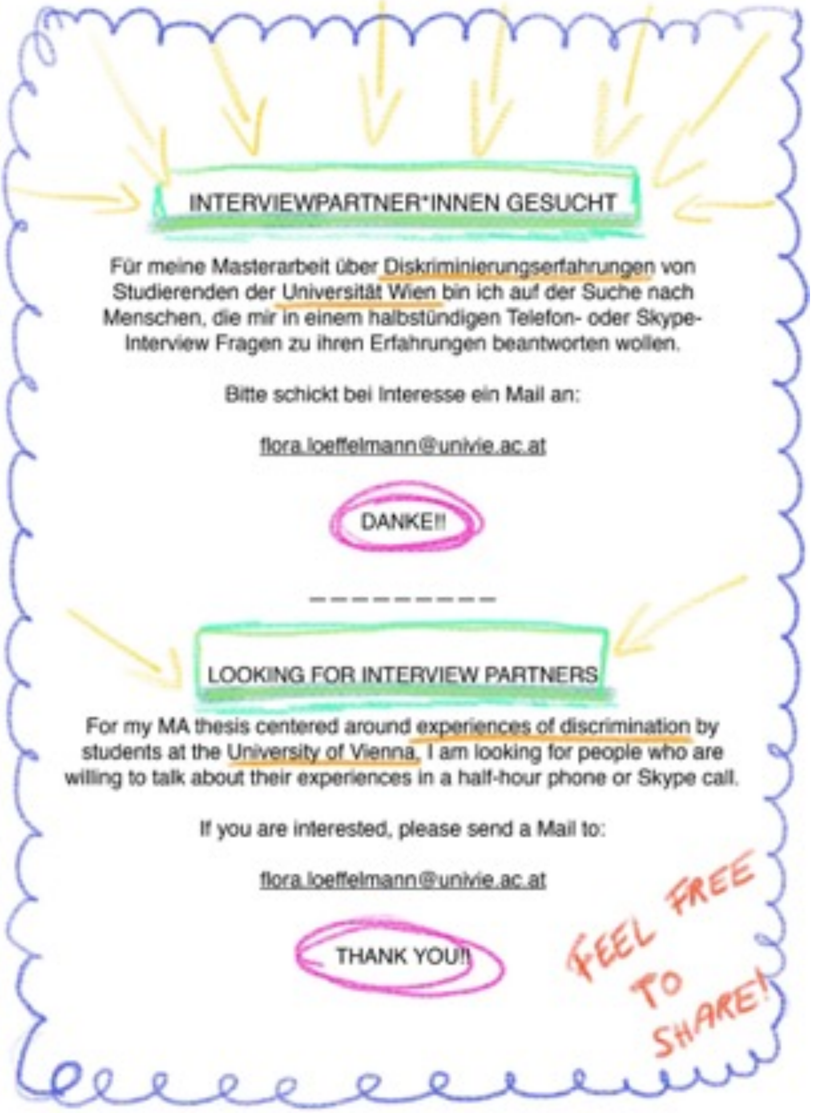
Discrimination at University

1. Please describe which role the experience of discrimination takes on in your everyday life at university.
2. Do you experience discrimination to be different at university than in other aspects of your life?
3. If discrimination at university differs from the discrimination you experience elsewhere: in how far is it different? Please tell me a situation that exemplifies this.

Handling in Social Environment

1. How do you deal with the topic discrimination in your social environment (partner*s, parent*s, friends...)? Tell me about a situation that comes to your mind.
2. How does your social environment deal with it? Do you talk about discrimination?

The Call for Interviewees



INTERVIEWPARTNER*INNEN GESUCHT

Für meine Masterarbeit über Diskriminierungserfahrungen von Studierenden der Universität Wien bin ich auf der Suche nach Menschen, die mir in einem halbstündigen Telefon- oder Skype-Interview Fragen zu ihren Erfahrungen beantworten wollen.

Bitte schickt bei Interesse ein Mail an:

flora.loeffelmann@univie.ac.at

DANKE!!

LOOKING FOR INTERVIEW PARTNERS

For my MA thesis centered around experiences of discrimination by students at the University of Vienna, I am looking for people who are willing to talk about their experiences in a half-hour phone or Skype call.

If you are interested, please send a Mail to:

flora.loeffelmann@univie.ac.at

THANK YOU!!

FEEL FREE TO SHARE!

Abstracts

Studies that try to examine the kind of discrimination students encounter at university most commonly rely on quantitative data. This approach often falls short of capturing the lived reality of those within the university context, implicitly showing that the ability to notice and name discrimination significantly depends on how much one is affected by it. For example, the notion of a European "post-racial society", which is often mirrored in these studies, preemptively classifies incidents of racist discrimination as non-existent, hindering a productive, potentially transformative discourse. This thesis offers a corrective to the notion that *race* is of no analytical use in the European context. Building on critical phenomenology and theories of intersectionality, I first explore the challenges faced by people who experience racist discrimination at university. Secondly, I assess how their experiences of discrimination differ from experiences of discrimination elsewhere. Thirdly, I identify what those who face less discrimination can do to improve the experiences of others. The core of my study is a set of interviews with four students of color who study at Viennese universities. I supplement their observations, which I, from the perspective of standpoint theory, consider expert knowledge, with insights from social epistemology, critical race theory, history, psychoanalysis, and medicine. I thereby show that racist discrimination, which the interview partners describe as phenomenal experiences of stress, discomfort, exhaustion, anger, and sadness, is grounded in societal power relations that work through mechanisms like othering, *white* ignorance, and hermeneutical und testimonial injustice. My conclusion is that experiences of discrimination at university are of a particularly disillusioning nature, because these institutions publicly present themselves as spheres of neutrality and openness. This public image poses a strong contrast to my interview partners' experiences.

Studien, die Erfahrungen von Diskriminierung an der Universität erforschen, stützen sich oft auf quantitative Daten, und spiegeln wider, dass die Möglichkeit, Diskriminierung als solche zu erkennen und zu benennen davon abhängig ist, wie sehr eine Person selbst davon betroffen ist. Dies ermöglicht die Verschleierung viele diskriminierender Praktiken, die durch die Vorstellung einer „post-racial society" präventiv als inexistent klassifiziert werden. Diese Arbeit präsentiert ein Korrektiv der Ansicht, dass *race* im europäischen Kontext keine nützliche analytische Kategorie darstellt. Ausgehend von Überlegungen der Critical Phenomenology und intersektionalen Theorien stelle ich erstens die Frage, mit welchen Herausforderungen Menschen konfrontiert sind, die auf der Universität die Erfahrung von Diskriminierung machen. Zweitens lote ich aus, wie sich die Erfahrung von Diskriminierung an der Universität von jener andernorts unterscheidet, und drittens danach, was die von weniger Diskriminierung Betroffenen tun können, damit sich die Erfahrung der Diskriminierten verbessert. Im Zentrum meiner Analyse stehen Interviews mit vier Studierenden of Color von Wiener Universitäten, die mit mir ihre Erfahrungen geteilt haben. Ihre Beobachtungen, im Sinne der Standpoint Theory Expert*innenwissen, ergänze ich durch Interpretationen aus der Perspektive der Sozialepistemologie, der Race Critical Theory, der Geschichte, der Psychoanalyse und der Medizin. Ich lege dar, dass rassistische Diskriminierung, die von den Interviewpartner*innen phänomenal als Stress, Unwohlsein, Erschöpfung, Wut und Traurigkeit empfunden wird, in gesellschaftlichen Machtverhältnissen begründet liegt, die über Mechanismen wie othering, *white* ignorance, hermeneutical und testimonial injustice operieren. Innerhalb der Universität sind Diskriminierungserfahrungen besonders ernüchternd, weil sich die Institution nach außen als offene Sphären der Intellektualität und Neutralität positioniert. Dies steht in starkem Kontrast zu den tatsächlichen Erfahrungen der Interviewpartner*innen.