



LUND UNIVERSITY

The Slap Heard Around the World

**Contextualising Forgiveness Online With the 2022 Oscars Scandal from the
Perspective of Women Living With Alopecia**

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2023

Abstract

As forgiveness has largely received scholarly attention from the perspective of marketing studies and quantitative approaches, this thesis aims to recontextualise forgiveness in digital environments with a qualitative approach of interviews. By distancing itself from previous studies of forgiveness, it treats forgiveness as a complex process rooted in the interviewees' identity positions and experiences as well as their affective and cognitive modes of engagement.

The project focuses on the 2022 Oscars scandal where the actor Will Smith slapped comedian Chris Rock after the latter made a joke about Jada Pinkett Smith's hair loss, caused by an autoimmune disease named alopecia. Specifically, it delves into the engagement and participation of women living with alopecia as an audience affected by the incident who followed the incident and the discussion around it online. Their perspective is crucial to understand as they were the ones targeted by Rock's joke and as a result they were engaged in the incident and affected by the aftermath, therefore they are the ones most likely to have capacities to forgive.

Theoretically, this study is situated in perspectives from norm theory and transgression which see norms as boundaries or expectations for human behaviour and transgression as the overstepping of these boundaries (Clinard and Meier, 1998; Hermes and Hill, 2021). It is focused on the context of celebrity scandals which are witnessed by diffused audiences anticipating such events (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998). By focusing specifically on women living with alopecia, the study will adopt Dahlgren and Hill's (2023) approach by analysing their engagement with and participation in the case, the previous identity experiences that affected their engagement and cognitive-affective process of making sense of the incident, perceiving and evaluating the transgression along with potentials for forgiveness.

Following the methodological principles of Flyvbjerg's (2001) phronetic research and Harding's (2008) standpoint theory, the study starts off from the perspectives of women living with alopecia by conducting 13 semi-structured interviews. The findings of this study indicate that women living with alopecia perceived the reaction of the general public as ignorant and discriminatory, focusing on the entertainment value of the incident while othering communities who were affected by the incident. Second, the transgressive nature of the slap can serve as a way to live vicariously through other people for women living with alopecia as they search for ways for countering ignorance against alopecia. Finally, interviewees felt that in contemporary

media environments, scandals do not persist long enough for audiences to forgive and therefore, forgetfulness begins to substitute forgiveness. The issues of the Oscars incident were subverted into the entertainment practices of the general public, leaving little room to celebrities for remediating their tarnished reputation and women living with alopecia stigmatised.

Keywords: *forgiveness, transgression, scandal, alopecia, celebrities, audiences*

Acknowledgements

They say that it takes a village to raise a child. Well, I needed a whole village to write a (hopefully) decent thesis. So, I would like to thank my village – the people around who have tremendously helped me during this journey. First, my heart goes out to all of the strong and inspiring women living with alopecia who I interviewed for this thesis. Thank you for your insightful reflections and the help you provided in reaching out to the community. I sincerely hope this thesis does justice to everything that you so kindly shared with me. Second, a huge thank you to my supervisor professor Annette Hill for supporting me, giving inspiring ideas and shedding light on the paths to come out of my often chaotic and confusing concerns regarding this project.

Germo, I could write a separate thesis about the joys of having a partner like you. You're the best person in the world and I love you so much. Thank you for coming on this master's journey together, making every day infinitely better and supporting me through this whole process.

Thank you to my awesome parents who have always been rooting for me, check in to chat, show me our dogs, offer their support and made my studies in Sweden possible. This thesis would not have been finished if it weren't for the constant shipments of candy and cheese my mom made sure to send my way. I am also very grateful to my grandmother who has constantly been curious about my thesis topic and has always supported me in my academic interests and pursuits.

Finally, my dear friends both in Lund and Estonia who have been irreplaceable during this process (and generally as well of course). Thank you to the people back at home for the countless FaceTimes and keeping me up to date with all the good gossip. And the wonderful friends I have made here, especially Klara, Alex and Anna, I could not be happier that we met, your support and encouragement has really been vital. I'm so glad we all made it through in one piece!

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Introduction

It is March 27th in 2022 and the Dolby theatre in Los Angeles is packed with the Hollywood elite for the annual Academy Awards (Oscars) ceremony. Comedian Chris Rock is on stage preparing to present the award for best documentary feature. After making a joke about the nominees for best actor, he continues his segment by commenting on Will Smith's wife Jada Pinkett Smith's baldness by saying 'Jada. I love you. G.I. Jane 2, can't wait to see it,' referring to a character from the movie *G.I. Jane* played by Demi Moore with a buzz cut (Guardian News, 2022). Pinkett Smith is living with an autoimmune disorder alopecia which causes hair loss and came out publicly with her diagnosis in 2018 (Claretta, 2022). After the joke, Will Smith walked up on stage, slapped Chris Rock in the face, returned to his seat and repeatedly yelled the now famous words 'Keep my wife's name out of your fucking mouth!' (Guardian News, 2022). The evening carried on without further disruptions and Smith won the Oscar for best actor (Khomami, 2022).

The incident quickly went viral, being termed the 'slap heard around the world' (Blasey, Limón and Hubbard, 2022) spreading through international media with the video of the slap receiving over 110 million views on YouTube (Guardian News, 2022) and creating intense discussion on social media. Smith was subsequently banned by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences board from all of its events for 10 years (Horton, 2022). The actor apologised and explained his behaviour many times after the incident by writing a post on his Instagram profile, posting a video on his YouTube profile and in many interviews following the incident (del Barco, 2022; Grady, 2023). Jada Pinkett Smith addressed the incident in her talk show *Red Table Talk* where she expressed hope for Smith and Rock to resolve the incident between them, she also had a long discussion with the show's guests about alopecia and the hardships that people living with it have to endure (Carras, 2022; What's Trending, 2022). Rock did not speak about the incident publicly until his recent comedy special on Netflix where he made several jokes about the slap and expressed the distress he still feels about the incident (Grady, 2023).

Indeed, the incident at the Oscars was an iconic moment of popular culture in 2022 and reverberations of the incident have continued to echo even a year after the slap. Yet still, no palpable resolve to the intense emotions and opinions for the parties involved in the incident nor the audiences who engaged with it has yet to emerge. This begs the question of what happens after such public incidents, how do people move on from such agitating events?

Often, when someone transgresses social norms or hurts us but shows redemption afterwards, there remains a possibility for forgiveness. From the field of psychology, Enright, Freedman and Rique (1998, pp. 46–47) explain how forgiveness refers to the 'willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward [them]'. Importantly, forgiveness does not necessarily require acceptance, rather it is about offering a second chance to reintegrate a person who has transgressed back into society if they show willingness to change (Finley and Johnson, 2019, p. 128).

The main motivation for this study has been to find out what forgiveness looks like in online environments. Interestingly, the topic has been rather understudied which is quite surprising considering that Ambrose et al. (2012, p. 101) stated already in 2012 that 'today, forgiveness has moved out of theological arenas into self-help books, therapy sessions, neurology labs, twelve-step programs, and personal and social aspirations. It has not, however, moved online.' Mostly, studies regarding forgiveness have approached it from a marketing perspective, often using quantitative methods and providing findings for organisations to repair their image after losing the support and trust of their customers (e.g., Sandlin and Gracyalny, 2018; Osterman and Hecmanczuk, 2020; Lee, 2022). The problem is that in these studies, forgiveness is treated as a rather straightforward process without considering the identity positions of the audiences – the perspective of people participating in these debates around transgressions online have been disregarded.

In order for there to be forgiveness, a transgression must happen first, therefore in this study equal attention will be turned to the nature and dynamics of the transgression at the Oscars. In many contemporary societies, hegemonic relations between social groups provide great potential for transgressive behaviour (Hermes and Hill, 2021, p. 6). In the context of media studies, analysing transgressive acts can outline the logics of power in the media and audiences along with helping us understand tensions and relations between different social groups and their relationship to the cultural hegemony (Hermes and Hill, 2021, p. 7). It has been brought out that in studies of transgression, inquiry into the types of transgression being witnessed, its potential impact and the politics at play in the situation are important aspects to turn attention to and will provide insightful analysis into the resulting media practices (Hermes and Hill, 2021, p. 13). With the Oscars case, the discussions around the incident involved many different social groups (for example, based on race, gender, class or people living with alopecia),

therefore analysing the case in-depth could provide useful insight of the social tensions between the groups or their relationship to the cultural hegemony.

In recent years, we have witnessed a rise in cases where someone's transgression becomes a public event, resulting in a mass response of social sanctioning and commentary. Various terms such as 'cancel culture', 'online firestorms', 'culture wars' or 'online shaming' have been used to characterise such viral trends of social sanctioning practices. The focus of the academic debate has largely revolved around criticising cancel culture by either analysing the proportionality of the audiences' condemnation compared to the transgression or the content of the discussion and its productivity in outlining problems (Bouvier and Machin, 2021, p. 8). While a large amount of the academic criticism regarding cancel culture sits on the political right, identifying it as 'identity politics gone mad' or 'cultural marxism for bringing down the Western civilization' (Bouvier and Machin, 2021, p. 308), I want to be clear that I do not identify with this 'intellectual' strand. Instead, this study aims to explore a different approach to public transgressions and responses by unpacking the engagement and participation of audiences who were most affected by the scandal and identify new patterns and dynamics of forgiveness that would fit into contemporary online culture.

This study will focus on women living with alopecia who engaged with and participated in the discussion around the Smith case by conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews. To clarify, engagement and participation are viewed separately, where engagement is a prerequisite for participation and participation is 'an observable action, the fulfilment of engagement' (Dahlgren and Hill, 2023, p. 5). The study will explore both the affective and cognitive modes of engagement (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, pp. 15, 17) of women living with alopecia, how they position their opinion of the incident against the general 'direction' of the debate, their perceptions of the transgressions during the 2022 Oscars incident and their reflections regarding the potentials and dynamics of forgiveness on social media. Their perspective is vital to understand as they were the ones targeted by Rock's joke about hair loss while the attention of the general public was focused on Smith's slap, not the initial joke. As an affected but neglected audience, they have great proximity to the case unlike most of the general public who engaged with the event online, therefore they would be the most likely social group to have the capacity to forgive. By taking an approach grounded in the reflections of women living with alopecia, interviews are conducted with the participants.

The qualitative interview approach employed in this thesis is crucial in distancing itself from the previous studies of forgiveness from quantitative approaches from the field of marketing.

Instead, this thesis treats forgiveness as a complex process which is rooted in the interviewees' identity position and experiences as well as their affective and cognitive modes of engagement and participation with the incident. In other words, in order to understand forgiveness, we first need to critically examine who was affected, how were they affected, why it matters, how they feel about it, etc. Only then can we begin to understand forgiveness in a specific context.

The aim of this study is to recontextualise forgiveness in online environments by providing insight into how women living with alopecia as a vulnerable social group who was affected by the 2022 Oscars scandal reflect on their engagement with and participation in the incident along with potentials for forgiveness. In turn, this will provide insight into how the culture of the discussion regarding transgressions develops and hopefully enables to identify patterns of forgiveness in the debate. By patterns of forgiveness, I mean the rationale that women living with alopecia provide for either granting or seeing potential for granting forgiveness. This case was chosen due to the fact that (1) it is relatively recent, therefore people who engaged and participated in the scandal are likely to remember how and why they participated in the discussion around the scandal, (2) the audiences were able to see the event unfold live, (3) the case taps into several topics, such as race, masculinity, illness, which gives great range for debate for the audiences and outlines the moral ambiguity of the incident.

The necessity for unpacking forgiveness is implicated by the contemporary media context in many societies. As will be further elaborated in the following chapter, Frosh and Pinchevski (2014, p. 595) identify a 'ripeness of time', where instances are often recoverable and witnessable due to technological advancements. This means that in societies with a high degree of mediation people need to be aware of the potential of their transgressions receiving the attention of large online audiences and the potential consequences. At the same time, it is not only about the potential virality of people's transgressions, but also people as audiences engaging with and participating in discussions regarding transgressions. As public transgressions often receive widespread attention, we need to better understand the dynamics and implications of such debates along with potentials for moving on from the scandals.

In order to pursue these aims and objectives, I have posed three research questions which guide this research. The first two questions help to contextualise and understand the engagement of women living with alopecia with the incident and unpack the transgressions at the Oscars, which serve as important context for the final question specifically aimed at the implications for forgiveness.

1. How do women living with alopecia engage with and participate in the 2022 Oscars incident?
2. In what ways do the participants of the study identify and relate to the transgressions of the 2022 Oscars scandal?
3. How do women living with alopecia perceive potentials for forgiveness in online environments?

The thesis offers an overview of important theoretical perspectives including social norms, celebrity culture, the contemporary media context, media audiences and identities. After this, I will introduce the methodological approach employed for this study together with the methods for data collection and analysis. Third, I will introduce the findings of this research which will finally be followed by a concluding chapter offering answers to abovementioned research questions and final reflections.

Literature Review

In this section, I will give an overview of the relevant theoretical concepts regarding the case. First, in order to better understand which social norms were transgressed with the Smith scandal, I will start by offering an overview of norm theory, transgression and carnivalesque. Second, as the case constituted a celebrity scandal, a further look will be taken into contemporary celebrity culture and celebrities as transgressors and theoretical perspectives of forgiveness. Third, to understand the contemporary media context around the case, I will introduce the concept of media events and its further adaptations and expansions. Fourth, a deeper look will be taken into the perspective of audiences involved in the case along with the specific approach to engagement employed in the study. Finally, conceptualisations of identity and performativity will be introduced to further understand the audiences' engagement and involvement in the discussions around the scandal.

Breaking Social Norms – the Transgressive Notions of the Oscars Scandal

As the scandalous nature of the Will Smith slap incident stemmed heavily from the breaking of social norms, a deeper look into norm theory is due. According to Clinard and Meier (1998, p. 10), norms are expectations regarding how people are supposed to behave in certain situations, which regulate social relationships as well as behaviour. They reflect the values of certain cultures and give both meaning and instructions for people in order to engage with the social world (Giddens, 2001, p. 22). In order to ensure that everyone is following social norms, people often engage in practices of norm policing, meaning that when someone has violated a norm, social sanctioning practices ensue (Solove, 2007, p. 85). It has been indicated that people who perceive themselves as having been victimised in their interpersonal relationships are more likely to engage in vigilante activity or norm policing, to use Solove's term, regarding the transgressions of social norms (Chen, Ok and Aquino, 2022). In the context of this case, we can see the online discussions surrounding the Smith incident as norm policing – Smith transgressed a social norm and audiences on social media were expressing their dissatisfaction with his behaviour.

Once a person has transgressed a norm, there are many options for social punishment, such as ridicule, shaming or shunning them from the community. An important distinction needs to be made whether the person is integrated back into society or not, for example in the case of shaming, the format can be either re- or disintegrative depending on if the person is shunned

or included after punishment (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 55). The reinclusion of a person who has transgressed a norm back into society implies that forgiveness should take place. As explained in the introduction, forgiveness refers to the 'willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward [them]' (Enright, Freedman and Rique, 1998, pp. 46–47). However, Ambrose (2012, pp. 99, 102) turns attention to the difficulties of finding forgiveness in the context of today's digital environments as forgetting plays an important part in moving on from previous transgressions and the internet has a 'shared perpetual memory' which makes it hard to forget or forgive even rather minor transgressions. These perspectives from norm theory and forgiveness give necessary context for this study to understand which norms might have been broken with the Will Smith scandal, the factors that might have influenced the audience's reaction and which methods of social punishment were used.

The act of breaking social norms has been termed 'transgression'. Transgression implies a '(conscious) overstepping of moral and legal boundaries, as a challenge to written and unwritten social rules' (Hermes and Hill, 2021, p. 13). Jenks (2003, p. 7) outlines that the urge to transgress social rules and norms are embedded into them. In this sense, transgressions do not deny rules, but rather 'exceed and complete them,' they are a part of rules (Jenks, 2003, p. 7).

Transgression can take place in many shapes and forms, an interesting version of deliberate and even joyous set of transgressions is carnivalesque. In his book 'Rabelais and His World,' Bakhtin (1984) employed the concept of carnival, a period of symbolic role inversion and satire to explain why people accepted an oppressive social order (Hermes and Hill, 2021, p. 5). Stallybrass and White (1986, p. 7) outline that the main importance of Bakhtin's study was the conceptualisation of the 'carnavalesque' into a 'potent, populist, critical inversion of *all* official worlds and hierarchies.' What makes Bakhtin's (1984) carnival so unique is its scale – it is not a show witnessed by an audience. Bakhtin (1984, p. 7) was very clear in that the carnival is an experience involving and felt by everyone – 'it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part.' He sees it as people's second life, founded in laughter and festivity (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 8).

Despite its unruly tendencies, a carnival is a period of *symbolic* role inversion – it happens with the permission of those in power and therefore should not be seen as a rebellious act (Hermes and Hill, 2021, p. 5). Still, questions of power are at the centre of the carnival – the sociocultural

'top' is constantly trying to eliminate the 'bottom', the 'low-Other' (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 5) and carnivalesque is trying to disrupt this sociocultural hegemony. However, in the process, often the weaker groups in society, those who 'don't belong' are, again, often discriminated against, therefore we should remain reserved towards the disruptive intentions of the carnival (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 19).

Relating to the Smith case, the Oscars ceremony is very much representative of the culture of the 'high and powerful' which, according to Stallybrass and White (1986), is trying to eliminate the 'low-Other'. With the slap scandal, we could see a triple representation of this 'cultural low'. First, with the example of Chris Rock's stand-up comedy, where he ridiculed the audience present at the event – reminiscent of the carnival as it was a permissible moment of critique of the social 'top', admittedly, done by a fellow member of the social elite, not by the 'low'. However, this permissible ridicule ended when Will Smith deemed Rock's joke about Jada Pinkett-Smith's lack of hair over the line, which ended in another representation of transgression, however this time not permitted by the cultural 'top' with Smith slapping Rock. Finally, the memes and jokes posted on social media after the incident also serve as a continuation of carnivalesque, the 'low' mocking the 'top', although again, without permission.

When trying to bring carnivalesque into the online context, we can see similarities with what Phillips and Milner (2017, p. 98) have recognised as fetishised laughter – a process where audiences focus on the amusing aspects of the incident while the actual context is blurred, it allows participants to 'focus on the *us* who laugh, not on the *them* who do not' while having little regard for the consequences of this practice. Despite questions of power having less of a focus with fetishised laughter when compared to the carnivalesque, it too is anchored in laughter and is exclusionary in its nature – it tends to reject people who feel uncomfortable or uninterested in participating in such practices (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 99). But where does this tendency for exclusion stem from? Phillips (2015, pp. 32–33) claims that often it stems from the lack of emotional proximity to those who are excluded from the 'us', in fact, the greater the emotional distance from the issues concerned, the louder the laughter of the in-group audience tends to be.

The Double-Edged Sword of Visibility – Celebrities as Transgressors

The Smith scandal revolved around high-profile people committing transgressive acts. In the following, I will be taking a further look into celebrity culture and how audiences engage and

relate to it. There has been a lot of discussion in academia around the definition of celebrities. Penfold-Mounce (2009, p. 1) addresses this debate by outlining various approaches to defining celebrities: celebrities as commercial commodity, objects of consumption or cultural texts. This study will draw on the conceptualisation from Hermes and Kooijman (2016, p. 483) who see celebrities as 'points of reference when taking a position on social issues as well as useful resources in the always ongoing work of identity construction'. The authors outline the important role that celebrities play in shaping the social norms around behaviour and identity performance (Hermes and Kooijman, 2016, p. 495). This conceptualisation helps to understand the expectations that audiences have towards the celebrities and gives context to analyse the transgressions committed at the Oscars.

When it comes to the relationship between a celebrity and their audience, Studlar (2016, p. 67) emphasises that scholars ought to understand it as more than a mere transaction of selling and buying. Rather, it is a site of 'unpredictable and complex responses involved in making meaning of social experience. It is a negotiation of sometimes contradictory, incomplete, or ignored intermedial discourses' (Studlar, 2016, p. 67). The relationship between a celebrity and their audience has been termed as a parasocial relationship. First introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956, p. 215), they conceptualised it as a one-sided, nondialectical, seemingly face-to-face relationship between the audience and the performer, yet it is illusionary in the sense that the celebrities are not included in one's social circle. Hills (2016, pp. 464–465) argues that for a long time, approaches to parasocial relationships were quite reductive, seeing it as a substitution for 'real' social relationships. He emphasises that intimacy is bound up in illusion and all social relationships have imaginary aspects interwoven in them (Hills, 2016, p. 470). In addition, it is important to consider how social media has changed the nature of parasocial relationships – rather than being strictly one-sided relationships, there is a much greater opportunity and space for two-sided interactions to take place and even with one-sided relationships, a greater intimacy or insight into the celebrities' personal life and stances is possible depending on the content they post on their social media profiles (Chen, Pain and Fadnis, 2016, p. 134). In the context of the Oscars incident, it will be interesting to see what role did the parasocial relationship between the actors and audiences play in perceiving transgressions and forgiveness.

It has been indicated that celebrities are co-dependent on media industries, celebrity culture is strong in societies where media industries are strong as these industries hold a great deal of

symbolic power in society (Couldry, 2016, p. 99). For example, the Hollywood film industries have played a major role in shaping the celebrity culture that we know today, i.e. marketing personalities for large audiences, the media industry is strong in the U.S. (Studlar, 2016, p. 68). Couldry highlights the importance of symbolic power in two ways – first, as defined by Thompson (1995, p. 17) 'the capacity to intervene in the course of events, to influence the actions of others, and indeed to create events, by means of the production and transmission of symbolic forms' and second, once it becomes concentrated in certain institutions over time (like the Hollywood film industry), these institutions begin to dominate the social landscape and can ultimately start to 'construct reality' (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 166). Strong celebrity culture emerges through the media and its symbolic power. In the process, celebrities are also accumulating influence and power or celebrity capital which is a process of being represented in the media, resulting in accumulated media visibility (Driessens, 2013, p. 543). However, this visibility is a double-edged sword in the sense that celebrities' actions are more visible, therefore their transgressions are also more visible, thus potentially turning the source of their power (visibility) into their enemy (Driessens, 2013, p. 552).

Here, we arrive at the theme of celebrity scandals. Generally speaking, scandals have been defined rather simply as a 'breach of virtue exposed' that causes public disapproval (Markovits and Silverstein, 1988, p. vii, cited in Mandell and Chen 2016, p. 5). Scandal has a lot to do with social norms and values – 'Only by transgressing against common understandings of proper behaviour can a given action become a scandal. The phenomenon of scandal is thus implicated in periods of social change, because those very norms and values are under attack' (Allen, 2016, p. 31). With the Smith scandal, an important part of the discussion was the larger problems exemplified in the scandal – stigmatising health conditions, racism in Hollywood and masculinity issues. All of this is indicating social change and the contestation of what is considered appropriate in a public setting which played into the scandalous nature of the incident.

Historically, there used to be a stricter distinction between a person's private and public life, scandals were often regarded as a person's personal affair (Mandell and Chen, 2016, pp. 9–10). Nowadays, technology has changed how scandals work, information regarding scandals is available to anyone with an internet connection, but technology is also able to capture transgressions and serve as evidence (Mandell and Chen, 2016, p. 7). Here, again, visibility plays a key role in many contemporary societies brought on by technological transformations,

resulting in scandals becoming a pervasive part of the public domain and everyday life (Thompson, 2000, p. x).

Indeed, visibility is key when it comes to celebrities and scandals, which is why Nayar (2009, p. 68) offers to approach celebrities as spectacles where the celebrity is produced for consumption as an 'abstract desire to achieve, to be recognised, to be wealthy'. He focuses the aspects of aestheticisation, fashion and taste in the making of a celebrity (Nayar, 2009, p. 72), which implies that celebrity spectacle is pursued through curated visibility. However, there remain instances of anti-spectacles where celebrities are shown in an uncurated way, content that was not meant to be seen (Nayar, 2009, pp. 98–99). The Smith incident can also be considered an anti-spectacle in the sense that it was not meant to be seen at the Oscars, it was an unexpected and uncurated portrayal of the celebrities involved, which constituted a scandal. Although it was uncurated, it does not mean that audiences are less eager to consume or engage with such content. In fact, Penfold-Mounce (2009, pp. 6, 21) explains that audiences are often fascinated by such transgressions as it is part of the quest for a second life (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 8) as introduced in the first section.

Once a scandal has happened, usually a response follows from the person who transgressed. Ware and Linkugel (1973, pp. 273–274) see it as a specific form of public address, a genre of public speech in response to instances where a person's character, their worth as a human being is in question. When looking at the forgiveness of celebrities who have transgressed, it has been found that forgiveness depends on four types of drivers: (1) consumer-related, such as the parasocial relationship between the celebrity and the audience, the audience's self-interest and their value-system; (2) celebrity-related, such as the celebrity's effort to make amends and the influence of their private-public persona; (3) context-related like the severity of the transgression or unexpected circumstances and (4) time-related, meaning how much time is needed for the audience to forgive (Finsterwalder, Yee and Tombs, 2017, pp. 1211–1219). However, the abovementioned study approached audiences as consumers with little regard to the role that their identity plays in the process, viewed celebrity transgressions as a general phenomenon instead of tending to the individualities of each case and did not account for how the larger context of discussions surrounding these public transgressions can affect opportunities to grant forgiveness.

Scholars have noted a shift in the expectations for parasocial relationships and how celebrity scandals should be resolved. Nunn and Biressi (2010, p. 49; Kanai, 2020, pp. 501–502) outline

that parasocial relationships are dominated with an 'ideology of intimacy' where in order to establish an 'authentic' relationship with an audience, celebrities must give reflexive, confessional and open insight into their personal lives. Often, this confessional style has become a way for celebrities to repair their public persona after a scandal (Nunn and Biressi, 2010, pp. 50, 53). However, the authors highlight that reputation management is not as simple as just sharing one's emotions with their followers because there remain different social biases and structures which influence the expectations we have for people based on race, gender, sexuality, class, etc (Kanai, 2020, p. 502). Additionally, showing vulnerability might prove difficult for celebrities as they are used to being in positions of power (Finley and Johnson, 2019, pp. 123–124). It remains unclear if Will Smith or Chris Rock has been forgiven by those who witnessed the event, but attempts were certainly made to repair their image after the incident, therefore this framework serves as important context for delving into the dynamics of celebrity transgressions and their attempts to resolve the situation.

The Oscars in the Context of New Attention Communities

With the Smith slap case, it is important to pay attention to the media context under which the incident happened. Given that the Oscars is a popular annual televised event, it constitutes what Dayan and Katz (1994) term as a 'media event'. The authors see media events as telecasts that interrupt people's daily routines by being perceived as an invitation or even command to join in as a holiday experience (Dayan and Katz, 1994, p. 1,5). These events happen live, there remains an element of unpredictability, they happen outside studios, they are preplanned, advertised and engage very large audiences, often characterized by a 'norm of viewing,' meaning that people feel a duty to view the event (Dayan and Katz, 1994, pp. 7–9). Media events also play an important role in contributing to collective memory based on what happens during these events (Dayan and Katz, 1994, p. 77). The authors state that media events require people to leave behind their disagreements and feuds to 'join in the effusive, contagious mood of the moment' (Dayan and Katz, 1994, p. 80). Indeed, the mood appeared to be contagious with the Oscars scandal as well as the transgressive impulses of the actors in the incident spread into social media with intense arguments and fetishised laughter (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 98) over the event.

Nowadays, social media plays an important role in media events, which was not the case at the time when media events were conceptualised. Here, Frosh and Pinchevski (2018) offer new approaches to bring media events into the contemporary context by focusing on the effect that

networked and mobile technologies have had on both media and events. First, they emphasise 'eventfulness' which focuses how the ways for obtaining an event status have expanded dramatically, given how we have the option to capture different instances in our everyday lives in various forms (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018, p. 137). We have moved from the shared, collective experience of a media event to eventfulness, characterised by a 'networked immanent divergence' (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018, p. 137). Second, the authors introduce 'eventness' which refers to the distributed configurations of media events, influenced by dynamic networks of technologies, representations and people (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018, p. 137). As we could see with the Smith slap scandal, the 'centre' of media events has become 'highly dynamic, fluctuating with the spreading and dissemination of feeds, streams, posts, tweets, images, and so on, which as such constitute the event both as a duration and as an aggregation' (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018, p. 137). A key distinction from Dayan and Katz' conceptualisation of media events being here that their makings have adopted a bottom-up approach, rather than the top-down dynamic of traditional broadcasting as initially introduced (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018, p. 137).

Another key aspect to consider with the Smith slap scandal is that the audiences were able to 'objectively' witness the transgression from the televised event and the many videos released after the incident. Here, Frosh and Pinchevski (2014) introduce the concepts of media witnessing and the ripeness of time. By media witnessing, they mean three domains of practices: how the changes in media technology have made the reproduction of captured instances reproducible; the emergence of new 'communities of attention' who connect through the media; and how audiences acknowledge, are aware and vulnerable to the risk of their representations being brought in front of large audiences (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2014, p. 594). In the Smith case, the slap incident was instantly recoverable and, indeed, brought in front of large audiences offering their commentary on the event. The phenomenon of media witnessing is very tied to the 'ripeness of time' where every instant is unpredictable and often possibly recoverable, brought on by the extensive mediation of everyday life (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2014, p. 595). This ripeness is again related to changes in media technology, in the result of which people are constantly aware and waiting for 'noteworthy – testifiable – events' (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2014, p. 595). This new form of witnessing is 'radically inclusive' as recoverable instances made public are available to any person with access to necessary technology, bringing the authors to consider it as 'world witnessing' (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2014, p. 599). Considering these changes in technology and, in turn, society, it appears that the

stakes are much higher when a transgression happens during a media event. Transgressions are easily recoverable and witnessable for large audiences who at the same time are waiting for new substantial events to engage with. At the same time, if world witnessing is radically inclusive and results in practices reminiscent of carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984) and fetishised laughter (Phillips and Milner, 2017), then once again there remains a potential for minority audiences to be disregarded or excluded in the discussions around the case.

Diffused Audiences Engaging through Dislike

Audiences are a key component of this study – they witnessed the scandal, observed the discussion around it and in some cases, participated in the discussion. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) emphasise the connection between audiences and performativity. Audiences are people witnessing a certain kind of performance, while performance is an activity where 'the person performing accentuates [their] behaviour under the scrutiny of others' (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p. 40). There are different types of audiences, most relevant of which in the context of this study is the diffused audience, which has developed through changes related to technology, society and culture (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, pp. 68–69).

Diffused audiences have emerged due to several factors: the pervasiveness of media in people's lives and the increased consumption or use of it, the notion of a performative society where most of people's actions can be seen as a performance and finally, the interaction of spectacle and narcissism (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p. 77). The performativity of diffused audiences is both local (in action) and global (in imagination) and has diffused the line between public and private (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p. 76). The authors claim that we have entered into an environment where the whole world is considered a spectacle, the 'spectacular gaze' does not involve only following events, but is rather pervasive in everyday life (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p. 81). Drawing a parallel of diffused audiences with eventfulness, eventness and the ripeness of time introduced earlier, we can see a larger tendency – as the opportunities for everyday instances to constitute an event witnessed by great audiences have increased drastically, so too are the audiences constantly vigilant and anticipating these events. This, in turn, has had an influence on people's behaviour, constituting a style of living characterised by observability and performativity.

Next, when analysing how audiences observe a scandal or participate in the discussion related to it, attention should be turned to what makes people engaged (or disengaged) with media

content as engagement can be considered a prerequisite for participation (Dahlgren and Hill, 2023, p. 5). Here, I will use Dahlgren and Hill's (2023) matrix of five parameters for analysing engagement: contexts, motivations, modalities, intensities and consequences. The authors call for approaching engagement in a novel way – instead of seeing it from the perspective of consumption, economic value or merely giving attention to something, they argue that engagement is a 'energizing internal force; rooted in affect and identity,' which can be seen as a nexus of relations both on an individual as well as on a collective level (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p. 2). The relationship between a person and the media they consume enables them to participate in politics as well as recognise different social, cultural and economic values of media in their lives (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p. 2). Engagement can also provide valuable insight into power – from the perspective that media organisations hold over their audiences or how audiences negotiate this by engaging or disengaging with content, but also questions of power related to the media content itself, how dominant discourses relate to social inequalities and problems (Dahlgren and Hill, 2023, p. 7).

When trying to understand how audiences engage with media content, attention should be turned to both emotionality and affect, where the former refers to a 'state' that the audience is in and the latter relating to how the person got to that state, a collective version of emotion which facilitates both engagement and participation (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p. 6, 2023, p. 15). However, the authors emphasise that engagement also has a cognitive aspect important to analyse that has to do with analysis and argumentation (Dahlgren and Hill, 2023, p. 17). Importantly, engagement should be seen in a larger context as an experience, meaning that the question is not only about how people engage with content in a specific moment, but their experiences both before and after encountering and engaging with a piece of media that offers valuable insight into the perspectives of audiences (Corner, 2017, p. 5). In the context of this case, I am interested in how people living with alopecia engaged with the case, the previous experiences that affected their engagement and cognitive-affective process of making sense of the incident, perceiving and evaluating the transgression along with potentials for forgiveness.

However, not all engagement is positive in the sense that audiences are engaging with content that they like – people can also engage with content through dislike. Dislike is a critical form of engagement, it gives attention to particular grievances relating to the content, representation and ethics and is a vital source for analysis and reflection for the audiences (Gray, 2021, pp. 4, 7). This sort of engagement is particularly relevant for marginalised audiences as they likely

come across content that they do not agree or identify with more often, but since it is targeted towards the dominant groups of society they have little opportunity to avoid it (Gray, 2021, p. 45). Engagement is also relevant regarding the audiences' identities, it serves as a way to 'draw lines between an us and a them, and I and a you' (Gray, 2021, p. 174). Given the Smith case, engagement through dislike is highly likely given that the audience at focus is women living with alopecia who saw representation on mainstream media with Jada Pinkett-Smith (living with alopecia), yet they found their community as the bottom of a joke made by Chris Rock.

Stigmatised Identities and Performing the Online Self

Finally, in order to understand how women living with alopecia participated in the discussions around the incident, theoretical perspectives regarding identity, performativity and stigmatisation are crucial to consider. Identity performance is a socially situated practice, as one is trying to maintain norms of intelligibility or self-expression (Butler, 1990, p. 17). Important for understanding the sociality of identity performance is the differentiation between front-stage and back-stage behaviour, referring to how people's behaviour differs in public and private contexts, respectively (Goffman, 1959). A 'front-stage performance' denotes all activities of a person which occur while being watched by a particular set of observers (Goffman, 1959, p. 22). There are two key aspects to be aware of with this approach. First, identity performance is a continuous practice, not an action of a particular instance, and it is guided by social norms which are reproduced through subverting to them (Butler, 1993, pp. xii, xxi). Indeed, when a person is engaging in front-stage self-presentation, they usually will want to incorporate and affirm the widely accepted social norms and values of society to give a good impression (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). Second, while there remains a differentiation between a person's front and back-stage performance, we should not be misled by assuming that there is a distinct 'inner' and 'outer' identity, but rather that 'the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed' (Butler, 1990, pp. 134, 142). Importantly, the practice of identity construction is influenced by social dynamics of power, i.e. institutional discourses, formations and practices and is defined through 'otherness' and exclusion to reach a realisation of what it is (Hall, 1996, p. 4; Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 65).

Society sets the boundaries for what is considered to be ordinary or natural and when we encounter someone who we perceive as outside of these norms, they are often reduced to a 'tainted and discounted' person (Goffman, 1963, pp. 2–3). Such attributions to someone's identity are considered stigmatisation which often results in various forms of discrimination

(Goffman, 1963, pp. 3, 5). For example, people living with different medical conditions can experience alienation and isolation (Lupton, 2012). A person's medical condition is intimately tied to their identity or sense of self and being in the presence of people who fall into the boundaries of 'ordinary society' can induce difficult emotions such as self-hate, self-derogation and cause them to want to hide the characteristics that enable their stigmatisation (Goffman, 1963, pp. 7, 102; Lupton, 2012, p. 87). This tendency of self-neglect has been termed as a 'spoiled identity', referring to the difficult process of identity work for accepting their new state (Goffman, 1963; Lupton, 2012, p. 88). Certainly, such a visible medical condition as alopecia can offer many hardships related to self-perception as well as social interactions for people living with it.

Moving on to identity performance in the context of social media, Cover (2016, p. 3) extends Butler's theory of identity and performativity into the online sphere by arguing that just as we perform our identities 'offline,' a similar mechanism works online – it should not be seen separately from other identity performances. In fact, in the context of social media, questions of identity have become more nuanced and complex, certainly not a type of 'fictional' play in a vague environment that is separate from our 'physical world' as it initially was seen (Cover, 2016, p. 77; Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 91). The situation is rather opposite as a person's online presence has become a representation of their physical selves (Cover, 2016, p. 78). The architecture of social media platforms directs users to consider questions like 'who am I; what matters to me; and, how do I want others to perceive me' (Cunningham, 2013, p. 2). At the same time, the platforms constrain the way we can perform our identity and over time the performativity of an online identity may begin to feel like 'identity itself' (Turkle, 2011, pp. 12–13).

When thinking about identity performance on social media, it is important to understand how people use different media to work on their identity. Foucault (1988, p. 18) introduces the concept of 'technologies of the self' which he describes as permitting 'individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'. His claim is that people constantly produce new self-understandings which is a political ordeal – in order to understand how one sees themselves, we need to analyse both people's micro-relations and the greater forces of power (Esteban-Guitart, 2014). Friesen (2017) offers an insightful way how

technologies of the self relate to social media. He suggests that how platforms ask for information about their users and invite them to post content on their profile's mediates a person's relationship to themselves (Friesen, 2017). Especially the aspect of posting on your profile, or 'original broadcast posts' as he calls it, offers a confessional engagement for users, a mediated 'interpellative self-discourse' meaning that a person's sense of self, the relationship of the self to itself can be iterated and shaped *via* social media platforms (Friesen, 2017). In the context of this study, I am interested in the dynamics between the participants' sense of self and participating in the online discussion around the incident.

Similarly to how technologies of the self were conceptualised in the context of social media, Cover (2016, p. 3) sees different online interactivities as an 'array of activities requiring the users to “work” to perform a coherent, intelligible selfhood extending across all these online activities in addition to offline behaviors'. Specifically, he outlines how online identity performance is articulated in (at least) two ways: first, working on one's profile by for example promoting one's preferences of taste, posting on one's profile and providing information about yourself such as age, gender, relationship status, etc; and secondly, by curating one's network of friends online (Cover, 2016, pp. 3–4). Forming an identity online happens in accordance with different cultural discourses and practices and by repeatedly following them start to feel as common sense (Cover, 2016, p. 3).

However, given the fact that social media users are able to see their friends' activities on many sites gives them the opportunity to spot moments of identity incoherence where the audience's notion of who someone's identity is conflicted by some information that a person has made public (Cover, 2016, p. 22). In an 'offline' context, one might ask their friend to clarify this incoherence, but in the context of social media, it is important to consider that oftentimes this otherwise private conversation unfolds (semi-)publicly if, for example, a person is asked to elaborate on their Facebook wall, Instagram comments or Twitter feed (Cover, 2016, p. 23).

Cover (2016, pp. 59–60) argues that media serve as an important source for establishing frameworks for normativity which affect the extent to which performing one's identity is possible, considering the range of signifiers available to express a certain identity. The interactivity of a social media platform changes identity performance through discourse as people are able to participate in the creation of normative texts, 'identity is produced at the same time as one helps to 'write' that identity' (Cover, 2016, p. 98). Considering how social media has complicated identity performance, a deeper look into how people navigate their

online identities while participating in public discussions could provide many interesting insights.

Summary

This study will employ theoretical perspectives from norm theory and transgression, contextualised in celebrity scandals and vigilant attention communities whose engagement with the incident will be analysed with regard to the role of their identities. The authors mentioned in this chapter provide a rich basis for understanding shifts in the contemporary media landscape in many societies which have all played a part in the development of the current culture of (celebrity) transgressions. Yet, there has been little academic focus on the outcomes of public transgressions and potentials for forgiveness, rather it has been treated as a matter of marketing or quantitative inquiry (e.g., Sandlin and Gracyalny, 2018; Osterman and Hecmanczuk, 2020; Lee, 2022), not of interpersonal or parasocial relationships and with little regard to the audiences who are affected by issues brought out with such scandals. In order to fill this gap in research, this study will investigate the current culture of transgressions, public responses and potentials for forgiveness through the case study of engagement and participation of women living with alopecia with the 2022 Oscars scandal.

Methodology and Method

In the following section, I will take you through the methodological standpoints along with the methods of data collection and analysis used for this research. As this study is anchored in Flyvbjerg's (2001) approach of phronesis and Harding's (2008) standpoint theory, the logic of these approaches will be introduced first. This will be followed by an overview of the sampling rationale and an introduction of methods for data collection and analysis. Throughout the chapter, I will offer reflections on the ethical considerations of this study.

Phronetic Research and Standpoint Theory

This study follows the principles of Flyvbjerg's (2001, p. 3) phronetic research, whereby the main aim of social science is to contribute to a 'reflexive analysis and discussion of values and interests'. This research is essentially a case study, focusing on a specific audience's perception of a specific case – the Oscars scandal. Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 71) emphasises the importance and value of the case study in its potential to provide context-dependent knowledge of a particular issue. But as indicated, in order for the case study to be useful, research must pay a great deal of attention to context (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 39, 42). Often, it is not useful to research a typical example, but rather an extreme case to provide the most information about a particular issue (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 77–78). The Smith case is atypical in its complexity, involving discussions around many competing societal issues (e.g., norms of comedy, violence, masculinity, racism, sexism, stigmatising illnesses, etc) and with the population in focus with audiences living with alopecia, thus offering a unique perspective compared to the general population.

As this study will focus on the perspective of women living with alopecia, methodological perspectives from standpoint theory will be adopted. Harding (2008, p. 225) argues that research using the standpoint approach can identify, explain and transform power relations so that those having been oppressed by other social groups will benefit. Research done according to this methodology will focus less on conceptual frameworks of dominant institutions, but rather start off from the oppressed social group's reality in a certain context and identifying power relations (Harding, 2008, p. 226). In the context of this study, forgiveness will not be approached from the perspective of quantitative inquiry or marketing studies where focus lies on the impact of the transgressor on a company, as per several previous studies (e.g., Sandlin and Gracyalny, 2018; Osterman and Hecmanczuk, 2020; Lee, 2022). Instead, the research will centre the perspectives of interviewees. Using standpoint theory in this study will help to

analyse how inequalities or discrimination can play into the context of online discussions and perceiving transgressions and most importantly, give as much voice as possible to the participants' views.

As a male European researcher not living with alopecia, a key emphasis in making this study viable is on empathy and reflexivity. In doing research about social groups whose identities are different from that of the researcher's, Fay (1996, pp. 12–13) outlines that if we were to adopt the line of thinking that 'you have to be one to know one,' every group would have to be their own social scientist. After all, knowing something does not consist of the experience itself but rather grasping the sense of that experience (Fay, 1996, pp. 27–28). Instead, reflexivity is a crucial aspect of making qualitative research work. It entails a critical reflection of one's role as a researcher and helps to understand how their interpretations of gathered information are influenced by historical context, personal experiences, language, race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc (Byrne, 2012, p. 213; Brennen, 2017, p. 22). Therefore, in conducting this research, I will remain critical of my own position throughout the research while centring the perspectives of the participants.

Sampling and Recruitment

Before I decided that interviewing women living with alopecia is the best approach for this project, I weighed multiple other options. First, I considered analysing content on social media around the Oscars incident, but after familiarising myself with examples of the data, I quickly realised that it says little about forgiveness and more about cultures of discussion around celebrity scandals without the opportunity to get insight into people's cognitive and affective processes behind the content. Instead, qualitative interviews seemed like the most appropriate method for the aims of this study. I considered different demographics for interviewing by outlining the potential demographics who might have been affected by the incident as they have the potential to offer the best reflections around forgiveness along with their engagement and participation in the debate of the incident. I ended up choosing between Black women and women living with alopecia, but with some help finally realised that women living with alopecia were targeted the most with the incident and saw after looking around on some online forums that they seemed to have an intense engagement with the incident, although their voice seemed absent from the larger debate.

The demographic this research is focused on is women living with alopecia who engaged with the Oscars scandal. The criteria for the participants were that (1) they must be living with

alopecia and (2) they must have engaged with the Smith scandal. The study employs purposive snowball and volunteer sampling, which allows to predefine the demographic under research before recruitment (Ørmen, 2021, p. 260). Participants were recruited with a call for respondents in several alopecia related social media groups as well as direct messaging people with alopecia online, further recruitment was conducted with referrals from participants (Seale, 2012, p. 145; Ørmen, 2021, p. 260). Such an approach is particularly useful for studies with a more exploratory nature or for studying groups that might be hard to reach, which was an important consideration as people living with alopecia might feel reluctant to talk about their condition (Seale, 2012, p. 144; Ørmen, 2021, p. 260).

I started with one informant who gave me further referrals to potential interviewees. However, as it turned out finding people who would be willing to talk was harder than I anticipated. I then proceeded to contact people advocating for alopecia on Instagram and posted on several Facebook and Reddit groups dedicated to alopecia awareness and support. Some participants were able to provide me with further recommendations for interviewees but often there was a problem that the participants did not know any other people with alopecia personally. In addition, although initially I did not plan on using gender as a criterion for the sampling, it appeared quite quickly during recruitment and talking to the participants that only women were responding to my recruitment announcements. They explained that online alopecia communities are often a female-dominated space as women's baldness is much less accepted in society than compared to men (elaboration about this aspect is in the analysis chapter). Therefore, I changed my sampling to focus specifically on women living with alopecia and who engaged Oscars scandal. Altogether I managed to recruit 13 participants for my study, a summarising table of the participants is included in Table 1.

One aspect to note here is that the age range of the sample is very wide (youngest participant was 24, oldest 64). It has been argued that generational inquiries in media research are often preferable as it helps to untangle different social structures for acting in the world which can differ between generations (Bolin, 2017, p. 4). However, as this study concerns a minority group in society who turned out to be rather difficult to recruit, I argue that approaching this study from a generational perspective was not viable in the time span for this project. Rather, it is a bonus by offering valuable insight into how women living with alopecia across different ages perceived the scandal and the discussion around it. Additionally, this study is not focused on a specific nationality as the incident made headlines around the world. The countries represented in the study are all Western (specifically North America and Europe) with the

majority of the participants from the United States (see Table 1), which might be explained by the fact that the coverage around the incident was more intense in the United States. In the findings of the study, I will not be introducing generational or national tendencies of the sample as the range for both is rather wide and does not give sufficient grounds for such specifications. Before the interviews, I tried to map out the potential risks for both the interviewees and myself along with measures for mitigation to ensure that the data collection process would go as smoothly as possible (Appendix 1). Throughout the interviews, I felt very conscious of my position as a male researcher not living with alopecia and at times it seemed that my participants felt that too. To facilitate an honest and open environment in the interviews, I began most interviews with general remarks and going through the purposes and nature of this study. The participants responded to that very well and were eager to talk about the topic. Some were curious to find out where my interest stemmed from and after I explained my position, they seemed very appreciative that this topic has received academic attention. Overall, I did not encounter any uncomfortable situations during the interviews and as far as I was able to comprehend, neither did my participants.

Table 1. Demographic information about participants

No	Pseudonym	Nationality	Age	Interview duration (min)
1	Sarah	American	64	84
2	Megan	American	52	64
3	Miranda	American	38	91
4	Charlotte	Canadian	34	66
5	Emma	Luxembourgish	24	60
6	Alice	Canadian	28	52
7	Florence	American	29	83
8	Johanna	Finnish	32	61
9	Mary	American	24	59
10	Eevi	Finnish	56	72
11	Hannele	Finnish	56	41
12	Anna	American	34	61
13	Julie	American	40	60
			Average: 39	Average 65

Data Collection and Analysis

This research uses qualitative semi-structured interviews for empirical data collection as that enables to get detailed information about participants' perceptions, views and thoughts about the incident who have often been neglected or suppressed in the past (Byrne, 2012, p. 209). The interview guide drew inspiration from Dahlgren and Hill's (2023) parameters of

engagement by focusing on contexts, how and when the participants followed the incident, their motivations for following the incident, the emotions they felt and their affective state, their cognitive reasoning in making sense of the incident and the consequences of the engagement for the interviewees personally as well as the community of people living with alopecia. Additionally, there were specifying questions regarding the morals and implications of the Oscars event and the perceived options for forgiveness. Thus, the interview guide was divided into four themes: context of the scandal, (social) media and engagement, morals and forgiveness and finally, identity and community.

I conducted a pilot interview after which I revised the interview guide (Appendix 3) and proceeded to conduct 13 interviews over Zoom as the geographic location of the interviewees made in-person interviews unfeasible. Although Zoom interviews have their drawbacks, such as difficulties in establishing and maintaining a trusting, caring environment to share personal information and thoughts and missing cues based on non-verbal communication (Byrne, 2012, p. 218; Brennen, 2017, p. 30), it has been proven to be a useful method for studying marginalised groups on sensitive topics (Drabble *et al.*, 2016, p. 130). Especially after the COVID-19 epidemic, Zoom has become a familiar environment for many people who had to either work or study during the pandemic and I believe that for talking about delicate issues such as health, not sharing a physical space with the interviewer might make it easier to talk about personal issues and reflections. The average duration of the interviews was 65 minutes, further information about the interviews is included in Table 1.

Protecting participants is of vital importance in qualitative research (Byrne, 2012, p. 214). While obtaining consent, the researcher has to be completely open about the intentions of their study and the motives for research, at no point can participants feel coerced or pressured into participating (Brennen, 2017, p. 16). Therefore, anonymity was granted to all participants, instead I will use pseudonyms, and informed consent (both verbal and written) was asked before the interviews. The consent form is included in Appendix 2. In order to ensure the anonymity of the participants as much as possible, names of the participants will not be used in the study, potential identifying information that came up during the interviews was redacted and recordings of the interviews were stored safely on a physical device without using a cloud service.

With qualitative interviewing, several factors can affect the nature and content of the interview – the interviewer's identity and who they are talking with, the environment in which the interview happens and the format of the interview (Byrne, 2012, p. 208). As mentioned in the

previous section, due to the differences in my own identity in contrast to my participants, it was key to maintain reflexivity and be sensitive to situations where my presence might have influenced my participants. I also tried to maintain sensitivity when talking about personal issues, for example, when asking about their personal experience with Alopecia, I mentioned that I am aware that it can be a difficult topic to talk about and they only have to share if they feel they are up for it.

Surprisingly, my participants were all willing to share their rather emotionally painful experiences regarding their condition. Only one participant dropped out of the study before the interview because they said they feel it is too difficult for them to talk about it because they still feel emotionally 'raw' from the experience. Upon reflection, I think that people that are willing to participate in such a study are likely already on better terms with their condition and people who are still processing their situation will likely refrain from answering to my calls for participants. This would also explain the low response rate of my invitations.

Throughout the process, I kept memos about the interview during the process and after it. However, during the interviews I refrained from taking many notes because I wanted to listen and be present for the interviewee as much as possible. After the interviews, I transcribed all of the data manually, wrote short summaries of all the interviews to have a clear overview of the main findings and took further notes about the data in my journal. An example of a transcript is included in Appendix 4.

The data analysis employed thematic textual analysis with an abductive approach. Abduction involves an iterative approach to analysis in order to recontextualise and situate pre-existing theoretical knowledge according to implications found from empirical data (Bazeley, 2013, p. 336). I deemed this approach most appropriate as one of the main aims of this thesis is to recontextualise forgiveness in a digital context and the process of abduction enabled modifying existing theoretical frameworks (Bazeley, 2013, p. 336). The process often starts off with a general question (Bazeley, 2013, p. 28), which in this case was 'What does forgiveness look like in online environments?'. I preferred the abductive approach as it involves deeply and repeatedly immersing yourself as a researcher into the empirical material which is important in order to give as much regard as possible to what the interviewees said as part of the standpoint theory mentality and especially because my own identity is very different to that of my participants, therefore my pre-existing notions are likely not able to grasp issues like my participants did.

In the analysis, I adopted a 'zigzag' approach where data analysis begins before all data has been collected which enables to fill gaps that are found during previous interviews (Rivas, 2018, p. 369). In the context of this study, the process involved listening to interview recordings, taking notes, coding and conducting following interviews where I modified some of the questions or added new ones to fill gaps identified during the initial steps of the analysis. The data was analysed with open codes, based on which categories, and finally, themes were formed, resulting in an interpretive understanding of the interview material (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87; Rivas, 2018, pp. 887–889). The whole process was recursive in that involved a lot of refining, reorganising, rethinking the codes (Bazeley, 2013, p. 126). I conducted the open coding process in NVivo as it enables to assign several codes to one passage and reorganise and regroup the data more quickly than with manual methods (Bazeley, 2013, p. 139). During the open coding, I initially used line-by-line in-vivo coding to 'break open the data' (Bazeley, 2013, p. 162), which was followed by another round of descriptive coding in order to give as much voice to the participants as possible but to be able to move on to a more conceptual level of analysis (Bazeley, 2013, p. 166). After reaching code saturation, where most of what my participants were saying was already recorded in my existing codes, I moved on to a two-step process where I only used open coding, followed by analytical coding. The analytical coding process was manual – I printed out all of my descriptive codes, started grouping them and finding patterns based on which I formed categories and themes. The code book along with snapshots of the process are included in Appendix 5. Throughout the coding process, I kept a journal regarding my decisions about the data as well as the thoughts for analysis that already emerged. At the end of the interview analysis process, four dominant themes emerged which served as the base structure for the following analysis section: identity, engagement and participation, transgression and forgiveness.

Summary

To sum up, this thesis is positioned away from quantitative approaches from the field of marketing that have studied forgiveness so far with carefully constructing the research design. First, in order to ground the conceptualisation of forgiveness in the reflections of people who were deeply affected by and engaged with the Oscars incident, qualitative semi-structured interviews with women living with alopecia were conducted. Second, in order to give as much voice to the participants as possible and provide a different conceptualisation of forgiveness, a thematic qualitative textual analysis of the interviews was conducted with an abductive approach. Ultimately, this approach helps to get to the heart of forgiveness and the experiences

of women living with alopecia by allowing the participants to reflect on their engagement, perceptions and experiences around the incident and deeply immerse the researcher in the retrieved data.

Analysis

A major aspect that emerged through conducting this study is that forgiveness is a rather elusive phenomenon. Especially considering the qualitative interview approach employed for this research, forgiveness cannot be treated as a quantifiable or measurable object of study where one could offer straightforward explanations of action and consequence. Based on the reflections of women living with alopecia, it appeared that forgiveness is a complex process, deeply rooted in the identity experiences of those who forgive as well as those who transgressed. At the same time, it is a matter of affect, emotion, reasoning and circumstance. All of these aspects play into the patterns of forgiveness that emerge throughout this chapter.

Therefore, the analysis section of this study is divided into four major parts. First, I will give an overview of the participants' identity and their experiences of living with alopecia. This will serve as important context for understanding their opinions and engagement with the scandal as well as their reflections regarding forgiveness. The second section will focus on how the interviewees engaged with and participated in the scandal which helps to understand the significance of the incident for them as well as their emotional state during the event. Third, attention will be turned to how the participants perceived the incident, the discussion around it and the multiple transgressions that occurred, which again are crucial factors in understanding the cognitive reasons behind the participants' capacities to forgive. It is only after the previous sections that we can finally delve into the specific dynamics and perceptions around forgiveness along with how it should be approached under the circumstances of this case.

Spoiled Identities

First, the identity position and experiences of women living with alopecia serves as particularly crucial context for understanding the interviewees' perceptions regarding the transgressivity of the incident, which in turn is connected to their capacities for forgiveness. In this regard, an important implication that echoed throughout the interviews was the notion of spoiled identities (Goffman, 1963; Lupton, 2012, p. 88). Participants felt that women living with hair loss do not fit into current social standards, which enforces the feelings of self-resentment. This brings with it a long journey to self-acceptance and finding spaces where their identities would be accepted. The following section is therefore divided into two parts: how the participants feel in today's society, mainly exemplified by social exclusion and second, how they work on their identity to reach self-acceptance.

Fitting in the Mould of Normal Society

In general, interviewees were open to talk about their personal experiences despite their reflections being mostly negative – the feeling of not belonging, self-resentment and hardships of living with the condition. An overwhelming tendency during the interviews was talking about social exclusion that women living with alopecia experience. They explained how the social standards in today's society are particularly high and unrealistic – if you do not fit the mould, you are going to have a hard time. This resonates with the perspective that identity performance is influenced by larger discourses and institutional forces (Hall, 1996, p. 4), the hardships that people who do not fit into the social discourses have to face, especially with the example of stigmatisation (Goffman, 1963). As Emma, a 24-year-old student from Luxembourg explained:

As long as you're not in the mould of 'normal society', you will have to face differences, you will have to face discrimination, jokes, weird looks and that for some people is empowering eventually, [for] some people it's just a reason to be angry /-/ or sad all the time.

From Emma's remark, we can sense the hardships of identity work for those who are outcast of the social boundaries of the 'ordinary' – having a constant reminder of being the 'other' in society, being reminded of who they are not (a part of 'normal society') and having that attached to their identity. Social standards are particularly difficult for women regarding appearance, as the interviewees explained that femininity is very tied to women's hair. Importantly, they described how men's hair loss is more accepted in society, some even go bald by choice because that does not affect their masculinity. Therefore, men are often unable to relate to the hardships of living with the condition for women, which is also reflected with the example of the Oscars incident – a male comedian making fun of a bald woman's appearance. Florence, a 29-year-old artist from the U.S. explained:

...it's like for you to lose your hair, I feel like it takes a big blow to your femininity and then it just sinks you into this depression, it's falling out every day, you gotta look at it, you gotta face it, you don't wanna look at yourself.

For many, social exclusion often resulted in being discriminated against in various forms, mostly participants mentioned experiencing sexism, bullying and people assuming they have cancer. Often, the discrimination came from friends or family who affirm that baldness is something that should be hidden. As Sarah described: "I've just seen too many young bald women just devastated and their families and environments encouraging that they should be devastated."

In general, all of the previous tendencies are closely tied to the feeling that many of the participants had – that alopecia and specifically women's hair loss is a social taboo. People do not want to see it, when they see it, they get uncomfortable and do not know how to react or talk about it and in general, there is very little representation of women with hair loss in popular culture. All of this amounts to a feeling of loneliness or isolation that some of the respondents felt as also outlined by Lupton (2012, pp. 85, 88) who described a similar tendency of alienation and isolation that people living with illnesses experience. Emma explained the problem as follows:

especially for teenagers or children who grew up with it and feel very alienated because they never see people like themselves on the news, in the media, on TV or whatever except when it's somebody with cancer with all the impact that this has on self-worth. Or movies, the only bald or hairless people are Voldemort and other bad guys. So that's another subject that makes you feel like okay, I don't look good, I don't look healthy...

What has been echoing through this section is the notion of transgressive identities for both people living with the condition as well as the people around them. As could be seen from the last quote, popular culture perpetuates the transgressivity of hair loss, which complicates the journey for self-acceptance.

Identity work

The second important aspect regarding the participants' identity is identity work – that is, the process of modifying one's personality to fit into society and accepting an altered state of existing with the illness (Goffman, 1963; Lupton, 2012, p. 88). In this regard, having alopecia and living with it was often referred to as a journey, which could generally be separated into three phases: negotiation and (self-)resentment, support and coping with the disease and finally, self-acceptance. Most participants were at a stage in having the disease where they have started to cope with and even accept their condition, but on a critical note, people who are very insecure about their condition would likely not be willing to participate in such a study. Importantly, this process of self-acceptance is not a linear one and despite the participants being on better terms with their identity, most of them still experience hardships with their condition.

Starting from negotiation and (self-)resentment, many interviewees explained how getting alopecia has negatively affected their self-image and how accepting it is a difficult process. Especially in the beginning, many felt ashamed of their hair loss and used to or still hide their baldness in public settings. This falls in line with the notion of spoiled identities (Goffman, 1963; Lupton, 2012, p. 88) and Goffman's (1963, pp. 7, 102) description of hiding characteristics that induce stigmatisation. Anna reflected on her experience:

So you have to cover it up in any way you can until it grows back. You look at it all the time. It's very emotional, it's very stressful. It's the worst, one of the worst feelings ever.

However, many of the respondents have come to better terms with their condition through different support mechanisms. For example, support from either friends and family or finding a community of people going through similar processes have been important factors. Some have used their hardships on their journey of acceptance to support others with hair loss and raise awareness of the condition. In supporting others, they share their own thoughts and experiences relating to the condition which is connected to Foucault's (1988) technologies of the self – they are mediating their relationship with themselves on the platform because of the isolation and loneliness that emerges from being excluded from society. At the same time, raising awareness can be challenging as some participants mentioned that they feel tired of educating other people and taking the high road when encountering ignorance. Mary, a 24-year-old therapist from the U.S. described her mentality regarding dealing with people's attitudes both online and offline:

But because of the whole lead up /--/ that's why now when I say I don't give a shit about what people say, like I truly don't. After you go through that many years of caring and you get to a point where you're like 'it doesn't matter anymore.'

The identity experiences of the participants described in this section serves as important context for making sense of the next segment – their engagement and participation with the case. It is also vital in understanding the interviewees' reflections towards forgiveness later on as now we can look at it in the larger context of their identities, not only the Oscars incident. As Corner (2017, p. 5) described, engagement with a piece of media is not only about what is happening with the person when they are in contact with the piece of media, it is also about their prior experiences that have led up to the engagement.

Affective Engagement and Participation

In the following section, I will be taking you through the participants' engagement and participation with the Smith incident. In this analysis, I will be relying on Dahlgren and Hill's (2023) conceptualisation of the engagement matrix. First, attention will be turned to people's motivations for following the event, second to the ways they followed the incident, third, the emotions and affective state that the engagement facilitated and finally, the participation in the discussion around the incident. This helps us realise the significance of the incident for women living with alopecia, which in turn is connected to their affective processes of forgiveness.

Motivations

Generally, the motivations for following the event and participating in the discussion were twofold – motivation from the participants' personal experience with hair loss and curiosity and desire to comprehend the incident. Dahlgren and Hill (2020, p. 15) outline how motivations can be social in nature, telling us about the communities and affiliations that the participants may have or feel. Therefore, it makes sense that people diagnosed with alopecia are interested in an incident involving hair loss as it is close to their identity and community.

The motivation from personal experience usually involved the participants' interest in alopecia-related topics, they wanted to know what people were saying about the event due to their own experiences with the condition. Some interviewees, having seen the discussion around the case and feeling that the focus of the case is in the wrong place, felt the duty to educate people about alopecia or wanted to offer support to people who are living with the condition and might have been negatively affected by the incident. Florence explained her line of thinking:

And then half of me was like 'but I have to do it for the people who have my experience and who feel like they're alone' and so it made me feel like damn this shit is gonna suck but it's also gonna be like really great, I'm just gonna try to focus on the good parts and, you know, who I can help.

Some participants were mainly motivated by curiosity. This generally meant that they were hoping to get more clarity on the incident, implying that there was a lot of conflicting information regarding the case going around, echoing the characteristics of eventness (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018, p. 137). Some were curious about social groups important to them who were affected by their incident, with the example of caring about what Black people, and more specifically, what Black women were thinking and feeling regarding the event, giving us further information about the communities that the participants empathise with and relate to (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p. 15). Mary brought out the groups whose opinions she cared about:

... the alopecia community, Black community, like the people that were most being impacted by it negatively. Those are the people that I cared about. /--/ I didn't really care about reading the opinions from like some random person who wrote an article but has no insight into any lived experience.

This also gives insight into how they perceive questions of power in society – the value that media has for them in getting information and participating in matters regarding social problems and inequalities and how dominant discourses are perceived to be reinforcing social inequalities (Dahlgren and Hill, 2020, p. 2, 2023, p. 7). In general, what was already apparent from the participants' motivations for following the incident was the emotionality of the

engagement – the painful feelings it caused, the scars it reopened and the commonality of the experience.

Ways of Following the Event

Unsurprisingly, most participants followed the incident on social media while only a few mainly used news media to follow the incident. Almost all of the participants described how the scandal came to them rather than for them having to seek it out. Charlotte described how she came into contact with the incident:

It was so pronounced and my feed, and so pronounced by everyone else that I didn't have to hear someone say 'oh Will Smith slapped Chris Rock' and have to go searching for it. It was all just there.

Already the previous quote is echoing something that came up in many interviews – the omnipresence and unavoidability of the event due to the plethora of content around the incident. This is an important notion as it echoes the characteristics of eventness and eventfulness (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018). Importantly, none of the participants were following the Oscars when the incident happened and were notified of the slap by other media. Again, we see that the centre of the event has shifted from media events (Dayan and Katz, 1994) to eventness where the focus has come to 'feeds, streams, posts, tweets, images, and so on' (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018, p. 137). The tempo with which the incident achieved virality and flooded the media space is also implicative of a constantly vigilant diffused audience awaiting 'noteworthy – testifiable – events' (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p. 77; Frosh and Pinchevski, 2014, p. 595).

The duration of the participants' engagement with the scandal was relatively long, most of the participants were seeing content about the incident for up to a month. Even though they might have stopped actively following the incident, many reported seeing reverberations of it in the media, especially when the Oscars season was coming up again and with Chris Rock's new comedy special where he broke his silence on the incident, which shows that some scandals do not just come and go, but at least for people who are affected by them, incidents rather linger around in popular culture.

Emotions and Affect

Dahlgren and Hill (2020, p. 6, 2023, pp. 15, 17) outline the importance of emotionality, affect, analysis and argumentation in engagement and indeed with this incident, this appears to be the most important aspect of the participants' engagement as it created a lot of strong emotions and different rationalities for making sense of the case. Mostly the incident facilitated negative

emotions among the participants, the most common of which was frustration and disappointment. The main reason behind the negative emotions was seeing the debate surrounding the incident, how people were disregarding the alopecia aspect in the incident as well as Jada's perspective of the case. It seems that the emotions were stemming from differences in levels of engagement with the event. The interviewees had an intense engagement with the event where focus lied on the cognitive aspects and understanding the incident. In contrast, based on the interviewees' reflections, most of the larger public had a more shallow engagement without understanding the full context of the incident, resulting in negative emotions for the interviewees when seeing the debate around the case.

With some participants even stronger negative emotions were apparent, some felt anger and one interviewee felt the incident was even traumatising, resulting her in taking a day off of work to process everything that happened. At the same time, some interviewees expressed positive emotions as well, mostly happiness that alopecia awareness was raised on some level and that alopecia finally received some widespread attention. Julie expressed her feelings of frustration:

There was less focus on how did she feel about the situation, even though it was directly at her and somebody acted on her behalf, you know? That's just kind of... even as a woman, sometimes it feels like that. You get left out of the conversation when there's two men involved. That part kind of was frustrating too.

We see that engagement through dislike is definitely the case with this incident. As Gray (2021, p. 45) described, marginalised audiences have little opportunity to avoid content that is mostly directed at the dominant groups in society. Important aspects for audiences living with alopecia were disregarded in the media coverage and debate, thus facilitating the negative emotions they felt.

The interviewees showed a lot of empathy for the actors involved in this incident, but interestingly, the influence of the (previous) parasocial relationship with the celebrities was not brought up – reflections were generally confined within the boundaries of the incident. Beginning with Jada, the interviewees said they empathise with her position, understanding the courage it takes to go to such a formal event bald, the vulnerability she had in that position and the emotional implications of being ridiculed in public. Descriptions in this regard were often very detailed with the participants imagining the activities, thoughts and emotions that Jada and Will were going through regarding the event. Participants also empathised with Jada for the disregard that she experienced with the incident – Will acted on her behalf without asking for her opinion and she was often excluded from the media coverage and discussions as well.

We can see that due to their past experiences with social exclusion, they have greater emotional proximity (Phillips, 2015, pp. 32–33) to Pinkett Smith's position in the event. 56-year-old Eevi from Finland described her feelings of empathy for Jada Pinkett Smith:

... I feel for his wife that she has her best clothes on, she's in Oscars, her husband is winning an Oscar... Think about them, how they go there. /--/ They have the night of the lifetime. /--/ Think about how she feels when she's going there and sitting in first row and then this guy telling a joke about her hair.

Even though a lot of participants condemned the slap as an act of violence, a lot of them still felt a lot of empathy for Will Smith. They explained that although the reaction was not appropriate, his feeling of anger was valid. The interviewees felt that in the general debate, a lot of people were not willing to understand where Will Smith's emotions were coming from, but they know the stress that having alopecia can cause for the partner which under the circumstances can understandably result in an irrational response. Florence reflected on Smith's position:

... I felt like it was very human of him and when it comes to like, you know, actors and famous people and stuff, I feel like because they can create great art or they have this following that we put them up here as if they're not human, which is insane like they're still a person regardless.

Finally, despite most of the interviewees condemning Chris Rock's joke, many still empathised with him. They explained that there are valid questions regarding the safety of comedians – people should not be assaulted for a joke and it is human to occasionally make a joke that unintentionally hurts someone. One participant explained that Rock has a childhood history with bullying which increased her empathy towards him and he should have the opportunity to evolve and learn from the incident. Julie reflected on Chris Rock's position: "I don't think he maliciously intended to say anything to attack her having alopecia. I think he just made an off-the-cuff joke that he didn't think would land the way it did."

In general, we can see that although the incident facilitated a lot of negative feelings for the participants, they empathised with all the parties involved. A key aspect in their emotional engagement was contesting the dominant discourses surrounding the case and how they relate to social injustices, as outlined by Dahlgren and Hill (2023, p. 7). Understandably, such an intense engagement can facilitate participation in the debate surrounding the incident, which will be further elaborated upon in the following.

Participation in Discussions

Next, we will be taking a closer look at how the interviewees participated or the reasons for not participating in the debate around the incident either online or in conversations. The people in this study who did not participate in the discussions mainly refrained from doing so because of the nature of online discussions – they were afraid of the backlash they might receive considering the extreme reactions regarding the incident that they witnessed. Although for some, not participating was not out of the ordinary as they normally prefer observing to posting or think that only people actually involved in issues should participate in discussions. Even for people who participated in the discussions, the perception of online spaces as a place of intense reactions, debates and backlash was prevalent and affected how they curated their content to give as little ground as possible for backlash to their content to unfold. These precautions and anxieties echo Cover's (2016, p. 22) explanations regarding online identity performance where a person can receive backlash to the content they post in a (semi-)public environment which can indeed cause anxiety, especially when compared to offline situations where disagreements can often be solved rather privately.

Many of those who participated in the discussion mentioned that they were not afraid to say anything. It seems that this can be seen as part of their journey with alopecia – after being so vulnerable and affected by what other people thought about their appearance and getting to a point of self-acceptance, they are not as concerned about what people think about them. Therefore, the person's sense of self 'offline' translates also into the online sphere with the content they choose to publish (Friesen, 2017). Another factor at play here seemed to be that they are in a stronger position to have an opinion because they have the condition that the incident involves compared to people online who do not have alopecia but still voice their opinion. Mary explained her line of thinking:

I just knew my boundaries within it and what I had a voice in and what I didn't. But I wasn't like scared to speak up about anything. I just knew what was appropriate to say and what wasn't....

In contrast, some participants mentioned several aspects they wanted to avoid when voicing their opinion. For example, some refrained from commenting on the violence of the case in order to keep the focus on alopecia and some avoided commenting on racial aspects of the case because they felt it was not their place to voice their opinion. We can see boundary work in the discussions – people sensing the aspects of the incident that they have a voice in and aspects

that they should avoid. Mainly the topics where the interviewees sensed they had a voice were related to their identity as women and as people living with alopecia.

When it comes to the content that the interviewees posted, it generally involved redirecting the debate to issues they perceived to have been disregarded in the discussions, mainly by focusing on the alopecia aspect of the case, or fighting discrimination – people heavily criticising Jada Pinkett Smith and Will Smith, racism in the commentaries and men commenting on women's appearance. According to the interviewees, the general public was engaging in practices reminiscent of fetishised laughter (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 98) and carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 7; Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 5) where audiences join in a collective experience oriented towards criticising the sociocultural 'top' while disregarding the context of the event and focusing on the 'us' who laugh, not the 'them' who do not. The 'them' who were not laughing were trying to counter the ignorance of the 'us' who were laughing. Miranda expressed her disappointment in the general public's response:

I think in posting it I was hoping that people would see it in a more serious light, that people would have empathy for Jada and some empathy for Will too, to understand that he was in such a difficult position.

Additionally, we can view this activity as norm policing (Solove, 2007, p. 85) – the general public commenting on the incident was policing the norms violated at the Oscars. But it appears that women living with alopecia were policing the general public in their misguided and discriminatory response. What is determined to be appropriate or offensive seems to depend on the person's emotional proximity to the incident and the issues it concerns (Phillips, 2015, pp. 32–33). As the interviewees have had experiences with bullying and social exclusion, this resulted in greater empathy for the actors involved and policing those who engage in fetishised laughter (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 98). We can also see that as Chen, Ok and Aquino (2022) claim, people who have been previously victimised in their interpersonal relationships are more prone to engage in vigilante activity.

Regarding the feedback of the content that the respondents posted or talked about in conversations, the experiences differed very substantially. Many of them experienced support and encouragement in their participation. The interviewees explained that people were interested in hearing their perspective and receiving either positive feedback to their post or constructive criticism. At the same time, some participants experienced negative feedback to their content or in the conversations that they had. Conversations were often superficial, issues of the incident were not addressed and they felt disregarded. Even in close social circles, some

felt that people are not able to understand the substantiality of the incident for them, again echoing the alienation and isolation people living with stigmatised medical conditions can experience (Lupton, 2012, pp. 85, 88). Charlotte reflected on her experience:

... every conversation that I had at the start, was never about me and how it related to me as having alopecia. It was all an internal conversation that they were having out loud, beside me.

Regarding the content that the participants posted online, negative experiences ranged from people ignoring the content they posted to people making rude comments and trolling. Some interviewees received comments from people disagreeing with their stance and arguing against them. On the more extreme side, a few interviewees experienced ridicule and insults, however the respondents seemed nonchalant about the rude feedback they get which might be stemming from their history of facing ignorant or rude behaviour. Mary gave an overview of the negative comments she received:

I guess the trolls within my comments and the DMs I would get are people being 1) making the same joke over and over again as if they're like some original comedian or 2) telling me that, and I think this was like a general consensus of why people didn't think we should have an opinion about it, is like they were saying that it was an empowering comment for him to make.

Overall, it can be said that the incident resulted in a very intense and emotional engagement and participation from people living with alopecia, mostly through dislike (Gray, 2021) with interviewees expressing their grievances regarding the discussion around the incident. Based on the participants' reflections, we have realised that the incident along with the discussions around it was important for the alopecia community and affected them heavily, thus providing a strong basis for forgiveness. However, in order to fully understand their engagement and reflections on forgiveness, further attention must be turned to cognitive aspects relating to how they perceived the transgressions of the incident.

Transgression

In this section, I will be elaborating further on how the participants perceived the incident – the several transgressions that were apparent in the incident, the nature of the discussion around the incident and finally, what were the perceived outcomes of the incident. Again, this serves as key context in understanding the cognitive processes of forgiveness for the interviewees as it helps to understand the seriousness of the transgression and their stances regarding morality.

Perceiving the Transgressions

The transgressions that the interviewees perceived in this incident were Chris Rock's joke about Jada Pinkett Smith's alopecia and secondly, Will Smith's reaction to the joke. A very important tendency in the interviews was how the interviewees were contesting the norms of comedy. Most interviewees condemned the joke, determining it to be lazy comedy or even bullying. In general, most participants felt that joking about other people's looks is not acceptable, especially with conditions that are out of the person's control and that it matters who is making the joke. Since Chris Rock did not have a close relationship with neither Jada or Will and especially as a man, he should not make such a bold joke about a woman's appearance on a global stage. This finding is in line with Allen's (2016, p. 31) claim that scandals often unfold in the context of social change. The tendency to comment on people's and specifically women's appearance has come into question. Alice explained:

I think Chris Rock should never have made such a cheap joke, targeting someone that he doesn't have a good relationship with. That was immature and he's a good comedian, I know he could've come up with a better joke about someone that he was friends with. It doesn't even have to be a joke about someone, especially someone's appearance.

When talking about the slap however, the respondents had less consensus in determining its transgressivity when compared to the joke. Although most condemn violence and think that slapping was not the right way to handle the situation, many still had conflicting feelings about it. There were several factors that the interviewees mentioned which affected their opinion-forming. Starting with the seriousness of the assault – many respondents did not think that a slap is a serious form of assault. They explained that their opinion of the situation would be different if for example it had been a punch instead of a slap as a punch has more violent connotations. Many thought that the situation could have been handled much better if he had used words instead of violence as it would have enabled to address the actual issue of stigmatising diseases and raise awareness. Johanna told me:

So that's a questionable action, but I believe it's good that he was standing [up for his wife], but then maybe I don't know if it would have given more visibility for alopecia if he stayed calm and stood up and instead of punching saying 'you know that's not a proper joke because of this and this reason'. But if it would have got to news, who knows?

At the same time, some felt that violence is sometimes justified, for example when someone is being oppressed or bullied. Many also appreciated that Will Smith was standing up for Jada Pinkett Smith and for people living with alopecia in a broader sense. One interviewee explained

that although they personally would not physically assault someone, it was a way for them to vicariously live through other people – see someone else do something that they would not do but understand the urge and even appreciate it. This is in line with Penfold-Mounce's (2009, pp. 6, 21) explanation for engagement with scandals as it is a part of their quest for a second life (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 8) where social life is not as restricted by social norms, where they could feel more free to give into their impulses. This could be seen echoed in other interviewees' reflections as well – although they might generally condemn violence, they appreciate someone standing up for the community. For some participants, there remains an element of pleasure when seeing someone who is engaging in stigmatisation being confronted. As 34-year-old Anna from the U.S. explained:

...you can live vicariously through people, obviously you wouldn't do something like that in real life, but you might think about it in your head. So it was like seeing something like that was just kind of like 'well thanks, you kind of did that for all of us then.'

Many interviewees saw the slap as an act of chivalry or Will Smith proving his masculinity. Opinions differed in this regard if chivalry is something to be supported or condemned. Those who condemned chivalry explained that it was wrong of Will to slap someone on behalf of Jada Pinkett Smith without consulting her first and instead, he should have supported his wife and talked to her. Some thought that although they understand wanting to protect your partner, that does not need to happen through a violent act and saw it as a way of Will proving his masculinity. For example, 40-year-old Julie from America explained:

But just something about, you know, respecting my wife, my person, my whomever. There was less focus on how did she feel about the situation, even though it was directly at her and somebody acted on her behalf, you know?

At the same time, there were several interviewees who supported chivalry and said that they think it is an important principle to protect your partner. They saw it as justification for the act – if in general they do not support violence, they understand and support someone wanting to protect their partner. Florence reflected her emotions around the slap:

It just made me, I felt good about the slap, cause I liked to see him standing up for his wife. I believe in like family, like my boyfriend would've slapped the fuck out of him too.

We can see that the cognitive reasoning of the participants outlined several social issues related to the incident and the standards that celebrities are held to in navigating and addressing these social issues as they play an important role in shaping social norms (Hermes and Kooijman, 2016, p. 495) and hold celebrity capital (Driessens, 2013, p. 543).

Hostile publics

Overall, one thing that very strongly emerged from the interviews was the notion that online public spaces are a rather hostile environment. Interviewees described how the public reaction to the case was very intense and divided in opinions, how important topics related to the case got swallowed up by less important ones and how the people voicing their opinion on the matter were rather ignorant and discriminatory in their stances.

First, interviewees described how people's reactions were very intense and exaggerated. The multitudes of content spreading around social media added to this notion of omnipresence and intensity. One interviewee explained that although people's anger to the incident was justified, the ignorance that they voiced was not. Again, this brings up the conceptualisation of diffused audiences (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998, p. 77) and media witnessing (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2014, p. 594), which together constitute a hyperconnected attention community who is waiting for testifiable events and apparently will offer a very rash and intense reaction in their commentary. It also confirms that audiences are intrigued by anti-spectacles where celebrities are shown in an unexpected, uncurated way (Nayar, 2009, pp. 98–99; Penfold-Mounce, 2009, pp. 6, 21). Charlotte summed up the general public's response:

Everything was so reactive, there was absolutely nothing grounded about the conversation at all. There was no sense of calm to just have a conversation, it really blew up.

Considering the intensity of the online discussions and media coverage around the incident, it is not surprising that some topics dominated over others. The interviewees explained that the most dominant theme in the discussions was violence and the men who were involved in the incident. At the same time, the topic of alopecia was largely absent from the discussions together with Jada Pinkett Smith's perspective of the incident. Some respondents described that they feel it is a common pattern that when men are present in a discussion or involved in an incident then women's perspectives are disregarded in the coverage.

Many participants also noticed sensationalism and shallow discussions in the media coverage as well as in the discussions – it was treated as just another celebrity scandal without delving into why the incident happened. In the discussions, they felt that people just engaged with the memes and videos that were spreading around after the incident, similarly to the notion of Bakhtin's (1984) carnivalesque where people are joined in a communal experience of role inversion where they get the chance to ridicule the sociocultural 'top'. Julie described the tendencies of the media coverage and the discussions:

I almost feel bad about the media surrounding it because it doesn't really involve the person who was directed to /--/. /--/ I feel like [in] most of the media circles, you know, the two men in the incident [dominated], which there's a lot of reason for that too, but she kind of gets left out, I think.

In addition to the shallow nature of the debate around the case that the interviewees noticed, many also outlined how there were a lot of discriminatory and ignorant tendencies in the discussions. Respondents noticed racism with the example of people scrutinising Will Smith's behaviour without acknowledging that Black men are held to higher standards in society. Sexism and bullying was also evident mainly with people disregarding Jada Pinkett Smith's perspective, commenting on her appearance, bullying and bashing her.

In general, there seemed to be a lot of ignorance in the discussions – the interviewees explained that people were unaware of alopecia and were not willing to gain insight or knowledge into the topic. Interviewees felt that in such situations, people should be more reflexive and realise that it is easy to comment in hindsight and form opinions about incidents that do not concern them personally. Again, thinking back on carnivalesque, we see that weaker groups in society are indeed excluded or even discriminated against during this experience (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 19) and find little opportunity to belong. Mary described the ignorant tendencies of the discussions:

...people were not willing to take a second and listen to the people and the groups that were impacted. And so I was not thrilled that the general thought that they had all the information and that they could just form an opinion and spew it without wanting to /- /- be educated about kind of the issues that came up from it.

Overall, the discussion was very divided in the opinions and the interviewees explained that this was the case both in the broader sphere of (social) media but also among the alopecia community. They described that people were rather quick in taking a stance on the incident. The participants outlined that the general tendencies were supporting and defending Chris Rock as a comedian and claiming that the joke was not transgressive, people criticising Will Smith for his violent response to the joke and lastly, people defending Will Smith and perceiving the slap as justified. The division in the alopecia community remained twofold – some felt that Chris Rock deserved the slap whereas others drew a hard line at violence and condemned Will's actions. Alice explained the tendencies of the alopecia community:

... I was really surprised that people were kind of all over the place, a lot of people thought it was silly and unnecessary, a lot of people thought Will Smith did a good thing by standing up for his wife. I was surprised, I think there was more people who were against what Will Smith did than for and that surprised me, for that group, at least.

Consequences

When explaining who the interviewees thought was affected by the incident and what it all amounted to, they outlined three main groups who were impacted: people living with alopecia, minority groups and the actors involved in the incident. Most interviewees agreed that people living with alopecia or hair loss were affected, although it is not certain if positively or negatively. They explained that for some, the incident might have resurfaced past traumas and experiences, for many the feeling of being an outcast in society was validated with the joke and the discussion that followed and people might be more hesitant and insecure about being bald in public after the incident. In this regard, we can see the important role celebrities play in forming and establishing social norms as outlined by Hermes and Kooijman (2016, p. 495). If a celebrity engages in stigmatising behaviour, it validates this tendency on a more general level. Therefore, people's standards for the behaviour of celebrities are also higher as it has the potential to have a broader effect, meaning celebrities should curate their behaviour more carefully.

However, some interviewees brought out potential positive aspects as well, seeing the incident as empowering for raising awareness and confirming issues they see in society. In general, most were of the opinion that the incident raised awareness of the condition in society, although some felt that it was a missed opportunity to educate, because alopecia was shadowed by the violence in the case. Mary explained:

Google search about alopecia went up like significantly and so it became an awareness tool that we didn't want. So obviously we don't want any of our awareness work being attached to violence.

When explaining the minority groups who were affected by the scandal, interviewees mentioned Black people, specifically Black women, and women in general. One interviewee explained that the incident was difficult for the Black community because the general consensus seemed to be that Will Smith was wrong for the slap, therefore there was no room for them to grieve the situation without receiving the condemnation of the white audience. Women and specifically Black women's vulnerability was brought out in the context of the social scrutiny of their hair and appearance and the important role that it plays in their identity. The incident perpetuated the norm of (Black) women having to defend their femininity. Miranda reflected on the potential impacts on women:

So definitely people with alopecia and also African-American women, and women but the societal norms about what a woman should be, what a woman should look like and how hair is a part of that.

Finally, most interviewees were of the opinion that the actors involved – Jada, Will and Chris were affected by the incident. Jada's perspective was mostly seen as having resulted in emotional pain. Will Smith's career has been permanently damaged in the sense that people will remember this incident for a long time and he will likely have difficulty in finding future career opportunities. In contrast, many participants admitted with contempt that the incident helped Chris' career – people are interested in hearing his perspective and he monetised on this aspect with his new comedy special on Netflix.

To sum this section up, we can see that the incident touched on several social issues which helped to determine the transgressivity for women living with alopecia. In addition, sensationalist, shallow and discriminatory tendencies in the coverage and discussion around the scandal affected many vulnerable groups in society as well as the actors involved. This begs the question of what are the potentials for forgiveness or moving on from this scandal?

Forgiveness

Finally, after having delved deep into the interviewees' identity experiences and their perceptions surrounding the case, we are finally ready to take a closer look at their reflections around forgiveness. The implications of this section are crucial in understanding how the consequences of public incidents should be understood in the context of social media.

Potential for Forgiveness

In general, many interviewees felt that with this scandal, forgiveness is not a public matter as the issue is between the actors involved and no one from the general public should be that deeply offended to deserve a public resolving of the incident. The only demographic that they mentioned who might find it harder to move on from the incident is people living with alopecia. This is an interesting implication considering that the respondents explained how Will Smith's career has been negatively affected by the scandal – what are the opportunities to move on from the incident if the issue can be resolved only between the people involved, but the general public's opinion still affects Will Smith's career? At the same time, participants were optimistic about the potential for forgiveness between Will Smith and Chris Rock. They elaborated that through open discussion and sincerity, the situation should not be beyond repair for anyone involved. Reflections in this regard were relatively short because understandably it is hard for audiences to put themselves in the position of the actors involved in the incident. Alice remained optimistic towards forgiveness:

I don't see why there can't be forgiveness between those involved at the end of the day. It was a bad joke and it could've hurt but I think it was not the worst thing you could say about someone. I think if someone made that joke about me, I would be upset but if they came to me with an apology, I'd forgive them, but that's just me.

Another important implication that emerged from the interviews was that forgiveness is something that needs to be earned. In order to receive forgiveness from the public, responsibility and redemption must be shown by those involved. In this regard, emphasis lies on sincerity, honesty and transparency in explaining and taking ownership of what happened in a public address. The interviewees explained that a key element in taking responsibility for the incident is apologising. Although Will Smith apologised after the incident in a public address, some participants felt that it lacked sincerity which seemed to stem from the curation of a public address, the suspicion of impression management orchestrated by behind-the-curtain professionals.

Here, we are reminded of Hills' (2016, p. 470) emphasis on the illusionary nature of (para)social intimacy and how audiences' expectations for this intimacy have started to include a more candid and confessional style of communication from the celebrities (Nunn and Biressi, 2010, pp. 50, 53; Kanai, 2020, p. 502). With the Oscars incident, we can see that if intimacy or a candid and confessional style is not facilitated, it can have detrimental consequences for the audiences in granting forgiveness, considering the backlash that the actors involved received from the general public as indicated by the interviewees. Interestingly, the influence of race, gender, class, etc on the process of receiving forgiveness were hardly mentioned in the interviews, which might have been caused by the interview design. Emma described her perceptions of Will Smith's apology:

... I feel a bit like it was definitely not handled very well by Will Smith, his apologies were kind of half-hearted in general – he tried to apologise, but at the same time he wasn't really apologetic because it was his wife. ...I'm not sure how much came from him and how much came from professionals telling him what to say.

Another interesting implication regarding earning forgiveness for celebrities is earning it through their work. In this aspect, the parasocial relationship plays an important role – one interviewee explained that people do not want to believe that their adored artists would be capable of bad behaviour. This falls in line with the understanding of parasocial relationships affecting the perceptions of audiences witnessing a scandal (Finsterwalder, Yee and Tombs, 2017, pp. 1211–1219). The interviewees were critical of the general public's tendency to look past violations based on the individual's accomplishments. Anna explained:

I mean, they'll forgive him when he puts out a great movie or something. Or they'll put it to the side and forget about it. Nobody forgave Chris Brown, but they still listen to his music and go to his shows. But no one was like 'yeah, I forgive you' for actually like beating the crap out of Rihanna. I don't think anyone ever forgave him for that, but they sure forgot about it every time a good song came out by him.

To sum up, when trying to identify patterns of forgiveness based on the reflections of the interviewees, these include (1) showing ownership and redemption, which need to be believable for the public in the celebrity's public address and (2) creating value through their work, which will alleviate the negative reactions from the public.

Temporality of Scandals

Interestingly, many interviewees felt that in the contemporary media environment, forgetfulness plays a more influential role than forgiveness. They explained that the news- and social media cycle perpetuates an environment where people might initially be heavily engaged in the incident, but it dies down as soon as the media attention fades. This is caused by people's lack of personal connection to scandals – generally, people are not personally affected by them and even those who are fall into the control of the news cycle and just move on. This finding is interestingly conflicting with Ambrose's (2012, pp. 99, 102) claim that in the context of the internet's 'shared perpetual memory' transgressions are hard to forget. Rather it seems that the media environment facilitates forgetfulness. Additionally, it provides confirmation that in many societies with strong media industries, scandals have become a natural part of everyday life (Thompson, 2000, p. x), which at the same time diminishes the importance of them as people become desensitised to the issues they concern. Overall, the finding of forgetfulness brings into question the conceptualisation of forgiveness towards celebrities as conceptualised by Finsterwalder et al. (2017, pp. 1211–1219) by overthrowing it completely. As Alice explained: "I think people just need to forget, just the further away from the Oscars, just the more people are just gonna forget about it and put it at the back of their mind."

With this case, forgetfulness is also stemming from the media coverage and discussion around the case. People living with alopecia and Jada Pinkett Smith were overlooked as victims in the scandal, which diminished the dimensions and seriousness of the incident. Emma reflected on this tendency:

I would say that since it was more handled as a celebrity scandal, it's gonna be forgotten the same way other celebrity scandals are forgotten. Like it might come every now and then being like 'oh remember Will Smith's life?' and they're gonna put this as like a highlight or whatever, but it's not gonna be remembered definitely for the alopecia aspect of it, just as his slap because Chris Rock made fun of his wife.

Summary

So where does this chapter leave us? When breaking out of the mentality of seeing forgiveness as a measurable process with concrete factors influencing someone's willingness to forgive, we realise that forgiveness is complex and elusive in its nature. For women living with alopecia who had great emotional proximity to the incident, forgiveness is a long process which, in order to be examined, requires a deep understanding of a person's identity along with their affective and cognitive processes before, during and after the incident. Although the interviewees personally feel great potential for forgiveness, this potential gets swallowed up for broader audiences by their carnivalesque practices of fetishised laughter and the temporal nature of celebrity scandals. Those without proximity to the case laugh, criticise and forget, without trying to understand the actual issues of the incident and, justified or not, tarnish the reputation of the celebrity who transgressed. In the process, vulnerable groups in society who are engaging with the event are excluded, stigmatised and left to deal with the aftermath. Ultimately, the celebrities are going to survive the scandal by either taking honest ownership of their actions or publishing a high-quality piece of work which will make the general public overlook the incident (that is, if they still remember it). But the 'Others' of society are left with a bitter reminder confirming their insecurities and hardships of trying to fit in the mould of 'normal' society.

Conclusion

As could be seen from the previous chapter, the Smith scandal was complex in its transgressions and public responses. The aim of this study is to recontextualise forgiveness in online environments and provide insight into how women living with alopecia as a vulnerable social group who was affected by the 2022 Oscars scandal reflect on the dynamics of the incident and the debate that followed. We have learned that forgiveness is an elusive and complex process which, in order to be fully understood, requires careful attention to the identity positions of people who had proximity to the case along with their affective and cognitive processes around the incident. In this final section, I will be reflecting back on the key findings and how they relate to the research questions of this study to offer nuances for understanding implications for forgiveness as well as the dynamics of such an incident for people living with alopecia. In order to answer the final research question regarding forgiveness, we first need to understand the interviewees' perceptions and experiences around the case, which is the focal point of the first two questions.

How do women living with alopecia engage with and participate in the 2022 Oscars incident?

A key aspect to be kept in mind regarding this question is that throughout reflections regarding engagement and participation with the Oscars incident, their identity and previous experiences with alopecia played a major role. Beginning with their motivations for following the incident, personal history with the illness was one of the main motivators for following the incident, facilitating interest in alopecia related topics. At the same time, the incident seemed to be rather unavoidable to follow due to its omnipresence, echoing characteristics of eventness and eventfulness (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018) with the multitudes of (often conflicting) content spreading around on social media and mobilised audiences already commenting on the incident. This facilitated curiosity in the participants to make sense of what exactly happened at the Oscars.

Women living with alopecia showed a very intense engagement with the incident and perceived the reaction of the general public as intense as well. A key difference here is that the general public was joined in an experience reminiscent of carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984) and fetishised laughter (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 98) which facilitated engagement through dislike (Gray, 2021) and strong negative emotions among audiences living with alopecia. Interviewees found that there were a lot of discriminatory and ignorant tendencies in discussions surrounding the

Oscars incident – disregarding alopecia, Jada Pinkett Smith's position and bullying the actors involved. In general, they felt that in the online discussions, the topic of alopecia was overshadowed by the violence and the men involved in the event.

Again, the interviewees' identities play an important role here as their previous experience with alopecia facilitated emotional proximity (Phillips, 2015, pp. 32–33) to the incident which in turn facilitated a lot of empathy towards Jada Pinkett Smith and Will Smith. Therefore, when seeing the problematic tendencies of the online discussions, they wanted to support vulnerable groups in society who could have been affected by the scandal, such as other women living with alopecia, the Black community and specifically Black women, and counter the discrimination and ignorance in the discussions in their participation regarding the incident. They were actively trying to have a voice in the discussion, despite the carnivalesque practices of the general public leaving little room for it.

Here, we see that according to the interviewees' perceptions, the general public was norm policing (Solove, 2007, p. 85) the actors involved in the Oscars incident. However, due to the public's lack of emotional proximity to the case, the policing took the form of carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984) and fetishised laughter (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 98) meaning that audiences were joined into a collective experience of criticising the sociocultural 'top'. However, as theory also outlines the exclusionary tendencies of such practices, interviewees confirmed that weaker groups in society are disregarded and discriminated against in the process (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 19), who in this instance were women living with alopecia, Black people and specifically Black women. Therefore, as audiences with alopecia had emotional proximity to the incident, they started norm policing the general public by drawing attention to their problematic behaviour.

In general, the discriminatory tendencies in the online discussions contributed to the interviewees' notion of hostile publics online. This resulted in some of the participants refraining from commenting on the incident online altogether and those who did participate in the discussions curated their content heavily in order to minimise the risk of receiving backlash. However, some interviewees were bold in their participation as they felt that their emotional proximity to the case gives them a stronger position to comment on the incident. For some, the boldness stemmed from their past experiences and feeling tired of other people's opinion. Therefore, the person's sense of self 'offline' translates also into the online sphere with their online participation (Friesen, 2017).

In what ways do the participants of the study identify and relate to the transgressions of the 2022 Oscars scandal?

The interviewees perceived two transgressions in the Oscars incident – Chris Rock's joke about Jada Pinkett Smith and Will Smith's subsequent response by slapping Chris Rock. Women living with alopecia were contesting the norms of comedy by claiming that ridiculing people for their looks is not acceptable, especially if the person making the joke does not have a close relationship with them and especially when a man is commenting on a woman's appearance in a public setting. Still, despite these grievances, some interviewees felt that a person should not be assaulted for making an unintentionally hurtful joke.

Opinions were divided in terms of the transgressivity of the slap both among the interviewees and in the broader alopecia community, but many were empathising with Will Smith and understanding his feelings of anger as having alopecia causes strain for the partners as well. They felt that despite the slap not being a serious form of assault, better options for resolving conflicts remain which would result in more elaborate discussions on the underlying issues of the incident. Many felt that the slap is a question of (toxic) masculinity and chivalry because Smith did not consult his wife before slapping and chose a violent response to a nonviolent situation. Still, some felt that he was standing up for the alopecia community in a broader sense.

These findings confirm Allen's (2016, p. 31) claim that scandals often unfold in the context of social change – the norms of humour and masculinity are changing and with it expectations for celebrities as well, considering their influence on shaping social norms (Hermes and Kooijman, 2016, p. 495). The conflicting feelings the interviewees had towards Will Smith's slap might be explained by the implication that it is a way for them vicariously live through other people. This means that although they might not slap someone else for their ignorance for various reasons, they still understand the impulse to do so by someone else. We can see this as the interviewees' quest for a second life which is less constricted by social norms and conventions (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 8).

What we learn is that stigmatising diseases is unequivocally condemned by women living with alopecia while slapping someone as a response is more in a gray area. The interviewees show a lot of empathy due to their emotional proximity to the case and demonstrate deep cognitive processes of determining the transgressivity of an action. In contrast, interviewees described ignorance and quick judgements of transgressions among the general public, which leaves little room for celebrities to attempt to remedy their transgression.

How do women living with alopecia perceive potentials for forgiveness in online environments?

Generally, there are two patterns of forgiveness which emerged from the interviewees' reflections. First, expectations for celebrity responses involved a candid and transparent style with an emphasis on taking ownership of the transgression in order to receive forgiveness. This echoes the claims made by Nunn, Biressi (2010, p. 49) and Kanai (2020, pp. 501–502) whereby celebrities can repair their tarnished image by showing vulnerability in their public addresses. For example, Will Smith did apologise multiple times after the Oscars incident, but the participants felt that his expressions were not honest and remained sceptical if his reflections were not dictated by behind-the-curtain professionals. This means that despite parasocial intimacy being illusionary in nature (Hills, 2016, p. 470), if the celebrity fails to hide the illusion of intimacy and be vulnerable, it can have detrimental consequences for earning forgiveness by ruining their reputation. The expectations for honesty and taking ownership of the transgressions remain for both receiving forgiveness from the general public as well as resolving the conflict between the parties involved.

The second pattern of forgiveness involved receiving forgiveness through the celebrity's work. Interviewees explained that if the transgressor publishes a high-quality piece of work in their field, then the public will be more eager to forget or at least overlook the transgression committed by the celebrity as generally, people do not want to believe that their adored artists are capable of deeply transgressive actions. In this regard, participants felt that the general public has hypocritical tendencies in who they condemn and who they do not and explained how some artists have gotten away with very appalling behaviour. This finding also confirms Finsterwalder and others' (2017, p. 1221) claim that the parasocial relationship a person has with the celebrity affects their willingness to forgive.

However, the most important finding with regard to forgiveness was that in the contemporary media environment, scandals do not persist long enough for people to forgive and therefore, forgetfulness is rather the outcome of public transgressions. With the Smith case, forgetfulness was stemming from the sensationalism around the scandal and the failure to address the underlying social issues the incident concerned for which the responsibility lies on the media, the celebrities involved and the general public. We can therefore conclude that as Thompson (2000, p. x) explained, scandals have become pervasive and common in public life, which results in the desensitising of both media and general public to issues regarding scandals.

Despite the extensive memory of online environments (Ambrose, 2012, pp. 99, 102), the public is drawn into a practice of fetishised laughter (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 98) after which the incident is disregarded and forgotten. Still, as the interviewees admitted, in the process the reputation of the celebrities involved in the transgression is often tarnished. The key to receiving forgiveness and decreasing the antagonistic tendencies of online discussions appears to be facilitating emotional proximity among people engaged with the incident.

Where Do We Go From Here?

This study has focused on women living with alopecia to critically examine how they engaged with and participated in discussions around the 2022 Oscars scandal. This enabled to fill the larger aim of recontextualising forgiveness in today's media environment and understanding the culture of discussions around public transgressions. We learned that due to the pervasiveness of scandals in public life, opportunities for forgiveness get lost in the entertainment value and power contestation (Stallybrass and White, 1986, p. 5) of the transgressions, resulting in the general public engaging in fetishised laughter (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 98). However, in the process, minority audiences who have emotional proximity to the scandal get hurt and discriminated against with the general public's response. Additionally, despite the temporality of such scandals and people's forgetfulness, the reputation of the person who committed the transgression is still tarnished.

The main limitation of this study is that it is difficult to conduct research on issues with a very intense yet temporary nature like such scandals. At the time of conducting the interviews, almost a year had passed from the initial Oscars incident which can affect how the interviewed audiences perceive and remember both their personal and the general public's engagement and participation in the issue. Therefore, in order to address these issues, further academic inquiries into such topics should start research as the scandals are still unfolding and active to get the most precise reflections from audiences. Of course, there are options to alleviate these issues with the employed method as well, for example by using a media scroll-back method but such studies may prove troublesome as it requires more effort from the interviewees and adds issues related to protecting the privacy of the participants.

Finally, there remain important questions regarding forgiveness that should be addressed in further studies regarding the topic. In the process of this study, participants provided no reflections on how different demographics of the person who has committed a transgression (such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, etc) can affect the potentials for forgiveness, as also

outlined by Kanai (2020, p. 502). This might have been due to the design of the interview, direct specifying questions in this regard would have helped. Additionally, although this study has been focused on a celebrity context, it is vital to understand the dynamics of forgiveness for 'regular' people as with the context of diffused audiences (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998), ripeness of time (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2014) and eventfulness (Frosh and Pinchevski, 2018) there have been many instances of 'ordinary' people receiving the condemnation of mass audiences (see Ronson, 2016). Both of these potential perspectives for research could provide valuable information for the further conceptualisation of forgiveness in online environments.

Despite the limitations of this study, I believe that it has provided strong insight into online forgiveness and the culture of online discussions surrounding transgressions. The turn away from seeing forgiveness as an issue of marketing and brand-building has been long overdue. I have argued that forgiveness is a complex process which starts well before the transgression itself, from the audiences' identity experiences along with cognitive and affective processes. Additionally, it has been vital to start off from the engagement and standpoints of stigmatised audiences who were affected by the scandal but are struggling to make their voice heard. I sincerely hope that inquiries into transgressions and forgiveness continue.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Risks and Mitigation

Participants	
Risk	Plan for risk mitigation
<p>Privacy – they are sharing very personal stories about their own life and experiences. They might feel worried about being identifiable or data leaking.</p>	<p>Will store information on a separate external memory device, not on a cloud and destroy the data after research properly.</p> <p>Will anonymise the participants and ensure confidentiality, no one's name will be included in the text and all potential information giving hints of anyone's identity will be removed from the text.</p> <p>The participants will have control over the information they wish to share. I will maintain that if at any point in the interview they feel uncomfortable or unsure of sharing certain information, they have every right to not share it.</p> <p>I will be transparent about who will have access to the transcripts of interviews and the thesis so the interviewees understand the audience of this material.</p>
<p>Feeling pressured to do the interview – as I will use snowball sampling and start getting references from other participants, I do not want the participants to feel they are obligated to do the interview if their friend has referred them to me.</p>	<p>Ensure the participants understand that this is completely voluntary for them, nothing bad will happen if they do not participate.</p> <p>Maintain that if at any point during, before or after the interview they feel uncomfortable, they have every right to end the interview or opt out from the study.</p>
<p>Scheduling problems – reluctance to find time for the interview or inability to fit the interview into the schedule.</p>	<p>I will be transparent about the duration of the interview and be flexible regarding the scheduling – the interviewee's time preferences come before mine.</p>

<p>Reluctance to participate</p>	<p>Confirm that everything will be anonymised.</p> <p>I will be transparent about how long the interview will be and how it will be conducted.</p> <p>I will be transparent about the aims and motivations of the research.</p>
<p>Failure to facilitate a trustful and honest conversation about the topic</p>	<p>I will convey the message that I'm not here to judge anyone and remain reflexive of my own position compared to the interviewees.</p> <p>I will be transparent about how delicate information and data will be handled.</p> <p>Curate the tone of my voice and my attitude before the interview and during it in order to create a pleasant environment.</p> <p>Hopefully, both me and the interviewees will do the online interview in our own homes or another private environment where I and they feel comfortable. With online interviews, the emphasis is more on the tone of the conversation and the initial warm-up conversation and questions in order to establish a good, positive environment.</p>

<p>Interviewer</p>	
<p>Risk</p>	<p>Plan for risk mitigation</p>
<p>Complications with doing interviews (network errors, technology does not work the way it should)</p>	<p>I will conduct a pilot interview to test my questions and the technology in order to prepare for any errors that might arise.</p> <p>If technological problems arise, I will be ready to schedule a new time for the interview.</p>

Coming across as biased or judgemental, making the interviewee feel powerless

I need to remain reflexive – I have to be aware of my potential biases and previous knowledge regarding the topic. It is also important to maintain a pleasant power balance, the interviewee should not feel as though they have no control over the situation, especially since they're sharing their personal information during the interview. I will maintain an open and positive attitude both with what I say as well as body language throughout the interview and not react with any judgement towards what the interviewee says during the interview.

I will also maintain during the interview that if at any point the participant feels uncomfortable discussing the question, they have every right to skip the question or end the interview.

I will also make sure the participant knows that I am aware of my position as a white male researcher but that I am here to listen and my aim is to give voice to the participants, I am interested in their perceptions and my own standpoints will not cloud what they say.

Appendix 2. Consent Form for the Study

Consent Form: The Perspectives of Audiences Living with Alopecia Regarding the Will Smith Slap Scandal

Masters in media and communication Studies, Lund University

Researcher: Kaarel Lott

The purpose of this research is to understand how people living with alopecia critically engage with the Will Smith slap scandal which happened at the Oscars in March 2022. I will ask questions regarding what content you saw and engaged with relating to the event, what content you posted, how the incident and the content around it made you feel and how this all relates to your identity. The interview will last around 60 minutes. The data will only be used for my individual master's thesis at Lund University.

I would like to record only the audio of the interview, transcribe it and use the dialogue to present my findings. I will record the interview only with your (written) consent. Please feel free to say as much or as little as you want. You can decide not to answer any question, or to stop the interview any time you want. Your identity will remain anonymous.

If you agree to the previous information, please sign your full name, current date, age, gender and nationality below.

Full Name

Sign Here

Current Date

Sign Here

Age

Sign Here

Gender

Sign Here

Nationality

Sign Here



LUND UNIVERSITY

Appendix 3. Interview Guide

Introduction

Greetings, introducing myself, the topic of study

Introducing informed consent and the interviewee's rights, ground rules!

Obtaining informed consent (verbal and written)

Do you have any questions or concerns before we start?

Theme 1: Context of the Scandal

1. How did you hear of the Smith incident?

Following the Oscars itself?

News?

Social media (platforms)?

People, face to face interactions?

Seeking it out or did it come to them?

2. How did you follow the incident and the debate around it?

Social media/news

2. 1. Duration – how long did you follow it for?

3. Why did you decide to follow the scandal?

4. Try to summarise your perception of the scandal, what happened?

Theme 2: Social media, engagement

5. What sort of content did you see relating to the scandal on social media?

When? Where?

5.1. What was the general tone of the content?

5.2. What did you agree or disagree with?

5.3. How did the content make you feel?

6. What conversations did you have regarding the incident and the content around it?

With who?

Where did these conversations happen? In person? Platforms?

6.1. What was your position in these conversations?

6.2. How did these conversations make you feel?

7. Did you participate in the discussion around the case on social media?

If you didn't participate – why?

7.1. What was it that you posted? Tell me about it, what was the content of it?

7.2. What were your considerations when voicing your opinion?

7.2.1. Was there something you were afraid of to say?

7.3. What sort of feedback did you receive, if any?

7.4. How did the feedback make you feel?

Theme 3: Morals and Forgiveness

8. What problems did the scandal outline for you?

Any social problems? Tensions? Things like that?

9. What was your stance on the incident?

What was wrong? Who was wrong? What should be done?

10. How do you judge the general public reaction relating to the case?

(What did other people think and how do you feel about it?)

11. Who do you think was affected by this scandal?

12. What do you think is the potential for forgiveness in this scandal, especially on social media?

Who should be forgiven?

What would forgiveness look like?

How would it happen?

Who should forgive?

Theme 4: Identity and Community

13. What is your experience with alopecia?

14. Did you relate to the people involved in the scandal? How?

Gender

Alopecia

Ethnicity

Nationality

Class

Fandom

15. How did people living with alopecia, the community respond to the scandal?
16. Do you think the Smith scandal was substantial for people living with alopecia? Why?

Wrapping up

17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 4. Example of Transcription

Interview 12 – female, 34, U.S.A.

All right, so first of all, can you tell me a bit about how did you hear of the Smith incident?

00:15 Honestly, I didn't watch the Oscars, but it's like you get notifications on your phone from like news and apps and it was just blowing up like 'Chris Rock slapped by Will Smith' and I was like what? So then, you know, of course I go online to see it cause I'm like, there's no way, there's no way this happened. And sure enough, but yeah, it was just everywhere.

But did you see it more on like, was your like emphasis more on like news media or social media or something else completely, what would you say?

00:57 Well like my Iphone, it has a news app and I guess I don't have notifications turned off. So it was just like showing all these notifications and that was like the only headline you would see. So then I go to Facebook and people are talking about it on there because it just happened. I wasn't watching the show, but I just kept getting all these pop-ups on my phone. So then after that I found it on YouTube cause it was already on there. So then I saw it.

So it was a sort of like all-encompassing event, on all like platforms and it just sort of was like everywhere, right?

01:40 Yeah, it just kept popping up on those little notifications that you get on your phone like when the screen's turned off and they all like come up, like it was all the same notification from like all these different sources.

So would you say that you had to seek the event out yourself or that the event sort of came to you by itself?

02:04 I had to find it because like I said, I'm pretty sure when I got the notifications it just happened. So it's like, how soon can you see that again if it's still airing on tv? But I did find it pretty quick. Someone had put it on YouTube already and that's where I saw it. But I had to look for it myself at that point, cause it was so new. It like just happened. I'm sure like the following day it would've been very easy to find everywhere.

But can you tell me a bit more about how did you follow the incident and the debate around it as well?

02:48 I didn't really like get into it. I was just like 'wow, that's crazy' and everyone seemed so appalled by it. And I don't know, I guess I looked into it more and I'm like 'okay, like why would he do something like that?' Cause I don't really follow Will Smith and Jada that much, like you hear things about them from their Red Table Talk or whatever, but I don't follow celebrities like that.

But this was just like a crazy event. So it's like 'okay, I wanna know some context about this.' And so I looked up like why was she so upset, why was he so upset to do something like that. It's like, okay because she is losing all her hair so she shaved her head and then he made a ball joke, and then he got slapped.

And then she said later that she has Alopecia. And I'm like well I've had like two rounds of that. So if someone made fun of me for that, I would be devastated. But everyone was so-so mad at Will, obviously it's very unprofessional to do something like that. But when I heard that it was because of her illness, I guess you would call it, it's an autoimmune thing. I was like, well you know, I didn't hate it. Like you can live vicariously through people, obviously you wouldn't do something like that in real life, but you might think about it in your head. So it was like seeing something like that was just kind of like 'well thanks, you kind of did that for all of us then.' Because it was just a crappy thing for him to say.

But that's an interesting thing you mentioned. So is it something like that you feel that you would sometimes like to do maybe yourself as well? Like slap someone who's being mean or rude, but you have the barrier to not do it, but then you saw someone do it and you were like 'yeah, that's nice' or?

05:31 Yeah, it was like that. Because you know, some people are rude and nasty and you just want to yell at them or something, but you can't, so it was kind of like a vicarious thing. Like 'oh I would never do that, I couldn't do that.' But it was like 'yeah, I mean he kind of deserved that.'

So you didn't follow the debate that was going on in social media at all, or did you see some things related to it?

06:06 The most things that I saw, like comments on videos and stuff was mostly everyone being upset about him, saying Will Smith is trash and they can't believe he did something like that, it was just a joke like what's the big deal? There were a few people that were like 'I don't mind that he did that, that was messed up, he shouldn't have said something like that.' And so I was like, I feel like I'm in the minority so I don't want to like say too much and just get like completely exacerbated online. But since I'm in the, I joined that [redacted] group or thread on Reddit. I forget what they're called, those pages. I'm kind of new to Reddit, cause I wanted to see what other people thought about it in that group cause we're the ones that have had it, right? So I'm like 'did it feel good to you when you did that or do you think it was bad?' And a lot of them weren't mad at it. I think there were more people on that group that said that they were happy that it happened to him than didn't. So I thought that was interesting. So I feel like a lot of people felt the way, like I just said, like they lived vicariously through it. Like 'good because you shouldn't say stuff like that' because people were really sensitive about that, you know? It's a big deal like losing your hair. And you know, he may say it's just a joke, but that's not something you joke about.

And to me it was also hypocritical because a few years ago he did a whole documentary called 'Good Hair' because his daughter asked him, why doesn't she have good hair? So he went around to all these salons talking with all these Black women and it was like this super empowering documentary about how you should love your own hair and not be influenced by like European standards and you're fine just the way you are. And then he makes a bald joke. So it's like those two things don't go together for me, I don't know what he was thinking. Because you can say it was a compliment because Demi Moore looked great in that movie, but he meant it to be a joke. He didn't mean it to be a compliment. Obviously Jada looks great the

way she is, but if you're sensitive about something like that and it's illness-related, maybe you shouldn't joke about that. But maybe he didn't know, cause I didn't know.

We'll talk about the content a bit more in a second, but I have just a couple of more quick questions before we get into that. I just quickly wanted to ask what was the duration of the scandal for you? So how long did you sort of follow it for or saw stuff about it for?

09:28 I didn't follow it that long, to be honest with you. It might have just been like, you know, I see it, I watched the video a couple times and that's as far as I got into it. I mean, it happened pretty quick.

So a few days or something like that?

Maybe like a few days. There wasn't really much news except for the event that happened, as far as what I saw. You know, he's probably not gonna be allowed to go back there again.

But what caught your interest in the scandal?

10:16 It was basically finding out that Jada said she had Alopecia and that's something that I had so then I was not so mad about the slap. And because I didn't watch any interviews with them after the fact, I don't have time for that. But I did find out that she said that's why she shaved her hair off cause she was just sick of it all falling out. And that she probably had talked about it on her show, but I don't watch her show. Like I said, I don't really follow them. This was just something that obviously popped up cause it was huge. People don't get slapped at the Oscars. I thought it was probably a joke at first, but I didn't spend a lot of time looking into it deeply.

Yeah, that's fine. But can you try to summarize for me in your own words, what happened in the scandal? What was the sort of chain of events?

11:25 So from what I see, Chris Rock made the joke about Jada being GI Jane 2 can't wait to see you. It looked like Will was laughing, like he wasn't mad and then Jada looked at him, super pissed off. And then all of a sudden out of nowhere he just walks up onto the stage. It's still, it looks like it's gonna be a joke, like people are cheering and laughing and then he just smacks him in the face. And it must have been kind of hard cause his head tilted to the side. But even then, it looked like it was a joke, like it was planned. And so Chris was joking like, I just got slapped by Will Smith. And then you didn't realise that it was serious until Will Smith started screaming from the audience 'keep my wife's name out your f-ing mouth.' That's when you knew, oh this wasn't a joke, it wasn't a planned skit. He was actually mad. It was weird though, it was kind of weird because like I said, it didn't seem like he was mad at first until Jada looked at him like, I don't like this. She wasn't laughing for sure, she wasn't laughing.

So do you think, because there was a lot of talk going around about like how Jada is kind of at fault for Will doing this slap, like the look that she gave to Will. So what do you think about that?

13:15 Well, people can say that, but that's not true. You can't blame her for giving him a look. Couples will do that all the time. It doesn't mean go hurt this person. It's not like she said 'go do this.' He's his own person and he's a very powerful person. So he made his own decision there. People are gonna blame her, saying like 'oh, he didn't do anything until she looked at

him.' Well, maybe that's the case and maybe he realised and they've had some problems with their marriage. That was also a huge scandal, I remember when that happened. So maybe he felt like he had to prove something. But I can't say that's her fault. She didn't say 'go do that' it was definitely spontaneous. She wouldn't have been able to control that.

Yeah, I see. Let's come back to the topic of what you saw online again. So can you tell me a bit more of what sort of caught your eye online when you saw the content relating to the scandal? Was there anything else?

14:41 Honestly, no. It was just the video itself. Because it was just kind of an unbelievable thing to see. The only thing people were really saying after that is that, you know, Will's gonna be blacklisted, which is kind of crazy because he is a really like good actor, really famous, really awarded actor, a really likeable guy. So you don't expect that coming from him or especially for Hollywood to blacklist him, he's like their A-list. I didn't really pay attention to the other content that came out because to me it just seemed like repeating the same thing over and over again.

But what do you think was the general tone of the content?

15:36 The general tone was that people were really mad that Will slapped Chris Rock. That he was, I don't know the exact words they used, but basically that he's just trash and they can't believe he would do something like that. Like he's this terrible guy, which is the opposite of what everyone said about him before that day. Their opinions of him completely changed just from that moment.

And what do you think about that?

16:21 I feel like people make mistakes. Chris Rock wasn't hurt, except for his ego and he's making money off of it now cause he just came out with a Netflix special and I guess he was talking about it. I haven't watched it yet. But I think it's kind of like, I don't know, with this whole cancel culture thing, it's pretty crazy, people will just flip on you for anything and like you're just done in like an instant. I think eventually people will get over it though. But I don't know if that means he's never gonna be able to work again. It's not like he needs to, he's rich. I understand why people were upset, but I don't think it was so salacious that you have to act like you hate the guy, you know? It's not like he like knocked him out or something.

But the content that you saw, what did you agree or disagree with, like both sides, what did you agree and disagree with?

17:36 I agreed that it was wrong for him to do that, it's unprofessional, obviously.

The joke or the slap?

Oh, the slap was wrong, violence is never the answer. So I agree with that. But I also think the joke was in pretty poor taste. And if you wanna say something bad like that, sometimes you say it to the wrong person, there can be consequences for that. But maybe had Will not slapped him, Chris would be the one looking bad right now instead of him. So I don't know if he did any good by doing that either, besides giving everyone a salacious story. So I agree that they're both wrong and like I said, I don't know if Chris Rock knew about her situation. So maybe to him it was funny and he didn't understand that it's not funny. And usually I like Chris Rock, I

think he's hilarious. So I was kind of shocked. Especially after, like I said, how he is always promoting Black women being proud of their hair and stuff, that he would make a joke like that. It just seemed opposite of what he's championing.

But what did you disagree with in the discussions and the content that you saw?

19:24 I disagree that Chris Rock didn't do anything wrong. I disagree that Will Smith was just a hundred percent completely wrong. Like I don't think there was any angels in this situation. It's weird, it's like I agree and disagree with both points.

Yeah, but that's fine. But can you tell me how did the content that you saw, how did it make you feel?

20:09 Well, at first I thought it was funny. Like it's not every day you see like two famous people smacking each other at the Oscars. So I thought it was pretty entertaining and the Oscars are so boring, that's why I don't watch them. Well now you got something worth looking into, you could say he helped the Oscars. People probably wanna watch it now to see what's gonna happen next (laughs). So at first, I just thought it was funny. But like I said, when I found out a little bit more about the context and how I can relate to it, then I thought, eh, I don't mind that he did that.

But what would you call that emotion?

21:12 Let me think. It's not like anger. It's like, like I said, I think when I posted on Reddit, it was more like trying to see where everyone stood and like maybe have a debate on it. I guess it was kind of like 'hell yeah, you slapped him for that –good!' I don't know if you have like Alopecia, it's an awful feeling for men and women. I mean, men go bald. I can't speak for men cause I'm not one. But for women I think it, at least for me, it's very hard. And you have to try to cover it up cause it's not acceptable for you to be bald or have a bald spot. So you have to cover it up in any way you can until it grows back. You look at it all the time. It's very emotional, it's very stressful. It's the worst, one of the worst feelings ever. And it's caused by stress so it's hard to deal with because it's already stressing you out because it's there.

It's just, it's a terrible experience. Like, it's hard for me to describe, but it really-really destroys your self-esteem and you usually suffer alone because you don't want anyone to know that this has happened to you. It's very embarrassing. It's just, it's a terrible feeling. If someone were to make fun of me for that, I would probably, I'd be so upset, I'd probably like cry, I'd probably be super depressed, not want to go out anywhere or be around anyone. It's very depressing. So if I put it in that sense of putting myself in the situation, say someone was making fun of me for that, I would want someone to slap them. I would want to slap them.

Did you have any conversations regarding the incident and the content around it with people?

23:41 Not really, just online. I mean, no I didn't really get into any huge discussions about it.

But online you had the Reddit thread, right [redacted]? Was there anything else?

24:01 No, that was the only thing I started because I was just wondering how they felt about it.

But yeah, let's talk about that thread. What was your sort of position in this conversation?

24:16 Well like I said, I feel like they were both wrong, but my position was that I wasn't super mad at Will Smith for doing that because if someone said that about me, I would want to smack him too. So I guess it was like, I can kinda relate to that and I feel bad about saying that, but that's how I feel about it. And I'm wondering if anyone else felt the same way, just because maybe they did the same thing, like because they understand how depressing that disease is. So it kind of felt like someone was sticking up for you.

And you mentioned that a lot of people agreed with you, right?

25:08 Yeah actually and I wasn't expecting that because there's so much, usually all the comments or anything people said in the media was that this was just like the most horrible thing ever. Like he is such a bad guy, I can't believe he did something like that, his career is over, he's done. So I was expecting a lot of people to say like 'oh, you know, like you're a horrible person for getting some kind of pleasure out of that.' But a lot of people felt the same way, some people more strongly than I did. And some people were just like, you know, obviously they're like 'no, this is terrible, that's never the answer.'

And I think the other thing that was, I guess I can say this, the other thing that a lot of people liked about it was that even if it was a bad incident, it made a lot of people look up what is alopecia. So more people are looking into it, what it is, there's more awareness about it now because of that. So that's kind of something good that came out of it.

But how did this conversation make you feel, this online conversation?

26:36 It made me feel good that I wasn't the only one that felt that way cause you're not supposed to like things like that. So to know that I'm not the only one felt nice. I mean that's the whole reason I joined that group anyway because I didn't know anyone else who had gotten Alopecia before. I've had it twice, the first time was in 2020 and I guess it's a lot more common than a lot of people know. It's a lot more common. So if you make it a more common thing or acceptable thing, you don't feel as bad about it because when it happens to you, you just feel like you're completely alone. But actually this affects a lot of people. Nobody talks about it though because it's embarrassing. I guess I just, I got some kind of validation feeling from a lot of those comments.

But did you participate in any other way in the discussion on social media? Did you post anything else anywhere?

No, I don't think so, that was the only thing.

But why not?

28:10 I don't know, I guess I didn't care enough to and I don't think there was anything more to say. I don't think there's any more depth to it than that, I really don't so I think it would just be saying the same thing over and over again, in my opinion. So I didn't feel the need to say

anything else. I said what I said, I got opinions from it and when the comments stopped, I stopped reading. And you forget about it and move on.

But what were your considerations before posting the question on Reddit? Sort of what was going through your mind before you voiced your opinion?

29:06 I'm not sure. I guess it was just like there's all this awareness about alopecia now and I guess it was just, I don't know exactly what was going through my head. Maybe something popped up about it again and I don't know. I just randomly like thought you know, I'm gonna ask these people what they think because I can't be the only person that wasn't mad at him for it. So I just wanted to see, I was just curious to see if anyone else who has it felt the same way I did or if I'm just completely in the minority here.

That's actually very good that you mentioned this cause it was like a few months ago that you posted this, right? So it was like quite a long time after it actually happened, the actual incident.

Right, I don't know why it came up then. I really don't know. I must have seen something that reminded me of it and was just curious and bored.

But was there anything that you were afraid to say when you were voicing your opinion or that you wanted to say but we're afraid?

30:48 Yeah, I haven't read that post in a while, but I think originally what I said, I was trying to be very careful about saying I was okay with the slap. Like I said, I wasn't super upset about it. I didn't think it was as awful as everyone said it was. But then when more people were like 'yeah, I was glad he did that' I was like yeah, I guess I was too.

Why were you afraid to say that?

Because I didn't wanna offend people who, you know, other people might be triggered by violence and stuff. To me, I don't think that's super violent, but you know, you don't know what other people are going through so I don't wanna just make it seem like I'm bashing someone else's opinion. And it's not a popular opinion.

So you think it isn't a popular opinion?

31:57 I don't think it's a popular opinion.

Like within the wider audience or among people with Alopecia?

Well, from the whole audience that I've seen, it's an unpopular opinion. But when I ask the question in that thread, in that subreddit, then I noticed, then I knew that it wasn't as unpopular, at least in that community. And that's the only one I really care about. You know, other people aren't gonna understand it, and that's fine, but in general, in the wider audience, it's an unpopular opinion from what I've seen. Like I don't know, I'm not going around interviewing people about it like you are (laughs).

Alright but let's talk a bit more about broader general themes relating to this case. So what problems did this scandal outline for you? Were there any social problems or tensions or things like that sort of caught your eye with this whole thing?

33:15 Not really, a lot of it seems pretty manufactured. It's just like, I think it's fake outrage. I don't think anyone was really hurt or like truly upset that two rich, famous people got into a fight on TV. It doesn't affect their life in any way, it was just something to talk about for most people. I think a lot of things are like that. I don't think anyone was truly upset in their heart like 'oh my gosh, Will Smith slapped Chris Rock, how am I gonna go on with my life?' Like no (laughs). No one was like truly upset. It was just something to talk about because it was the only thing going on, it's a big deal because of who they are. If it was two unknown people, nobody would care. The only thing I would say that it brought attention to is alopecia. And I think that's a good thing cause there were articles like that would come out and be like what is this disease and how many people have it? So it was good that it brought awareness to that.

Do you think even people living with alopecia weren't actually hurt by this scandal?

I don't know, I wasn't. I think the consensus is just like, even if it wasn't the greatest way to do it, at least it brought some awareness to it. Cause I think a lot of people don't know what it is or how common it is. And I'm not exactly sure why, but cause like even when I went to my dermatologist to get treatment, he said that there was a lot of people who had what I had and a lot of it started in 2020. So it was a lot more common since then. I think he said 'you're the third person today.' So I don't know if the whole pandemic had something to do with an uptick in it. Could be.

But I'm curious, you mentioned that the whole thing was also a bit manufactured. So do you think it was manufactured more by the audience, like that the outrage was manufactured as you mentioned, or was it more that the scandalous nature of this was sort of manufactured by the celebrities themselves and the Oscars people?

36:26 I think the outrage from the general public is manufactured. They don't really care, they just want something to gossip about. It doesn't affect their life in any way. They don't care. As far as the celebrities themselves, I don't think that was manufactured just because seeing other things of Will Smith, like him crying and being super emotional and stuff, I don't think he planned to do that at all. So I think that was real, like him doing that. He just did it himself, like there was no plan. There was definitely no plan. And I'm pretty sure those two don't get along, because like I said I haven't watched it yet, but this Netflix special just came out and I know people are talking about it again now, but I haven't looked into it. But apparently Chris Rock talked about it and seemed pretty pissed off. And I guess where he held the show was like where they live or something. Like I said, I haven't looked into it, but I heard it was kind of shady.

But can you tell me a bit how do you judge the general public reaction towards the case? So what did other people think and how you felt about it?

38:03 In my own circle, nobody really talked about it or cared.

But the general public?

General public, they just say like 'oh, this is such a horrible thing' but they don't really care. It's just celebrity gossip, you know? And I live in [redacted] so it's not like a huge deal, there's something new coming out every day about these people, tabloids and stuff. So maybe in other

places it was more of a big deal, but here I don't think people really care cause it's just like 'oh, you know, whatever.'

But do you think anyone was affected by this scandal?

39:03 No, I don't, maybe Chris Rock was affected and Will Smith was affected.

How do you think were they affected?

Well if Will Smith can't work again, that might be an issue for him. And Chris Rock seems, based on the little bit that I've heard about his new Netflix special, sounds like he was pretty upset about it because, you know, he went radio silent after the whole thing. He didn't say anything or give any interviews so nobody really knew how he felt about it until probably like a couple weeks ago.

How do you feel about that?

39:55 He's entitled to his opinion. If I was him, I wouldn't be happy that I got slapped for making a joke either. So yeah, he's allowed to be mad about that, of course. And like I said, I don't know if he knew what he was saying would be that kind of offensive, but also I feel like he kind of does know, because he made a whole documentary about Black women's hair. So I don't feel sorry for him. I just don't feel sorry for him. I don't think anyone, as far as I'm concerned, I don't know what you've heard from other people, but I don't think anyone was like affected by it.

I think the only people that were affected by it were people who have that disease, either thinking that this is being overexposed or Jada doesn't actually have it and it's all a bunch of bs cause there's people accusing her of just lying about it. And then other people affected saying like 'yeah, I have that too and I'm glad somebody stood up for us.' But as far as the general public, there's not really anything to connect to, unless people are triggered by two grown men slapping each other. It's not like the epitome of violence that you see in America. It was pretty tame. So I don't think anyone was affected by that. There's too much other stuff going on.

But what do you think is the potential for forgiveness with this scandal, especially in the context of social media?

42:00 That's a good question. I don't know if there will be forgiveness so much as people will just forget about it.

Why do you think so?

I don't know if they'll be like 'oh yeah, we forgive you.' I think maybe they'll just forget about it. Something bigger will happen. They forget about it. As far as forgiveness from Hollywood – I don't know. Will Smith's probably got enough money to make his own, produce his own shows. I know he had some shows, like they had a Bel Air show, a new one. I don't know how that is affected in any way. They still show reruns of that show all the time, the old one.

Forgiveness, I think it could happen if there's like a role that a director really wants him in. It's not like he can be told 'no, you can't do it.' But I think there could be forgiveness, but I also think that people just might forget about it.

And with that, you're talking about the sort of general broader audience, right

43:41 Yeah.

So do you think it's like a sign of the times or like sort of a pattern with these things that it is more about forgetting than forgiving?

Yes, I do.

Why so?

Because what is the public forgiving him for? For slapping another person? I mean, it just sounds kind of silly, to be like 'oh, this is like...' – it doesn't affect your life in any way. So what are you forgiving him for? Just for doing something bad, right? I mean, they'll forgive him when he puts out a great movie or something. Or they'll put it to the side and forget about it. Nobody forgave Chris Brown, but they still listen to his music and go to his shows. But no one was like 'yeah, I forgive you' for actually like beating the crap out of Rihanna. I don't think anyone ever forgave him for that, but they sure forgot about it every time a good song came out by him.

Do you think the two cases are comparable?

45:10 Not at all, Chris Brown mutilated her face. I mean, he was punching her over and over and over again. She was unrecognizable looking. And that was before they were supposed to go probably to one of these award shows. I mean he had to get arrested and you know, that's totally different cause that's overkill. Like why are you punching someone over and over and over again? No, not comparable.

So does forgiveness come into play depending on the sort of degree of what happened?

Of what happened? Sure, yeah, definitely. And it's not really up to the general public to forgive. That's between those guys. If Chris Rock wants to forgive him then maybe the general public will too. But to be honest, I think a lot of people don't really care about it. If Will Smith got up there and like punched him and knocked him out or something, then no, I don't think anyone would forgive him for that. Yeah, it definitely depends on the excessiveness of it.

And this slapping doesn't qualify as something that is bad enough?

I don't think so. It's not like he like physically hurt him, it was just the violation. It's a violation of your space and maybe it might have stung for a little bit, but it wasn't like he like physically battered him or anything, you know. It's like you're not gonna go to jail for that.

Very interesting. We're coming up to the final part of the now, this is a bit more of a personal question, but if you don't mind sharing then could you tell me about what is your experience with Alopecia?

48:02 Well, oof, it sucks. So in 2020 we all were in lockdown, especially living in [redacted]. They had us locked down like the worst out of all the other states. So you were completely isolated at home. And then I work with logistics so our work was like 10 times busier than it was before. So it's not like, you know, some people, they were at home, they didn't have to work, they could relax. No, I had to work more. In my own home, being isolated and it was so stressful. And it was the 4th of July and I was straightening my hair, and then I see this huge bald spot on the top right side of my head. So I freaked out, I went straight to the emergency

room. It's like what's wrong with me? I have no idea what's wrong with me. And the doctor said it was probably a ringworm or a fungus. And so he gave me antifungals and shampoo to use. So I was like, 'okay' and I was like 'but how do you get that though?' And he is like 'from like dogs or kids?' I'm like 'I pet dogs and stuff, but I don't have any pets, I don't have any kids.' He's like 'dirty water?' Like I haven't swam in the ocean. But the apartment I lived at the time was kind of crappy, so maybe? So I just went along with that. It grew back, so I thought that was over.

But then the second time it happened, unfortunately I was outside my apartment having a cigarette and this guy comes up with a gun and is like telling me to like give him all my shit or he is gonna take my life. And there was another neighbour outside with me. Somehow we got away from this guy, got into our apartment cause it was right in front of our door. And this was like a big highrise luxury-style apartments that we live in. And we somehow got away from him. We were running through the apartments until we got to mine, cause I was on the fourth floor. He was like on the eighth floor. So we go to mine, called the cops, and he actually shot at the door and left. The bullet was still in the door in the frame part of it. There's cameras everywhere, but they still haven't caught the guy.

So that was crazy, I wish that to never happen to anybody. And then the day after that, I had a bald spot on my head in the same place where this guy basically had a gun to me. So I was like, okay, this is not a fungus, this is something else. So I went to urgent care, told her what happened, and she was like 'well, I mean that's pretty understandable that you would lose your hair over something like that, I'll give you antifungals, but go to the dermatologist. If they tell you it's alopecia, stop taking those immediately.' Because I couldn't get into the dermatologist for a couple of days. So then I went there and that's when I got diagnosed and they said it's definitely triggered by stress. It's an autoimmune disorder, but you get triggered through stress and that's when it happens. So you have to chill out. But in that situation, that was crazy, that was like flight or flight, super adrenaline.

But then I started to feel better cause he's like 'yes, there's things we can do.' So I would go in every like six weeks to get steroid shots in the spot and eventually it was like, well you don't need to get these shots anymore, it'll keep growing on its own. You can just come as needed. And that was January of last year that that happened. So I haven't had it again since then. I don't know when I'll get it again, if I'll ever get it again. I hope I don't get it again, but I probably will. But it's not something you should think about too much and stress yourself out. So I just try not to stress out too much. I don't know how exactly you do that, but since that seems to be the trigger, cause there's nothing else. That's my experience with it.

Wow, thank you for sharing that. That's quite the story.

53:53 You wouldn't even like think it was real. And I know when it happened, people were like 'you should have just gave him like your phone.' And I was like 'maybe' but when you're in that situation, you don't know what to do, you just kind of do. And I got away with my person and all of my things. So can you say I did the wrong thing? Because it worked out. But yeah, if you're in a situation like that, you don't know what you're gonna do. I saw an out and I took it cause like my neighbour ran up, took the key fob, ran and got the door open and then I started running through the door and he was pulling me through and it actually like shut and locked

behind us. And then we just ran through all the stairwells, so we didn't wanna wait for the elevator. But yeah, that really happened.

Yeah I absolutely believe you. I'm sorry it feels so weird and inappropriate to go on with my other questions now after that story.

Well that's my experience with it so I have nothing else to... That's the only times it happened to me was under extreme stress.

But did you in any way relate or identify with the people who were involved in the scandal?

55:29 Sure, I felt for Jada. Or any woman that has hair loss, even regular female pattern hair loss. If you're like in the shower and it's just like all coming out, it's the worst feeling psychologically cause women are so attached to their hair, they really are. It's kind of silly, but we are very attached to it. So yeah if she was going through something like that and she was brave enough to be like 'I'm just gonna shave it all off.' I mean, that's pretty powerful and she looks beautiful, so it's like good for you.

But yeah, to make fun of something like that, it's pretty devastating. So I'm sure she felt some kind of way about it. Well, she did. So I could relate to that. No one's ever made fun of me because the only people that know about it would be my closest friends. I still have a lot of hair so I could cover it up. I could only wear it in certain styles for it not to be seen. So luckily nobody else saw it in my mind cause I didn't want them to. But the people that I eventually showed it to were just my friends. So obviously they're not gonna crack a joke about it. If they did, they might get slapped. It's just not something you joke about.

But what do you think, how did people living with alopecia as a sort of community, if I may so say so, how did people living with alopecia respond to the scandal?

57:26 Like I said, I think a lot of it is, even if they didn't like that it happened, they're glad that some awareness was brought to it. Because there's a lot of different forms of Alopecia. I just have one, I have Alopecia Areata so that's when you get like a perfect round bald spot. But there's other types where it's just that your hairline or it's all of your hair. There's many different types and it happens to a lot of people, but nobody talks about it. It's just because it's embarrassing and nobody wants to talk about it. So I think as far as that goes, the community felt more seen and they don't view that as a bad thing. I feel like ultimately that's how they feel, that it was good exposure.

So do you feel that the response from the community was rather unified or were there any different opinions within the community as well?

58:46 There was different opinions. I would say it was like, as far as my thread, I don't know the whole community. I would say it was like 70/30, like 70% okay with it, 30% absolutely not. Or they're kind of in the same position as me, like 50/50 on it. Like of course it was wrong that that happened, but I don't feel sorry for the guy that it happened.

But there wasn't like a huge, like no, everyone had different opinions. Some people were pretty passionate about hating the fact that Will Smith did what he did. So it's not just limited to the general public, within the community there's differing opinions on that.

But do you think the scandal was in any way substantial for people living with alopecia?

59:49 Maybe, I can't say that for sure.

But in your opinion?

I think so, just because it brought a lot of attention to it. That's never happened before.

So it's about awareness?

It's about awareness. Because like I said, when it happened to me, I didn't know what the hell it was. So if it happens to someone else, maybe they'll know what it is and they can go and get the correct treatment.

Well from my side, I don't have any further questions for you. Is there anything you would like to add or feel that you didn't get to say?

No, I said everything. I'm surprised I was able to talk that long about it, it's such a short clip.

Appendix 5. Coding Process

Descriptive Coding on NVivo

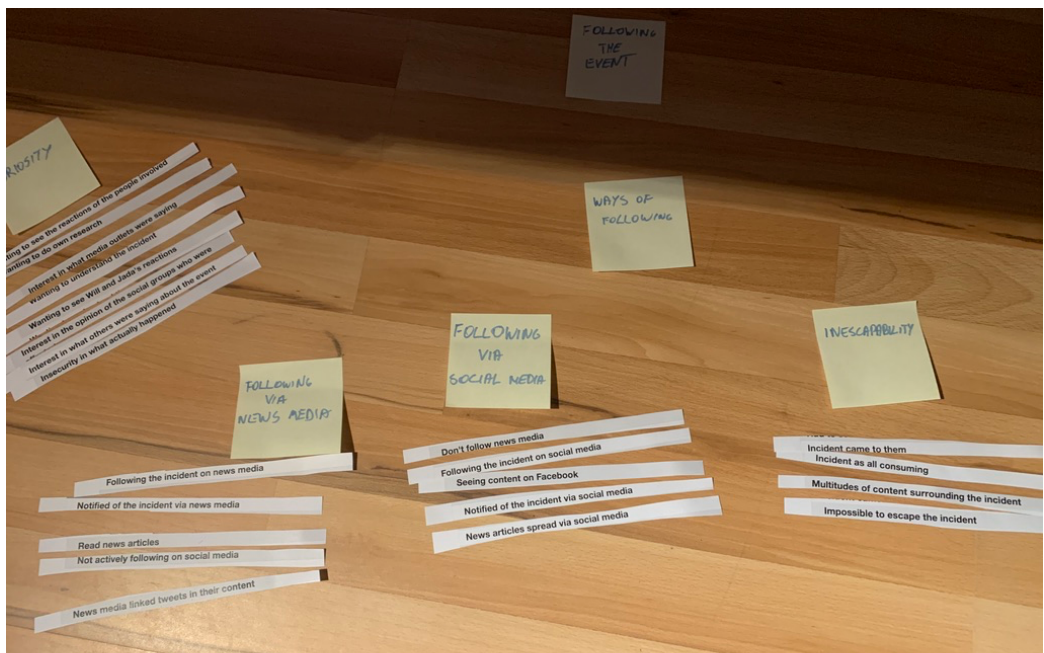
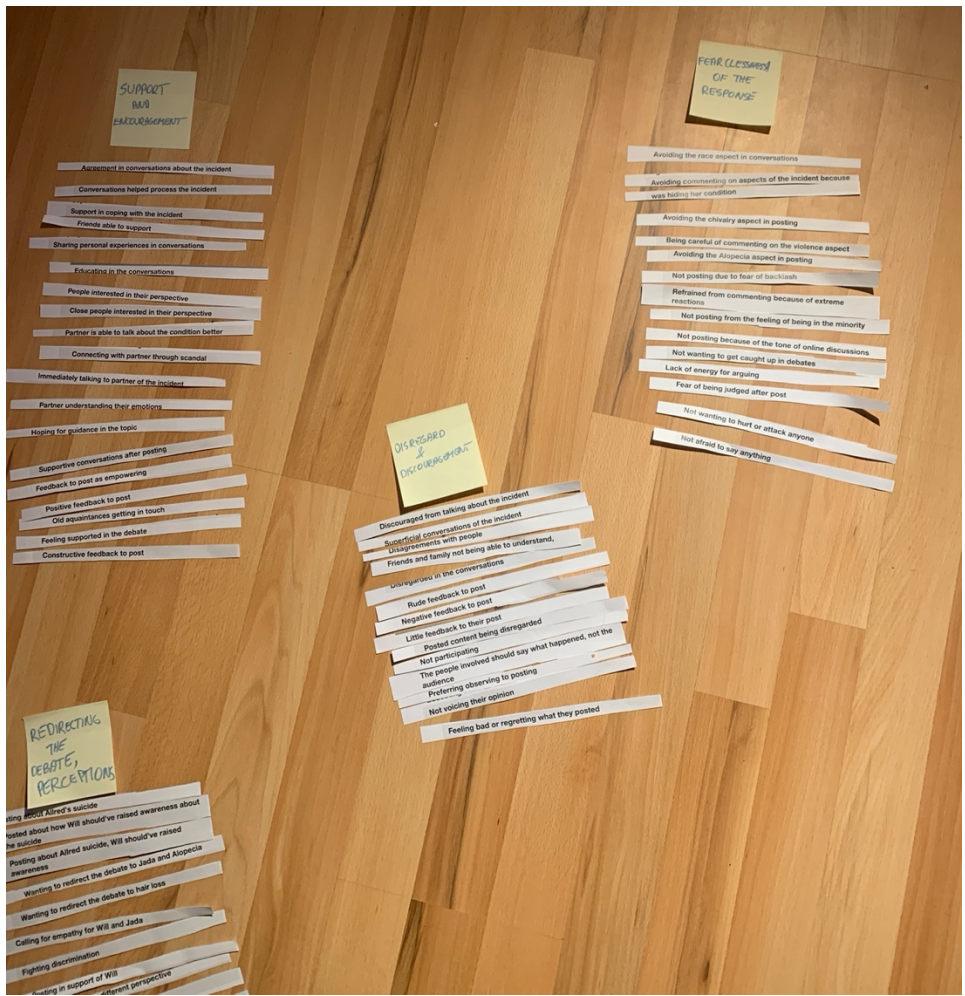
Initial unanalytical approach to clustering descriptive codes:

>	● Alopecia experiences and identities	0
>	● Chris	0
>	● Community response	0
>	● Feelings	0
>	● Forgiveness	0
>	● Jada	0
>	● Larger issues relating to incident	0
∨	● Motivations	0
	● Desire to support people with hair loss	2
	● Discussion as entertainment	1
	● Interest in Alopecia related topics	1
	● Interest in what media outlets were saying	1
>	● Interest in what others were saying about the event	5
	● Motivation from personal experience with hair loss	5
>	● Wanting to see the reactions of the people involved	2
	● Wanting to understand the incident	2
>	● Nature of the discussion	0
>	● Nothing constructive from the scandal	1
>	● Perceiving the transgression	0
>	● Rio Allred suicide	3
>	● Visibility and awareness for alopecia through the incident	3
>	● Voicing their opinion	0
>	● Ways of following the event	0
>	● Who was affected	0
>	● Will	0

Excerpts from coded transcripts:

<p>How did you follow the incident and the debate around it, in general?</p> <p>01:57 I mostly, like I said, I was looking at what other people from the same community were saying about it so I was reading their opinions and whatever came on my feed, I quickly read it to also see, I guess as a journalism student I was curious what other magazines and media would say or how they would approach it or mostly what they'd say about Alopecia in general, but usually it was just like one line explaining what the disease is, not really much more than that. It was always focused more on Will Smith and the person he slapped.</p> <p>So the main platforms that you used to follow it were Instagram and Facebook. Do you remember how long did you follow the incident for or what was the duration of the scandal for you?</p> <p>03:00 I think it was a couple of weeks, maybe 1-2 weeks and then it slowly kind of faded out. It wasn't much more than that. I think it was between the slap itself and then a couple of weeks later there was the announcement that Will Smith should be banned from the awards for 10 years or something? And I think after that it kind of died out, honestly.</p> <p>Why did you decide to follow the scandal, if you recall?</p> <p>03:36 That's the thing, I don't think I actually actively followed it, I was more curious at the beginning when I saw all the reactions to it. So I was more curious, okay how are people discussing this because I saw it more, as much as I condemn violence, I was definitely not agreeing with the way he handled the situation, I was like 'okay well at least it's an occasion to discuss what Alopecia is and bring it to the mainstream media' but I was kind of disappointed to see that it still was mostly about Will Smith himself and usually the whole Alopecia thing came in the background because they were like 'oh he's defending his woman' but they weren't really explaining why he had to defend to her or he felt like he had to defend her</p>	<p>Chris, Will and Jada as affected by the scandal</p> <p>Skepticism of the media coverage</p> <p>Relating to Jada</p> <p>Feeling sad</p> <p>Incident hurt the Alopecia community</p> <p>Superficial conversations of the incident</p> <p>Interest in what the Alopecia community was thinking</p> <p>No representation of Alopecia</p> <p>Humour as a coping mechanism</p> <p>Desire to support people with hair loss</p> <p>Coding Density</p> <p>Interest in what others were saying about the event</p> <p>Not actively following the incident</p>
<p>06:06 The most things that I saw, like comments on videos and stuff was mostly everyone being upset about him, saying Will Smith is trash and they can't believe he did something like that, it was just a joke like what's the big deal? There were a few people that were like 'I don't mind that he did that, that was messed up, he shouldn't have said something like that.' And so I was like, I feel like I'm in the minority so I don't want to like say too much and just get like completely exacerbated online. But since I'm in the, I joined that Alopecia Areta group or thread on Reddit. I forget what they're called, those pages. I'm kind of new to Reddit, cause I wanted to see what other people thought about it in that group cause we're the ones that have had it, right? So I'm like 'did it feel good to you when you did that or do you think it was bad?' And a lot of them weren't mad at it. I think there were more people on that group that said that they were happy that it happened to him than didn't. So I thought that was interesting. So I feel like a lot of people felt the way, like I just said, like they lived vicariously through it. Like 'good because you shouldn't say stuff like that' because people were really sensitive about that, you know? It's a big deal like losing your hair. And you know, he may say it's just a joke, but that's not something you joke about.</p> <p>And to me it was also hypocritical because a few years ago he did a whole documentary called 'Good Hair' because his daughter asked him, why doesn't she have good hair? So he went around to all these salons talking with all these black women and it was like this super empowering documentary about how you should love your own hair and not be influenced by like European standards and you're fine just the way you are. And then he makes a bald joke. So it's like those two things don't go together for me, I don't know what he was thinking. Because you can say it was a compliment because Demi Moore looked great in that movie, but he meant it to be a joke. He didn't mean it to be a compliment. Obviously Jada looks great the way she is, but if you're sensitive about something like that and it's illness-related, maybe you shouldn't joke about that.</p>	<p>Appreciating someone stand up for them or Jada</p> <p>Joking about looks</p> <p>Larger public does not need to be involved</p> <p>Incident raised awareness of Alopecia</p> <p>Manufactured outrage</p> <p>Hiding baldness</p> <p>Condemning the joke</p> <p>Interest in what the Alopecia community was thinking</p> <p>Coding Density</p>

Analytical coding





Final Coding Table

Themes	Categories	Subcategories	Descriptions	Example
Forgiveness	Potential for forgiveness		Codes where interviewees talked about who might get forgiveness and different factors that might influence it	I think everybody. I think everybody played a part. Everybody's played a part in it
		Forgiveness as something to be earned	Codes where interviewees talked about the following actions of those involved in the incident and how they play into earning forgiveness for different parties.	I think there's possibility for this situation to be redeemed by the individuals involved publicly showing some kind of insight and responsibility for their actions
		Temporality of scandals	Codes where interviewees talked about the temporal nature of scandals, how people just move on and that serves as a substitute for forgiveness.	I don't know if there will be forgiveness so much as people will just forget about it.
Transgression	Perceiving the transgression	Levels and dynamics of violence	Codes where interviewees talked about how serious is a slap as a form of violence, the intentionality of it, what factors might have been at play in the slap. Slap as an act of chivalry is here too.	I looked into it more and then I heard about, or I read about all the issues that Chris Rock and the Smiths had outside of that drama
		Contesting the norms of comedy	Codes where interviewees talked about what sort of humour is appropriate, how the joke was perceived, the intentionality of it.	low blows should not be seen as funny
	Hostile publics	Intensities	Codes where interviewees talked about the powerful response the event facilitated and the feelings of those who were participating in the discussion.	I felt like it was a really, really exaggerated response.
		Attention & shadowing	Codes where interviewees talked about the topics that dominated over others, who or what got left out of the conversation, sensationalism, memification and a general inadequacy to cover the important topics in the debate, how the incident was a missed opportunity to educate.	This was not a discussion about alopecia, it was a discussion about you shouldn't use violence in any case.
		Ignorance & discrimination	Codes where interviewees talked about people's inadequacy to fully grasp the factors at play in the incident, understand the situation but still comment on it, discriminate or bully the people involved in the incident and their disagreement with such tendencies.	But like the conversations that people were having on the internet, the comments, how they were continually making fun of her or talking about bald-headed bitches
		Divided opinions	Codes where the interviewees talked about how the incident separated people into different stances who were debating on social media.	It was really divided in terms of, most political things, people get really-really divided so there was a really divisive tone in the air around it where it almost looked like people started becoming unsafe, it became an unsafe space to talk about it.
	Outcomes	Affecting people with Alopecia	Codes where interviewees reflected on if the incident was substantial to people with Alopecia, how it affected the community and how it raised awareness.	I would summarize the slap scandal as being an unexpected historical event of the Oscars that was able to shine a light on the Alopecia community
		Affecting the actors involved in the incident	Codes where interviewees reflected on how Will Smith, Jada Pinkett Smith and Chris Rock were affected with the incident.	Well their family, them, their family, their friends. I'm sure nobody wanted to even touch Will Smith, he was a pariah, he made himself a pariah for a little bit, you know.
		Affecting minorities	Codes where interviewees reflected on how black people and women were affected with the scandal.	A lot of the black community was affected
	Identity	Social exclusion	Social standards	Codes where interviewees talked about the beauty standards of society, especially for women.
		Discrimination	Codes where interviewees talked about how they have been discriminated against or been bullied.	my long time experience of feeling like my scalp is a projection screen for people's shit, they've projected on to me
		Social taboo	Codes where interviewees talked about the (in)visibility of the condition in society, how people don't know how to talk about it, avoid the topic and show little awareness of it.	And this issue has been so kind of hushed or taboo, I feel like there's just not a lot of education or whatever about Alopecia.
Identity work		Negotiation & (self)resentment	Codes where interviewees talked about the hardships of their condition, how it has affected their image and how they hid their condition.	So you have to cover it up in any way you can until it grows back. You look at it all the time. It's very emotional, it's very stressful. It's the worst, one of the worst feelings ever.
		Support & coping	Codes where interviewees talked about different support mechanisms they had for coping with their condition, such as humour, community and also how they are supporting other people going through the same journey	I love to make jokes a lot, that's my defence mechanism
		Self-acceptance	Codes where interviewees talked about how they have accepted their condition.	Now, I'm probably at a place where I'm accepting it, you know, I just living with it
Engagement and Participation	Motivations	Motivation from own experience/identity	Codes where interviewees talked about how they followed and/or participated the incident due to their personal experience with hair loss, wanting to spread awareness, be supportive and see how the Alopecia community felt.	It was because as someone with Alopecia, I mean I know I'm not bald so it's different, but I wanted to see what other people thought of it
		Curiosity	Codes where interviewees talked about how they wanted to find out more about what happened to comprehend the incident.	So then I was hooked – what really happened, what are people thinking about it, what does it mean to people?
	Ways of following the event	Following via news media	Codes where interviewees explained how they followed the incident on news media.	think the first time I noticed it was probably just Google in my newsfeed.
		Following via social media	Codes where interviewees explained how they followed the incident on social media.	It's been a while but I would say that mostly it was through social media so either Facebook or Instagram.
		Inescapability of the incident	Codes where interviewees explained how the incident was impossible to escape from, the omnipresence of it.	No, it came to me. Yeah, it was just news everywhere, all social media, everything, minutes after it happened.
	Emotions and affect	Duration of engagement	Codes where interviewees talked about the duration of their engagement with the scandal.	I think it was a couple of weeks, maybe 1-2 weeks and then it slowly kind of faded out
		Empathy for Jada	Codes where interviewees showed empathy, understanding or compassion to what Jada was going through with the incident and her condition.	I can relate easily with Jada. I feel her pain
		Empathy for Will	Codes where interviewees showed empathy, understanding or compassion to what Will did.	I never hit anybody about it, cause I'm not really that kind of a person. I can certainly understand how someone might.
		Empathy for Chris	Codes where interviewees showed empathy, understanding or compassion to Chris.	And then Chris Rock too, maybe just saying something off the cuff that wasn't very well thought out and you know, that made such a huge moment for all of them. I can empathise and sympathise for all of them in it and definitely relate to it.
	Participation	Positive emotions	Codes where interviewees mentioned the positive emotions they had regarding the case such as happiness, feeling proud or entertained.	And I was proud that he was defending us. I felt like he was taking our side.
		Negative emotions	Codes where interviewees mentioned the negative emotions they had regarding the case such as feeling powerless, sad, frustrated, disappointed, traumatised, etc.	I was disappointed and also powerless that I can't change them, to see through difficulties with Alopecia.
		Fear(lessness) of the response	Codes where interviewees talked about how they avoided certain topics, were afraid of the reactions to their content or refrained from commenting because of the nature of discussions, but also how some were not afraid of the response.	And so I was like, I feel like I'm in the minority so I don't want to like say too much and just get like completely exacerbated online.
		Redirecting the debate and perceptions	Codes where interviewees explained the various ways in which they tried to change people's perceptions of what happened, tried to change the behaviour of people commenting online or tried to direct attention to matters that were disregarded.	my content about it, not in conversations was about reinforcing the part of the conversation that I felt like was not being had.
		Support and encouragement	Codes where interviewees talked about the supportive conversations they had off- and online, how people were interested in their perspective, how they were agreement with people they talked to.	they wanted to know kind of from my point of view what I think about it, maybe to help them to also process the situation.
	Disregard and discouragement	Codes where interviewees talked about negative feedback they received, how people don't understand their perspective and how they refrained from commenting on the issue.	I thought I could see that register with some people but it was quickly swallowed up by this cry of 'let's get Jada as a spokesperson' (laughs) so that was the most I talked about it	