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From ‘low-class’ and ‘talentless’ to ‘narcissist and pathological liar’: a functional-pragmatic approach to Meghan Markle’s negative evaluation on X

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Abstract: This paper looks into how aggression against Meghan Markle is deployed in a sample of X replies that address her directly through the lens of Appraisal Theory coupled with impoliteness. A sample of tweets containing the seed word “Meghan Markle” was retrieved with Export Comments (December 2022–April 2023). Replies were run through the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count-22 to assess the tone and prevalence of emotions in the corpus. Results indicated high values for negative emotions, interpersonal conflict, and moralization words. Then, a random sample was manually codified to identify the use frequencies for the Attitude system’s affect, judgment, and appreciation categories when employed to convey hostility against the public figure. Tweets were overwhelmingly negative and explicitly conveyed through the negative judgment of Meghan Markle’s previous sexual and professional life. The veracity of her words and actions was also a source of aggression while tapping into the widely accepted stereotype that depicts women as liars or as incompetent and lacking determination, while some tweets also touched upon her mental instability. Findings reveal that aggressive tweets on X rely on appraisal resources and impolite-related language to promote and perpetuate culturally bound and traditional beliefs about women that ultimately reflect an underlying patriarchal system.

Keywords: aggression/hostility; impoliteness; appraisal; judgments of propriety; judgements of veracity; feminine stereotypes

1 Introduction

This paper takes as a starting point the fact that much of our interaction and engagement with others, primarily through virtual means, involves the expression of

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interpersonal meaning. In other words, online participation means sharing opinions, engaging with others, and responding to their posts. Since the advent of Web 2.0, it is undeniable that most of our online activities also involve sharing emotions and assessing thoughts, individuals, and objects (cf. Cavasso and Taboada 2021; Derewianka 2008) while creating bonds and affiliations (Zappavigna 2012). In this respect, evaluative content emerges as a prominent feature within online and social media language where many-to-one and many-to-many online interactions are the norm. When individuals articulate their viewpoints and constructive critiques, they assume a position concerning the subject under consideration. Hence, stance-taking fundamentally encompasses articulating one's attitudes, value-based judgments, and evaluative perspectives by participants in discourse (Martin and White 2005).

Social media, particularly micro-blogging sites like X, constitute platforms where participants can evaluate other participants negatively or positively based on what they post and other related factors, such as the expectations of what is considered appropriate behavior for the community members where the exchanges occur. Previous research by del Saz-Rubio (2023) has indicated that, in general, moral considerations lie at the core of much of the negative and even impolite evaluations we carry out daily (cf. Kádár 2017; Parvaresh 2019). In addition, impoliteness can arise in the context of social groups reacting to a "collective emotion" (Durkheim [1912] 1995). This label refers to emotions and viewpoints that emerge from groups with similar values that are fundamental to their sense of belonging (Sullivan 2015).

Additionally, digital platforms have become sites where impolite and hostile/aggressive behavior amongst participants tends to be the norm (del Saz-Rubio 2023). The fluid nature of online social interaction allows participants to deploy linguistic strategies that can promote harmony and maintain social links or that, on the contrary, can intentionally cause social conflict with the addressee (Limberg 2009). Some factors contributing to the escalation of online hostility are the anonymity and pseudonymity of those posting. Anonymity is broadly understood as a concept that varies from complete anonymity to simply a perceived sense of it. The idea stems from the belief that digital spaces offer a unique environment distinct from physical interactions, often considered less serious, more liberating, and valued differently. This perception of anonymity significantly impacts online behavior (Joinson 2003), even though individuals frequently disclose their names, photos, and affiliations on social media, in video blogs, or through emails (McKenna and Bargh 1998). Thus, anonymity is believed to diminish adherence to social conventions significantly, as individuals do not perceive the risk of being held accountable for their actions (Wallace 2016). This leads to disinhibition, that is, a reduction of concern for self-presentation and the judgment of others or the so-called *Gyges effect* (Hardaker 2013), which can make participants more prone to engage in cyberbullying or trolling since their behavior cannot be linked to their real-world identities.

In addition to this, some studies have indicated that social media, as an expansion of offline environments, are sites that reproduce intolerance against gender, race, class, and sexuality (Vickery and Everbach 2018). More specifically, extant research has put the onus on social media platforms as environments where women are predominantly harassed and attacked (Del Saz-Rubio 2024; Felmlee et al. 2020). Starting from Instagram's portrayal and objectification of women's bodies (Caldeira et al. 2018; Mauro and Schellmann 2023) to the general reluctance of many social media platforms to oversee channels focused on disseminating misogynistic content and upholding conventional perspectives on gender and roles (Kemekenidou 2020: 234), social media platforms continue to provide a fertile ground for the growth of sexism and hostility. X has been no exception (Del Saz-Rubio 2024; Xu et al. 2012). This situation is particularly severe in the case of women with high public visibility online, as is the case of celebrities, to the extent that 'celebrity bashing' (Ouvrein et al. 2021) and online body and slut shaming have been identified as damaging practices mainly addressed towards female celebrities across different platforms, such as Instagram (Hamid et al. 2018), X (Felmlee et al. 2018, 2020) and TikTok (Omana 2020).

One example is the abuse and vitriol received by Meghan Markle (henceforth MM), especially on X and Facebook (Mahfouz 2018), as a relevant figure that embodies several intricate issues, including race, gender discrimination, as well as the distinction between royals and commoners in addition to her being a former actress and a divorcee (Hirsch 2018:16). In other words, the decision to focus on MM as the object of analysis was motivated by her controversial character after entering the British royal family, her wedding to Prince Harry, and their decision to resign and step down from their duties as senior royals and move to North America. Even though the royal wedding received extensive media attention, MM faced long-standing criticism (Bet 2018), including a noticeable rise in discriminatory and derogatory remarks targeted at her online, which culminated with the situation being labeled by the media as the 'Megxit' (Rahimli 2020) in clear reference to the UK's withdrawal from the European Union and the 'drama' ensuing the royals stepping down from their royal duties. In this vein, some authors have corroborated how her media treatment went from pure adulation to utter censure (Yelin and Clancy 2021) against the backdrop of a supposedly hospitable environment for her as a bi-racial, divorced, and self-proclaimed feminist (Duncan and Low 2018), all being attributes that posed a challenge to the white national identity – closely attached to the monarchy – in Brexit-era Britain (Pramaggiore and Kerrigan 2021). Thus, MM encountered extensive unfavorable media attention and a significant decline in popularity, rendering her highly susceptible to becoming a subject of online verbal aggression and antagonism.

On its part, while evaluative language is amongst the linguistic strategies deployed to maintain social links and establish rapport (Hunston and Thompson

2000; Martin and White 2005), some studies have used the Appraisal System to show how a selection of evaluative resources can be enacted to obtain the opposite effect: that is, to attack and de-legitimize the character of political opponents, as shown in Ross and Caldwell's article (2020) on Trump's use of negativity; or to attribute blame to British government ministers based on negative judgments of their capacity, veracity, or propriety, as in Hansson et al.'s research (2022). In other words, negative or impolite comments can be linguistically realized via certain appraisal devices. In this line, Mills (2003) contends that the concepts of (im)politeness and their evaluative expressions are inherently intertwined, substantiating the idea that negative evaluations could lead to impoliteness or aggression, especially if posters negatively judge the appropriacy of others' behaviors (Haidt 2012; Kádár 2017). This is the area I would like to explore further in this research. Accordingly, a pragmatic and systemic approach will be followed to analyze a sample of tweets targeting one specific public figure, Meghan Markle.

Although there is an expanding body of scholarly research investigating language usage in broad online contexts (Crystal 2011) and in specific registers – such as X (Zappavigna 2012) or Facebook (Farina 2018) – the body of research exploring the characteristics of appraisal mechanisms in linguistic interactions on social media and how they are deployed via impolite-related language is limited. Against this backdrop, this research aims to fill this gap by (i) exploring the discourse semantic resources most frequently used by posters to construct a negative portrayal of MM in their tweets via the enactment of certain appraisal devices and the deployment of impolite-related language (Culpeper 2010; Del Saz-Rubio 2023) that diminishes her public image; and (ii) to assess whether the negative appraisal of MM rests upon the invocation of core themes that tap into gender-based representations or feminine stereotypes, as documented in previous studies.

To achieve these objectives, I will first conduct sentiment analysis to assess the general tone of the whole corpus of tweets retrieved from December 2022 to March 2023 with the help of the *Export Comments* tool. My starting hypothesis will be that the tweets addressed at MM are mainly of negative valence. Afterward, I will perform a corpus-assisted quantitative analysis of a reduced sample of tweets that contain the seed word “Meghan Markle” to identify the appraisal categories (within the Attitude system) most frequently deployed by posters to present their stance toward Meghan Markle. After that, the most relevant sub-types within Attitude will be qualitatively described and illustrated by focusing on the impolite-related strategies deployed to convey an evaluative attitude. On top of this, and considering the potential of micro-blogging sites like X for misogyny, it is also the aim of this piece of research to assess whether the negative appraisal of MM taps into gender-based categories.

The remainder of the article is as follows. Section 2 situates the study within the literature on gender stereotyping on social media, aggression toward celebrities, and the framework of appraisal and impoliteness. Section 3 explains the methodology of analysis and dataset selection procedures. Section 4 presents and discusses quantitative and qualitative findings, while Section 5 offers concluding remarks and venues for further research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Gender stereotyping on social media and celebrity critiquing

Mass media have always played a role in disseminating information and providing entertainment but also in influencing and molding our views and attitudes (McLuhan 1964) through the portrayal of gender stereotyping. Thus, women have often been depicted as deeply involved in domestic tasks (cooking, family health, children) or as ornamental and sexual figures in advertising (Del Saz Rubio 2018a 2018b; Goffman 1979; Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia 1977) and TV programs. Even if there have been observable shifts in the depiction of gender roles, it is argued that the media still predominantly showcases a world deeply entrenched in stereotypes. If we turn our gaze to the role of social media, the situation is not much more optimistic.

Even though social media were initially theorized as a way to offer girls and women a broader platform to extend their reach, share opinions, foster connections, and exchange social capital (Senft 2008), while challenging restrictive gender norms (see Bailey et al. 2013; Hüber and Baena-Quesada 2023), the truth is that these social media are also responsible for the spread and reinforcement of traditional gendered stereotypes (Felmlee et al. 2018; Ward and Grower 2020). In this vein, Felmlee et al.'s study (2018: 18) corroborates that “acts of aggressive behavior oriented toward women on X (formerly Twitter) tap into many of these same core themes in feminine stereotypes”. Results from Felmlee et al.'s mixed-methods study evidenced that aggressive online messages addressed to women often used language that implied that they lack feminine stereotypes and ideals, in particular those of physical attractiveness, niceness, and sexual purity. Likewise, in studies dealing with aggression towards female politicians carried out by Esposito and Zollo (2021), who investigated online misogyny against UK MPs on YouTube, findings indicated that Web 2.0 has facilitated the proliferation of sexist, insulting, and threatening messages addressed to female politicians in what they

refer to as *technology-facilitated gender-based violence*. Another study by Del Saz-Rubio (2024), which dealt with aggression towards three Spanish female politicians, found that aggression towards them was conveyed through insults and negative comments questioning their intelligence, physical appearance, political affiliation but also the morality of their decisions; while some of the politicians also received more insults and sexist negative comments focusing on their sexuality and subordination to male figures. All these studies show that women in visible positions receive aggression and hostility.

Likewise, online celebrity bashing in the form of public shaming via negative commenting seems common on social media (see Felmlee et al. 2018, 2020; Ouvrein et al. 2021; Qamar et al. 2020, *inter alia*). Thus, it takes a mere few seconds to find an online comment that refers to a female celebrity as too ugly, too fat, or too slutty (Eronen 2014). As in public-shaming cases of ordinary individuals, these practices can have negative implications for their personal and professional lives, a phenomenon amplified by social media, with X and TikTok being known for serious cases of celebrity shaming (Omana 2020) in which posters massively contributed to the spreading of this bashing phenomenon through liking, sharing or retweeting. Online bashing is often oriented toward traits that are accessible and observable, especially physical and sexual appearance or celebrity appearance-shaming (Felmlee et al. 2018). In this vein, a content analysis carried out by Qamar et al. (2020) found that 7 out of 10 comments addressed at female celebrities referred to their physical appearance and sexual objectification.

2.2 Meghan Markle and the socio-political context of the moment

Previous studies have identified two main phases for the persona construction of MM before she departed from royal duties in 2020: her *celebrity* phase, in which she acquired celebrity status “through achievement” (Yelin and Paule 2021) before her relationship with Prince Harry; and her *royal* phase, right after her marriage to him. During this phase, the British royal family had a vested interest in cultivating and maintaining her persona to reinforce significance and relevance to modern British and Commonwealth societies (Randell-Moon 2017). Meghan Markle was, after all, the first person of color to marry into the British royal family, and her (bi)racial identity, as well as her identity as an American, proved problematic for the construction of her royal persona, as her entry into the royal family put the ethno-racial dimensions of heritage on the limelight. Despite this, her persona was turned into an asset for the royal family to connect to a racially diverse Britain and the Commonwealth of Nations in an attempt to align that heritage with the royal brand and, ultimately,

“to mitigate the narrative of Markle as a threat and instead present her as a potentially unifying figure for the Commonwealth” (Carniel 2021:41).

After the royal phase, her persona work signals a third phase in which the couple left the country and renounced royal duties in 2020, and this is the one being dealt with in this article, considering the chronology of the tweets that make up the corpus of analysis. However, the analysis carried out here cannot be fully grasped if we fail to note that MM’s integration into British society occurred during a time marked by increased concerns regarding immigration, xenophobia, and a heightened sense of British exceptionalism, with Brexit potentially serving as a consequence rather than a root cause of these tensions. Thus, despite the hopes that the mixed-race marriage brought for black people in Britain as a sign of modernity and the end of alleged racism, the truth is that this union also challenged the view of an ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse Britain (Carniel 2021). As will be shown in the analysis below, MM’s biraciality becomes a source of dispute not only for posters that belong to the elites and non-white elites but also for those of African origin who do not feel represented by her.

In this context, and given her controversial persona and the long-standing history of vitriol and hatred received on social media, the decision to focus on how evaluative language is deployed to attack MM is well justified. Similarly, this study adds insights into the expanding literature on celebrity critiquing across different platforms, as stated above, by delving into its semantic manifestations.

In addition, by focusing on a specialized corpus of tweets posted by commenters who share similar perceptions of reality and have their views supported by peers (Jamieson and Cappella 2008) – as members of the same echo chamber – I wanted to dissect further how evaluative language contributes to this negative and even hostile representation of MM through the enactment of impolite-related language. Studies like this are pertinent considering that discussions on social media, as the case that occupies us here about Meghan Markle, are often characterized by ideological polarization and, thus, infused with linguistic tactics that transgress established social decorum and even basic civility. As a result, the atmosphere can be one where negative emotions are rife and where the aim is to attack, disparage, or hurt the participants’ feelings and/or public or private image; that is, impoliteness is at work.

2.3 Appraisal Theory and the impoliteness pragmatic approach

In this study, the main/core analytical framework revolves around Appraisal Theory (thus AT), a social semiotic approach to investigating how text producers utilize evaluative language to foster alignment among readers regarding shared values

and attitudes (Martin and White 2005).¹ Appraisal comprises Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, which constitute the three central systems of AT. Attitude deals with the semantic resources used to express emotions, judgments, and valuations. In contrast, Engagement and Graduation engage with, source, and amplify those evaluations and the positions taken within a text. The Engagement system is based on a distinction between utterances that engage with dialogic alternatives and those that do not. Lastly, the Graduation mechanism involves linguistic elements that essentially rank emotions, entities, and attitudes in a general sense. Attitude is analyzed according to positive or negative valence. Thus, *happy* and *sad* in “Meghan Markle is happy/sad”, convey positive and negative polarity, respectively. Attitude can also be inscribed or invoked. Under the label of inscribed, evaluations are explicitly presented via lexical items (“Meghan Markle is *evil*”). In contrast, invoked attitude is expressed by grouping several words that evoke favorable or unfavorable judgments.

As the central system, Attitude concerns how the speaker/writer can express feelings and evaluate people and things through the semantic domains of Affect, Judgment, or Appreciation (see Figure 1). Affect is how one feels or “deals with resources for construing emotional reactions” (Martin and White 2005: 35). Judgment concerns the ethical evaluation of a person’s behavior and character according to various normative principles (Martin and White 2005: 35), also conceived as a given group’s values and ideologies. On its part, appreciation refers to the aesthetic evaluation of products and processes (Martin and White 2005: 35).

Judgments of social esteem pertain to attitudinal valuations that do not carry legal ramifications, as shown in Figure 2 below. More precisely, actions falling within

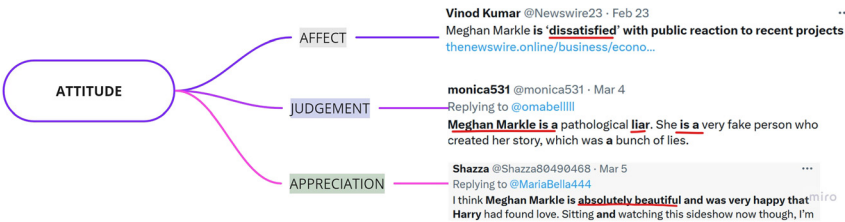


Figure 1: Examples of the three sub-systems within attitude from the MM’s corpus.

1 It should be noted that there can be other resources to convey evaluative language in online exchanges. However, I will limit this study to the semantic domains within the Attitude system. Appraisal Theory provides a detailed and systematic framework, as it categorizes evaluation into three main domains, and this has allowed me to capture a broader range of evaluative meanings compared to other theories, such as stance-taking or metadiscourse. The fact that it is rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics was also crucial as this theory emphasizes the importance of context. Finally, I believe its applicability across different genres and modes makes it a more versatile tool for discourse analysis than stance-taking, for instance.

the purview of social esteem are subject to evaluation based on societal norms that subdivide into judgments of normality, how unusual a person is (*conventional, traditional, eccentric, normal looking*); judgments of capacity, how capable someone is to perform a task (*brilliant, skillful, talentless, lazy*); and judgments of tenacity, how resolute someone is (*determined, strongwilled, obstinate, coward, brave*).

On its part, judgments of social sanction encompass a framework of guidelines that carry legal and moral ramifications. Actions falling within the scope of social sanction are subject to assessment based on either ethical principles or legal stipulations, whereby unfavorable behaviors are frequently denounced as transgressions or subject to punitive measures as criminal acts (see Figure 3). Appraisals of human conduct revolve around the principles of veracity, how truthful someone is (*honest, credible, deceitful, liar*), and judgments of propriety, how ethical someone’s behavior is (*good, fair, unfair, corrupt, or evil*).

However, for the more qualitative analysis of the corpus sample selected, I will complement this more systemic approach with the pragmatic approach of impoliteness, as both frameworks share an interest in meaning, social function, context, and language users. Moreover, previous research has demonstrated Appraisal

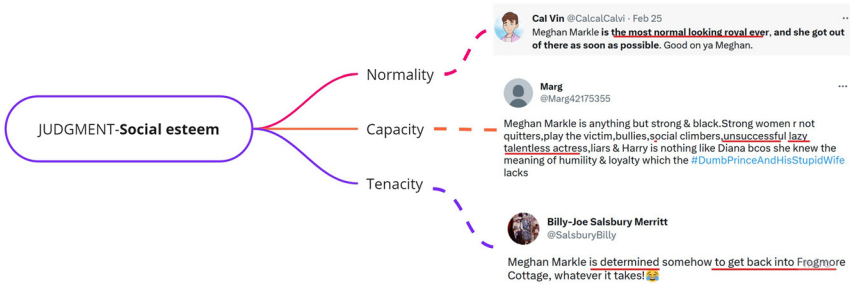


Figure 2: Examples of social-esteem judgment sub-types in the MM's corpus.

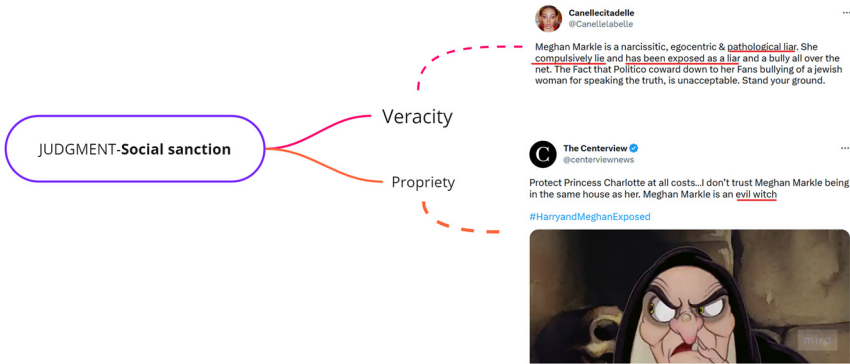


Figure 3: Examples of social-sanction judgment sub-types in the MM's corpus.

Theory's relevance for studying the phenomenon of (im)politeness (cf. Andersson 2022; García 2014). Thus, evaluative language will be studied to explain how it is exploited to convey impoliteness and aggression toward Meghan Markle.

Impoliteness is understood here as a second-order notion, that is, as an umbrella term to refer to inappropriate verbal behavior. Although the notion of impoliteness is sometimes employed interchangeably with other lay/first-order terms such as “rude, offensive or aggressive” (Watts 2003), I draw on Culpeper (2011: 72), who proposes the label “impoliteness” as a cover term for these related labels, so impolite, aggressive or hostile are terms to be understood as synonyms. I also take as a starting point that impoliteness on social media also fulfills an instrumental role in reinforcing and strengthening ties with those in the out-group. In this respect, the impoliteness dealt with here is instrumental as it is employed ‘to serve some instrumental goal’ (Beebe 1995: 154) on the part of participants of the social media platform, be it of an affiliative or coercive nature (cf. Culpeper 2011; Del Saz-Rubio 2023 for similar insights).

3 Data and corpus compilation

This article analyses tweets containing the seed word “Meghan Markle” from December 1st, 2022, to March 6th, 2023. To download the tweets, I used *Export Comments*, a software that allows one to download tweets through X's advanced search tool. In the initial phase, 6,319 tweets posted by respondents worldwide were collected. The corpus was then manually cleaned by eliminating repeats and tweets that only included emojis or HTTP addresses (memes or gifs) or were not evaluative *per se*. After cleaning the corpus, the final number of tweets was 5,698 (111,837 words).

As part of the corpus-assisted analysis, I first resorted to the Linguistic Inquiry WordCount-2022 (or *LIWC-22*, for short) (Boyd et al. 2022) to conduct sentiment analysis of the whole corpus and corroborate the general tone of the replies. The focus of sentiment analysis is on positive and negative evaluations conceived as a range of percentages (Pennebaker et al. 2015) and expressed in terms of strength of emotion or sentiment intensity (Liu 2015). *LIWC-22* is the fifth version of the original text analysis application (Boyd et al. 2022) that allows the assessment of sentiment or emotion associated with opinions by classifying words thanks to a default dictionary of over 12,000 words. Word stems are organized under 90-word linguistic or psychological categories and four summary psychological dimensions of language variables: *Clout*, *Authenticity*, *Analytic*, and *Emotional Tone*.²

2 These summary variables are derived by calculating measures and subsequently converting them into percentiles, using standardized scores obtained from extensive comparison corpora. They are standardized composite variables transformed to a scale from 1 to 100.

For this article, I have focused on *Tone* as it offers insights into polarized sentiment orientation embedded in the tweets and targeted toward the person of Meghan Markle. *Emotional Tone* results from subtracting negative tone words from positive tone ones. I have also considered the recently added dimension of *Emotion*, which provides information for the emotions of anxiety, anger, and sadness together with some aspects of the *Social Behaviors* variable, which comprises the subordinate categories of *politeness markers* (please, thank you) (Brown and Levinson 1987; Holtgraves and Joong-nam 1990); *interpersonal conflict* words that reflect conflict (Barki and Hartwick 2004); and *moralization words*, which reflect the judgmental language through which speakers make moral evaluations (either good or bad) about someone else's behavior or character (Brady et al. 2020). In any event, the purpose of *LIWC-22* was merely to test the hypothesis that tweets were negatively loaded in their majority.

Alongside *LIWC-22*, the next phase entailed the manual codification of a sub-corpus of 400 random tweets containing the seed word “Meghan Markle” through the lens of Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005) and impoliteness (Culpeper 1996; del Saz Rubio 2023). The 400 tweets were randomly selected through the Excel RAND or RANDBETWEEN functions. More precisely, *Attitude* provided the lens to critically analyze the discourse of hostility and aggression targeted at MM in this sub-corpus. Thus, each tweet was manually codified and classified, attending to whether the evaluation was *inscribed or invoked* and *positive or negative*. To classify the evaluative expressions within the Attitude types of affect, judgment, or appreciation, the 400 tweets were scrutinized by looking at the concordances where they appeared for contextual cues. This phase takes a pragmatic approach as meaning is typically negotiated in digital platforms, and evaluation should be assessed in context. In order to make the coding more reliable, a PhD student coded 10 % of the tweets with an intercoder reliability of 0.83. After that, I extracted information regarding the frequency distribution of the three sub-systems under assessment.

Finally, I conducted a detailed qualitative analysis of the themes most frequently invoked through judgment and enacted to attack and display hostility against MM. This qualitative critical discourse analysis ultimately aims to determine whether they tap into feminine stereotypes when attacking MM, taking previous studies in 2.2. into account. The proposed methodology presented here could provide a promising avenue for identifying the types and sub-types within the appraisal system most frequently deployed to attack public figures in larger datasets of online conflict talk.

All the tweets from the corpus and illustrated are reproduced in their original form, including typos, misspellings, and non-standard grammar, and the researcher does not endorse the views expressed. In the presentation of the data, I have followed the latest ethical principles and standards in pragmatics and social media research,

as delineated by Bolander and Locher (2019). After assessing the risks involved in the publication of posters' content, I did not feel bound to seek consent from participants (something which would have proved to be an unsurmountable task considering the number of tweets collected) due to the following reasons: (i) first, the online data utilized in this study is considered to be widely accessible to the public, as part of an open discussion on X in which the posters, despite not being public figures, took part. The fact that some of them made use of hashtags supports the belief that they intended their tweets to reach a wider audience; (ii) and second, the posters' content abides by the platform's rules and, in principle, does not violate X's policies regarding the publication of content, or the tweets would have been removed. Despite this, and taking into account that the content of some of the tweets might be sensitive, I decided to assess the risks involved in their publication and adopted a more nuanced ethical approach with a view on privacy rights first. Thus, I anonymized the tweets by deleting the posters' IDs and obscuring the identity of the person they were replying to.

4 Results

4.1 Overview of sentiment and emotion related lexis

The statistical values obtained after running *LIWC-22* on the 5,698 tweets that make up the MM corpus for the variables described in Section 3 above are shown in Figure 4, along with those obtained for the Test Kitchen Corpus³ (31 million words) in general and more specifically, for the sub-corpus of tweets as provided by the Kitchen Statistics (Figure 4). In other words, Figure 4 provides an overview of the statistical values obtained for each of the categories in (i) the Test Kitchen Corpus or *LIWC22* (light blue below); (ii) in the tweet component included in the Test Kitchen Corpus (grey below); and (iii) in the MM's corpus (dark blue below). Comparing the values obtained for the MM's corpus against the other two provides a general picture of how the different variables assessed perform in my sample, especially concerning the Test Kitchen Corpus, which acts as a benchmark.

Findings for the MM corpus point to lower values for emotional tone (15.3), positive emotions (0.97), and polite markers (0.26) in comparison with those for *LIWC22* and the Tweet subcorpus. In contrast, the values for negative emotions (1.7),

³ The Test Kitchen Corpus is a curated corpus broadly representing the many ways in which language is used. It was constructed from randomly selected subsets of text from across 15 different types of English language sets. Once built, it was used as a "test kitchen" to quantify and qualify the *LIWC-22* dictionary.

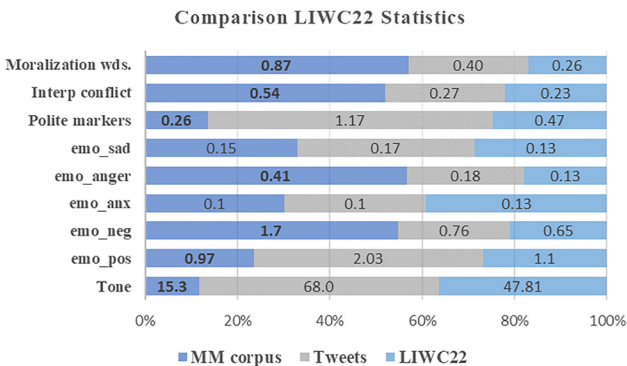


Figure 4: Results from LIWC-22 on MM corpus.

interpersonal conflict (0.57), and moralization words (0.87) are higher in the MM corpus than in the other two that work as a benchmark. This shows that language for moral judging and reflecting interpersonal conflict is pervasive in the MM corpus. Likewise, the MM corpus ranks higher for the emotion of anger (0.41), revealing that the expression of emotions is also relevant as MM becomes the focus of respondents’ affectual state. For the sadness and anxiety category, the three corpora show similar values.⁴

4.2 Frequency distribution of semantic sub-categories within the attitude system

Regarding the quantitative results for the frequency distribution of the sub-categories within the Attitude system, Figure 5 below points to an overwhelming majority of inscribed evaluation versus invoked assessment (86.8 % vs. 13.2 %); thus, evaluation is explicitly conveyed mainly through lexis, a result that was somehow expected considering that the corpus constitutes a polarized discussion about MM on social media. Regarding polarity, the MM corpus displays significant negative polarity (76.3 % vs. 23.7 %), meaning that most tweets containing the word seed ‘Meghan Markle’ are negatively loaded, and only a tiny percentage assesses MM positively. These findings reify and complement those obtained through *LIWC-22*.

⁴ In a word, running the corpus through LIWC-22 has allowed me to assess that the general tone of the corpus is negative; however, it should be noted that there is no correspondence between the categories measured and the sub-systems of Appraisal Theory.

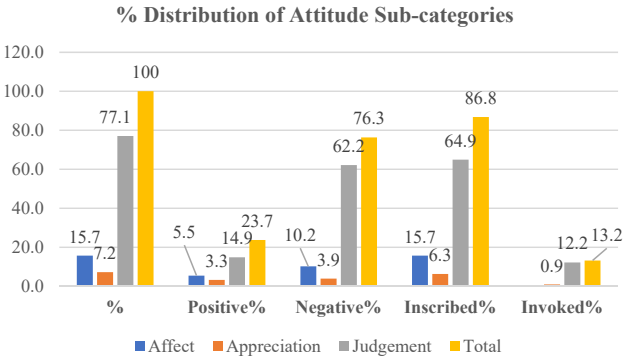


Figure 5: Distribution of sub-categories within the attitude system.

Overall, judgment is the most frequently deployed sub-system (77.1 %), followed at a distance by affect (15.7 %) and appreciation (7.2 %). This means that the assessment of the public figure of MM is heavily reliant on the negative scrutiny of how she is, acts, or looks. Not in vain, the sub-system of judgment encompasses the writer’s “attitudes to people and the way they behave” (Martin and White 2005: 52). In other words, MM’s character and how she measures up receive the focus of attention via judgment. These results are in line with Cavasso and Taboada’s (2021) study, which applies Appraisal Theory to a corpus of online comments and concludes that there is a preference to express highly opinionated language as an opinion (judgment and appreciation) rather than as an emotional reaction (affect).

A closer look at Figure 6 below reveals a significant disparity regarding the frequency of use between propriety and veracity judgments, which fall within the *social sanction* stratum, and the rest of the judgment sub-categories. Propriety stands out as the most common sub-type (63.21 %). This can also be interpreted as a

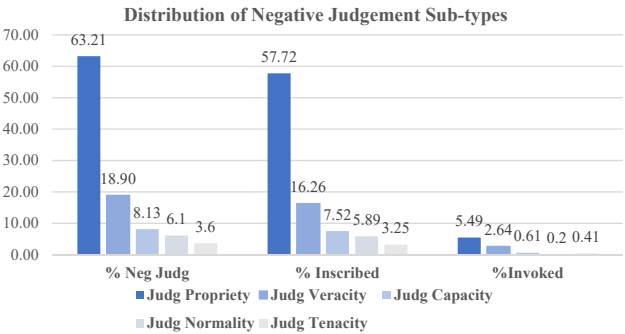


Figure 6: Distribution of negative judgement sub-types.

consequence of a greater presence of vocabulary related to moral issues, considering that the MM corpus ranked high for moralization words compared to the benchmark statistics available in *LIWC-22*. Not in vain, propriety gauges how well or poorly an author believes a third party has upheld a given ethical value. Thus, linguistic manifestations of a moralizing nature in the posters' tweets are rife, as they judge MM's behavior on moral grounds as 'improper'. This sub-category is followed considerably by veracity judgments that question MM's truthfulness and honesty, representing 18.9 % of the total, and capacity ones (8.13 %), questioning her competence. Within the *social-esteem* stratum, lower percentages are obtained for the sub-categories of normality (6.1 %) and tenacity (3.6 %).

4.3 Qualitative analysis: judgment sub-types and impolite-related language tapping on core themes surrounding Meghan Markle

Through the manual codification of the negative valence tweets into the different sub-categories that evaluate MM as transgressing against social expectations and/or social esteem via impolite-related language, different thematic topics emerged that tap into existing female stereotypes. A more detailed examination of these themes is presented in the following sections.

4.3.1 Questioning Markle's propriety by focusing on her sexuality

The propriety of MM's sexual behavior and previous sexual life is a common theme of discussion in the sample analyzed when addressing criticism towards her. Most of these tweets fall within her celebrity phase before her royal one. In other words, MM's sexuality is negatively judged through speech-acts that question the morality of her actions, especially before she marries Prince Harry. This is shown in example (1) below, where the poster, through pointed criticism that associates her with something negative (*she had cheated on both her previous exes*), presents MM's sexual behavior as dubious, considering that the poster states that she was still living with her ex-boyfriend when she flew to visit Prince Harry. In this vein, suspicions regarding her sexual integrity and moral standards seemed to be raised, as MM is accused of being deceitful and cheating when involved in a relationship. These statements imply that MM is not to be trusted and point to her behavior as widely rejected as immoral and reproachable. Likewise, juxtaposing the two images implicitly supports the criticism and accusation conveyed through the explicit impolite-related language deployed.

Example 1

Prince William warned Prince Harry about Meghan Markle, that she had cheated on both her previous exes, that how you meet them is how you lose them. Meghan was still living with Cory when she flew to London to meet Harry.

[#PrinceWilliamsAKing](#)



In the context of Meghan Markle's courtship with the prince, some of the tweets from the sample indirectly present her as acting strategically or opportunistically, as if she had devised a scheme to marry Prince Harry. This is conveyed through the use of explicit lexis that reveals a conscious effort on her part to aim high. Using words such as *bag a prince* or *landed the low-hanging fruit of the Royal Family* in examples (2) and (3), respectively, illustrate this belief while explicitly associating her with a negative trait, which qualifies as an on-record impoliteness strategy (Del Saz-Rubio 2023) that aims to disparage her positive image. In (2) below, there is an explicit intent to smear MM's positive face via judgments of propriety that intertwine with those of veracity as the poster further states that MM is a liar because she has always enjoyed *white privileges* and has not had to endure the difficulties that other black women have gone through. This is enough for posters to question her defense of black people and to judge her behavior as untruthful through the hashtag *#MeghanMarkleisLiar*, hence invoking several interrelated topics when conveying hostility and impoliteness towards this public figure.

Example 2

Meghan Markle bagged a prince because soapboxing the most talked about struggles, regardless if thier your own, makes you famous. Lets be honest [#megahnmarkle](#) has had a 'white privilege' life. She knows nothing of black struggles & rascisim against black people.
[#MeghanMarkleisLiar](#)

On its part, example (3) embodies an invective rife with abusive language of an explicit sexual nature via the epithets *sperm-belching gutter slut* employed as part of a predication strategy within the 'discourse-historical' approach developed by Wodak (2001a; 2001b) and Reisigl and Wodak (2001). On their part, direct insults are an

on-record positive impoliteness strategy aimed at disparaging the interlocutor's public image and revealing powerful emotional arousal on the issuer's part. What is more, the word 'slut', as a misogynistic slur, is, as stated by Farvid et al. (2017:544) "currently widely used within the West, to describe girls/women whose behavior falls outside of what is considered morally acceptable or respectable sexual or social conduct". Once again, the posters' expectations of morality trigger the hostile comments targeted toward her. Further proof of the vitriol aimed at MM in this tweet is also manifest through the poster's conveyance of their affectual state (via taboo language), which is one of great indifference towards her via the expression *who gives a fuck* and the further reference to her as *trash*. What these predication foreground is a sexualized image of MM while implicitly attributing to her the conniving arts that have allowed her to bag the prince, hence reinforcing a dubious sexual behavior.

Example 3

Meghan Markle is really just a sperm belching gutter slut from California who bagged a mentally retarded UK Prince. Who gives a fuck if she has been evicted. USA should keep its trash in its own borders!#MeghanMarkle

Other more explicit tweets openly refer to her sexual life and behavior and do not hesitate to use derogatory terms that label her as a *low-class hooker* while using nomination strategies such as *Yacht Girl*, as a metaphor to associate her with a certain lifestyle and with the insinuation of providing companionship or sexual favors in exchange for financial gain or social status, as shown in example (4). Tweets like this rely on the patriarchal model that has traditionally allowed men greater sexual permissiveness than women, especially concerning sexual initiation, premarital behavior (as was the case for examples 1 and 2), or even promiscuity (Soller and Haynie 2017). Likewise, this tweet combines pointed criticisms by attributing a negative trait (*glorified Yacht Girl*) to the positive image she holds.

Example 4

Meghan Markle is nothing but a glorified Yacht Girl who landed the low hanging fruit of the Royal Family

Nothing but a low class hooker

Another source of negative judgment and hostility towards MM, intimately related to her sexual behavior, is her professional career as an actress before she married Prince Harry, both regarding her role in the TV series *Suits* alongside other previous appearances in the film industry. Thus, hostility focuses on her celebrity phase as a source of vitriol. In (5) below, references to her sexuality, which pertain to the private

sphere of the celebrity, are intertwined with aspects of the professional realm as the respondent evaluates her performance with the adjective “raunchy” in the docufilm *The Boys and Girls Guide To Getting Down*,⁵ including a snapshot of the movie in which she is depicted as having a sexual encounter with another character. Thus, MM is typecast in a predetermined role proper of the raunchy film genre, while her professional career is reduced to the roles she has played as ‘sexually active’. This dwells on the impropriety of her behavior and reduces her worth as a person to her ability to provide sexual pleasure to a man.

Example 5

We'll I never, no wonder Harry's happy with Meghan, does she spit or swallow, I bet she spits.
Meghan Markle's raunchy 90210 role saw her performing oral sex in a car
metro.co.uk/2017/03/13/meg... via @MetroUK



metro.co.uk
Meghan Markle's raunchy 90210 role saw her performing oral sex in a car
What would the Prince say?

In a similar vein, but through sarcasm, an off-record form of impoliteness, the poster in example (6) invokes a negative judgment of MM as s/he jokingly states that she is a source of inspiration with her *A-List Hollywood career*. Although this could seem like a favorable appreciation of her career, the fact that the tweet is accompanied by pictures of MM undressing a man in some scenes of a sexual nature from the TV series *Suits* serves to convey the opposite meaning, an interpretation also aided by the eye emoji (👁️), which compels users to look at the images to find some sort of contrast between the visuals and the linguistic message. Example 6 dwells on

⁵ This is a film released in 2011 where MM starred. The film was billed as “a real-life guide to sex, drugs and bad behaviour” (‘Raunchy early role comes back to haunt Meghan’ <https://www.news.com.au/entertainment/celebrity-life/royals/raunchy-early-role-comes-back-to-haunt-meghan/news-story/0646675a221634d6b145b8494775443a>).

implicated impoliteness and humor to convey that she is not a good actress via implicature, which constitutes a more indirect form of aggression.

Example 6

Meghan Markle always inspires me with her A List Hollywood career. 🌟



This view is also conveyed through explicit language in example (7), where, amongst other things, the respondent accuses MM of only performing roles *in bed* while referring to her with a predication strategy that tackles the sexual impropriety of her role as she will always be a *TV mattress actress* together with a negative appraisal of her competence. *Ad hominem* insults constitute on record impolite strategies and associations with negative aspects.

Example 7

Meghan Markle is a loser who fumbled the biggest bag of her life all because of her “know it all” attitude, jealousy and greed

Meghan is not a humanitarian, she doesn’t care about others, she is not a feminist and she certainly doesn’t care about other women

Meghan will always be a failed ex cable tv mattress actress who has always used WHITE MEN to get what she wants then dumps them



In other words, posters imply that MM's professional worth is due to the bed scenes she has filmed while indirectly describing her as a second-rate actress. Consequently, her professional worth is questioned and diminished. This becomes a moral evaluation delegitimation strategy since MM is portrayed as behaving against a basic moral perspective, which is "the moral disposition which interactants possess" (Parvaresh 2019: 79) and which users bring to the interactions in which they participate. This moral disposition encompasses socially shared assumptions and expectations deeply rooted in moral values and presumptions that typically revolve around criteria for discerning behaviors as virtuous or unethical (Purzycki et al. 2018). In this case, MM's conduct is judged against the view that women should be chaste, and the negative evaluations of her sexuality deauthorize MM as a woman, mother, and even a royal figure.

Additionally, the poster in example (7) sanctions MM on moral grounds via predication strategies that negatively assess her for other questionable moral values, i.e., being greedy, jealous, lacking empathy, and not being a feminist. On top of it, MM is also accused of using white men and then dumping them, another recurring theme in the sample analyzed, which aids in the controversy of her raciality.

All these tweets seem to illustrate the constant scrutiny and negative appraisal of aspects that belong to her celebrity phase, that is, her previous sexual life, previous relations, and the roles performed as an actress. These replies simultaneously reveal the posters' strategic reliance on historical connotations that have linked actresses with impropriety, mainly concerning matters of sexuality (Gale and Stokes 2008). In addition, many of the tweets analyzed tiptoe towards the potential exploitation and reinforcement of racist stereotypes about African American and mixed-race women that portray them as sexually provocative and promiscuous, or more precisely, as immoral Jezebels.⁶ The Jezebel stereotype has endured with the hyper-sexualization of black female characters in contemporary entertainment media who are disproportionately dressed in provocative clothing (Mastro and Greenberg 2000: 44) and otherwise

⁶ The Jezebel archetype was characterized as a black woman who exhibited an insatiable sexual appetite. She was depicted as being dissatisfied with relationships involving black men and was associated with a perceived inclination towards engaging in sexual relations with white men (cf. Gamsakhurdia and Kurdiani 2021).

hyper-sexualized (Tukachinsky et al. 2015). Thus, race and sexuality intertwine as sources of stereotypical portrayals of MM.

4.3.2 Questioning Meghan Markle's propriety by focusing on her stance towards race

Posts about MM's biraciality or racial issues constitute a key source of social sanction towards her behavior via fallacious argumentation. This situation is not entirely new, considering that one week after Markle and Prince Harry's relationship became public, he felt compelled to release an official statement condemning the racial undertones in some comment pieces, alongside the media's treatment of MM. However, after her marriage to Prince Harry and first pregnancy, considerable attention was drawn to her biraciality on social media. This was evidenced by reactions to the time interview with Oprah Winfrey in March 2021 (CBS), where she revealed that members of the British royal family had expressed concerns over Meghan and Harry's son, Archie, possibly having a darker skin tone.

On her part, MM has always positioned herself within a biracial identity framework that embraces both black and white components, thereby emphasizing inclusivity (Woldemikael and Woldemikael 2021). Despite this, replies by posters who perceive and judge her as a race traitor are rife, and her "biraciality" is a pervasive thematic source of hostility against her. MM is perceived as an impostor who lacks moral values when it comes to racial issues. Accordingly, posters criticize – via fallacious argumentation – her defense of biracial individuals, blackness, and black achievements as contradictory in nature, amongst other things, due to (i) the prominence of her Eurocentric features; (ii) the fact that her children have fair skin and (iii) her having only dated white men and her having grown up enjoying white privileges, as stated in example (2). Fallacious arguments, i.e., *argumentum ad hominem* or *argumentum ad populum*, especially of an emotional nature, as the ones deployed in the corpus, are non-cooperative, and their goal is to block the general aim of finding a joint resolution to a conflict by reasoning (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004). In other words, the lack of reasoning on why MM is deceitful when declaring herself biracial is thus justified via emotional argumentation, which in the sample analyzed is expressed with the help of impolite-related language (Culpeper 1996; Del Saz-Rubio 2023).

Example 8

If Meghan Markle is so proud to be Black, why does she never wear her hair as a natural curly afro?

Of course every woman has the right to experiment with her look but isn't it odd that she never shows us her natural hair...is she ashamed of it?

It appears that Meghan Markle has had rhinoplasty to make her nose thinner, straighter and narrower – once again proactively erasing her Black features

A wise man once said you should never judge people by their words but instead observe their actions – what do Meghan Markle's actions reveal about her true feelings on race?

[#MeghanMarklesAGrifter](#)



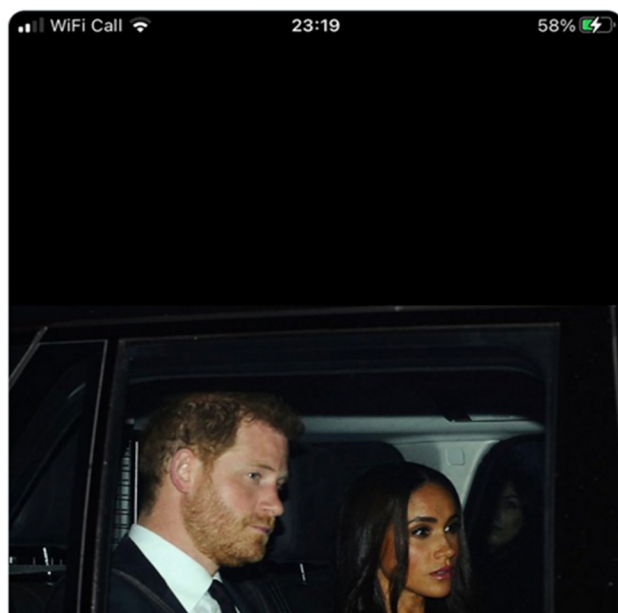
In (8) above, for instance, the poster questions MM's behavior regarding one of the features picked to reveal her black ancestry, i.e., her Afro hair. Consequently, the poster juxtaposes images of MM and one of her mother, Doria, as a smiley child with black curly hair with a larger updated picture of her in which she has straightened hair of a lighter tone. This is an example of implicated impoliteness aided by different verbal strategies, such as the use of rhetorical questions – as an indirect impolite strategy (see Del Saz-Rubio 2023, 2024) – aimed to attack the public image of MM in order to expose her lack of truthfulness regarding her true feelings on race.

Although the poster acknowledges the right to try different hairstyles, MM's African heritage is questioned by accusing her of never wearing her natural curly Afro hair. The juxtaposition of the pictures indirectly implies a conscious decision to erase her African features; thus, her behavior is implicitly and morally sanctioned as wrong, according to the poster. In a similar vein, the poster accuses MM of proactively altering her nose to erase any sign of African heritage. Finally, the hashtag *#MeghanMarklesAGrifter*, unequivocally used to convey a negative assessment of MM's character by explicit association of her with a negative trait, succinctly encapsulates the tweet's content while portraying her as deceitful via questioning the veracity of her words.

While some of the posters are focused on presenting contradictory evidence, albeit via fallacies, regarding MM's feelings on race, other tweets criticize her for resorting to artificial means to make herself look "black". Thus, the poster in example (9) – through a rhetorical question that exposes MM's inexplicable behavior, harshly criticizes MM for using a fake tan to make herself look more black. At the same time, other examples are rife with references to her face being not black enough. Thus, MM is again questioned on moral grounds for pretending to be something she is not, i.e., a black woman, and therefore, for trying to align with a community in which she does not seem to fit. It should be noted that these comments are rife, as the thematic analysis has shown. They need to be contextualized against the social and political moment and consider the tension between her role as a transgressor or disruptor of the tradition of the monarchy and her role as a sign of modernity (Pramaggiore and Kerrigan 2021).

Example 9

Meghan Markle's fake tan Why does a woman identifying as black require fake tan???



Not only MM's physical appearance as a core aspect of her biraciality is the aim of the vitriol directed at her. Her political stance towards racial issues is interpreted in some tweets as contradictory because her children are of white ethnicity and have fair skin, amongst other things. This is illustrated in (10), in which her impropriety is highlighted, as she is accused of crying about racism, with a fallacious reasoning: the fact that her children are not black is enough to delegitimize her as honest and truthful.

Example 10

Meghan Markle is always crying about racism. Meanwhile, this is how "Black" her kids are.



Respondents do not seem to agree with the notion of her being biracial, and aggression toward her is conveyed via accusations of being not black enough, trying to be too white, or using her black heritage as a card to gain approval from the black community. In example (11), she is openly accused of being a racist with an *ad hominem* insult and pretending to be friends only with black celebrities such as Oprah or Tyler Perry to use the race card in her favor once she started dating Prince Harry. The contrast in the pictures in (11) is intended to make her appear deceitful and unreliable due to improper behavior and purposeful lying. This is further supported in (12), where the poster socially sanctions her on the grounds that all her friends and even boyfriends have been white.

Example 11

Before she started dating Harry VS While dating Harry

I'm just going to call it what it is

Meghan Markle is a racist who hates black people unless your Oprah or Tyler Perry



The assertion that she has used white men as a status-seeking strategy evokes the gender-based stereotype that views women ascending “socially” or “professionally” thanks to marriage with a man. Meghan’s alleged association with white, wealthy men (i.e., Jeffrey Epstein) through the slur “yacht girl” has also been employed to cast doubt on how she secured specific roles in television series or films. By focusing on her decision to address King Charles with concerns about *unconscious bias*, respondents aim to unmask her for doing just the opposite of what she preaches. Thus, two judgment subtypes are simultaneously enacted to portray her in a negative light that questions her morality and adherence to the moral expectations of the echo chamber.

Example 12

Meghan markle is a racist. all of her friends and men have been white.



4.3.3 #MeghanMarkleIsALiar, #MeghanMarkleExposed: questioning MM's veracity

Most tweets under this category revolve around the belief that MM is a liar and a hypocrite. In other words, there is a perceived inconsistency between her moral engagement and behavior. This triggers high levels of vitriol on the part of respondents regarding the veracity of her actions. Many tweets analyzed use hashtags such as #MeghanMarkleExposed and #MeghanMarkleIsALiar. In contrast, others label her as #PrincessPinochio to convey that MM is not telling the truth or

that she is acting hypocritically while implying that the celebrity's true nature has been exposed, as she has been caught in a lie. All these tweets seem to be aiming at reifying her unsuitability as a member of the royal family well after the royal phase, and they are illustrative of the outright rejection she elicits from a wide sector of social media users.

MM is heavily criticized and blamed for her inconsistent moral conduct in different areas. One of them is her role as a royal and her lack of respect for tradition regarding aspects of the monarchy, which she revealed in the Netflix documentary or the Oprah interview. Thus, in example (13), her paying respect to the Queen's casket is perceived as insincere and even hypocritical, as she is believed to have been making fun of her just a month before when the Netflix documentary to be aired in December 2022 was being recorded. The respondent also placed two pictures contrasting MM's solemn face as she approached the Queen's coffin, interpreted as a sign of respect, and MM's mock curtsy, interpreted as "disrespectful" by many.

Example 13

Meghan Markle kneeling down in front of Queen's casket in September, knowing that she made fun of her in August, and it will be aired in December. Hypocrisy!! #DumbPrinceAndHisStupidWife
#HarryAndMeghanAreFinished
#HarryisaBackstabbingLiar



In addition, MM is also accused of low moral standards in her entrepreneurial attempts after she and Prince Harry gave up their titles as royals, that is, in the post-royal phase. The California-based wellness coffee brand she invested in, the Clevr coffee brand, was said to be tied to a Chinese state accused of genocide, as in example (14). Thus, she is associated with a negative trait. If this were accurate, her public image would be damaged for being the leading investor in a brand that would not uphold the highest ethical standards and human rights protections. This would

implicitly expose her as a fake figure, publicly stating one thing but then doing the opposite, given the recent award she and Prince Harry received for their activism on racial justice and mental health. Thus, she is delegitimized because of her lack of truthfulness and inability to perform professionally, as embodied in the hashtags, and with the direct insult of *dumb stupid*, which exposes her as incapable of managing a business.

Example 14

Meghan Markle's 'wellness' coffee tied to Chinese state accused of genocide pagesix.com/2021/04/04/meg... via @pagesix She is so damn stupid. #MeghanMarkleExposed #MeghanMarkleIsToxic #MeghanMarkleIsALiar



Other strategies to portray her as a liar include ad hominem insults via explicit lexis, mainly adjectives employed in predication strategies that associate her with a negative trait. Thus, MM is referred to as a *pathological liar*, a *fraud*, a *hypocrite* who is *selling falsehood* against other members of the royal family, *fibbing* or *using Spanish media to smear WandK*⁷ and to spread fake news. All these descriptors are employed to evaluate her negatively for not being truthful regarding intimate issues such as her pregnancy and alleged miscarriage or simply her age. The age difference between MM and the Prince becomes another source of hostility. What is more, accusations of untruthfulness are often intertwined with references to her mental instability, as she is not only a *liar* but is usually referred to as a *pathological liar* or even a *narcissist sociopath* (15). Some tweets underpin certain undesirable psychological traits that portray her as manipulative and self-centered as critical traits of narcissism (Sedikides et al. 2004). As is quite common, accusations of lying are combined with other gender-based themes, such as MM's lack of competence to perform as Duchess (15), while the implicit assumption is that she is just not good enough. It should be noted that most of these tweets are also accompanied by emotional lexis, as instances of affect, as is the case in (15), where the poster expresses disgust at the thought of them both:

⁷ William and Kate.

Example 15

Meghan Markle is a liar and a Narcissistic Sociopath. She doors not have what it takes to be a Duchess. Both her and Harry the traitor should be nowhere near the Coronation. They're disgusting .

In example (16), the respondent also taps into the core theme of women as liars, a recurring theme in the literature. Some of the tweets dwell on the widespread belief or preconception that Eve's female descendants are more prone to lying (Giallongo 2023: 64). In fact, the Christian tradition has always emphasized the feminization of the Original Sin, which was accomplished through a sexually explicit framework that stigmatized women by portraying them as accomplices of malevolent forces, often symbolized by the serpent and the devil (Durand 1999). The respondent (16) resorts to the adjective *evil* twice to qualify MM's moral behavior as improper and reproachable through predication strategies that associate her with something negative, as an impoliteness strategy aimed to attack her positive face by tapping into judgments of veracity and propriety. The effect of the accumulation of negative judgment through pointed criticism and the explicit *ad hominem* insults reveals high vitriol on the part of the poster.

Example 16

Meghan Markle is a sociopathic narcissist. She is also a psycho LIAR. Evil person.
And the curtain on her evil is ready to drop for the world to see her UNTHINKABLE evil.

In a similar vein, MM's first and even second pregnancy triggered much rumor-mongering, and some of the tweets from the corpus show this. These tweets should be analyzed within the broader context of the excessive media excitement and sensationalization surrounding the births of royal family members. In particular, as Orgad and Baldwin state (2021:) "[...] in 2019–2020, Meghan Markle was one of the most intensely-mediated mothers in the English-speaking UK, US (and perhaps the global) media". In addition, Prince Harry's statement to the press after the birth of his child was seen as a public, progressive, and feminist recognition of maternal labor, not only of every woman but especially of black women, considering that their experiences have always been shadowed behind a cloak of invisibility (Orgad and Baldwin 2021). Despite this, Prince Harry's statement also hid the immense privilege that MM had had regarding safe and successful labor and also masked the significantly higher labor risk that persists for black women in general, regardless of the advantages they may have.

Taking all this into account, MM's pregnancy and motherhood are taken as a source of negative judgment towards the celebrity. Thus, she is judged for being untruthful and having gone through the effort of faking her pregnancy in the case of her second child by, amongst other things, wearing a prosthetic bump (*fake baby bump*) that constantly wiggles up and down as proof of the lie (examples 17 and 18).

Example 17

Meghan Markle FAKE BABY BUMP FELL TO HER ANKLES IN FRONT OF EVERYONE IN LIVERPOOL 🇬🇧 🇺🇸 🇬🇧 🇬🇧 🇬🇧 🇬🇧 🇬🇧 🇬🇧 🇬🇧 🇬🇧



Likewise, in example (18), the poster issues the *ad hominem* insult FRAUD to associate her with a negative trait through predication strategies and accuses her of being untruthful while judging her once more for having low moral standards as she used racism to obtain personal benefits, i.e., having two children within the succession line. These types of tweets reflect the deep animosity that the character generates among social media participants, which gave way to so-called conspiracy theories regarding both her pregnancies. These tweets embody hostility towards values that posters perceive as being at risk, such as her intrusion into the royal family, her role as a mother, and the fact that her children, of African descent, may become part of it. These tweets portray her as an outsider in the family and the British monarchy.

Example 18

Meghan Markle NEVER gave birth to Archie or Lili

Meghan Markle is a FRAUD, who used racism to blackmail the Royal Family & faked being pregnant to get two children within the Line of Succession

I SAID IT

#SussexBabyScam



4.3.4 Questioning MM's social esteem: from 'talentless' and 'not cool' to 'reckless'

Judgments that question MM's capacity, normality, and tenacity (social esteem) were less frequent than judgments of social sanction. Despite this, some of the aggressive replies by respondents focus on MM's capacity, thus tapping into the classic feminine personality stereotype, which dictates that women are nice and warm but lack competence (Ellemers 2018). In this respect, MM's capacity is constantly questioned through predication strategies that call her *a clown*, *a laughing stock*, or *a twat of the highest order*; or that, via taboo language, as an impoliteness device, refer to her as a *talentless ugly fucker* (19) with judgments that pertain to her physical appearance as well.

Example 19

Why is Meghan markle ugly

🤔. Well, it's true. I think she's fucking ugly. Prince Harry can kiss my arse if he don't like what people think of his wife. Meghan markle a talentless ugly fucker. Harry can object & say I'm full inaccuracies but I guess he hasn't read his own book 🤔

For example (20), MM is accused of being ignorant of British traditions and history. In this tweet, the respondent aims to counter MM's assertion that the royal family is sexist via fallacious arguments. By listing various female monarchs, the conclusion

is drawn that Meghan is entirely ignorant of English history and traditions. Simultaneously, another judgment, one of veracity, is enacted, labeling her as a fake feminist, as this is another core trait with which she identified and which the debate on social media, in general, has sought to dismantle. The argumentative reasoning skips one premise: there is no guarantee that having women Monarchs is a sign of femininity, but this reasoning is enough to delegitimize MM.

Example 20

Royal Family is sexist when most of the great Monarchs of the UK are women from Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Victoria and now Queen Elizabeth II. Meghan Markle is ignorant of history and traditions. She's a fake feminist.

MM is also called *insane* or a *nutcase* through predication strategies that negatively judge her capacity (Martin and White 2005: 53) (21) or normality (22) and which rely on direct insults with a clear intention on the part of the issuer. The use of the adjective *insane* implies the existence of mental issues while tapping into the well-known stereotypes of women as “neurotic” and “mentally unstable”, or “not mentally sound”, and thus needing help. Using hashtags that encapsulate the idea of her being crazy and not all in there (#LooneyTunesMeghan or #mentalhealth) also helps reinforce the respondent's perceived lack of capacity. Likewise, in example (22), her lack of normality is attributed to her lying and being inaccurate in some of the testimonies she provided in the Oprah interview.

Example 21

Meghan Markle is insane and needs a serious and long help

#LooneyTunesMeghan #LooneyTunesMeghanMarkle #mentalhealth issues #MeghanMarkleisLiar

Example 22

The reason why I do not believe Meghan Markle is mentally sound is because what normal person would put all those Oprah inaccuracies and lies out there knowing full well with the scrutiny they would be fact checked? Is trying to bring down the Monarchy just a perverse game to her?

Thus, adjectives within the domain of *stupid* and *ugly* tend to emphasize distinct stereotypical faces of femininity (Felmlee et al. 2020). As a result, MM is also criticized for her lack of physical beauty. MM's lack of tenacity and normality are also sources of attacks, and they usually combine with criticisms from the other judgment sub-types. In example (23), her determination is negatively assessed by qualifying her preference for a natural birth as a RECKLESS action. This decision, which

questions the normalcy of her behavior, comes across as a negative trait as she rejected the royal gynecologist's aid or advice with further implications of putting the baby in danger and refusing help from specialists in the field. Moreover, this objectionable behavior undermines aspects of tradition, and thus, she is depicted as rebellious and nonconformist regarding royal issues, an "outsider", in a word.

Example 23

Meghan Markle is RECKLESS for natural a birth and she does not need the help of Royal gynecologists bit.ly/2lkuLOa if.t.t/eA8V8J

Likewise, adjectives such as *gutless* or *not courageous* in example (24) point to a lack of tenacity as MM refuses to attend the King Charles Coronation ceremony while implicating that she is a bad mother for not allowing Archie's family the chance to spend his birthday with them. As stated above, several judgment sub-types are intertwined as she is also cast in a negative light due to her lack of propriety, i.e., she used her son as an excuse. At the same time, the whole incident is qualified as a lie, and her honesty is questioned on a regular basis.

Example 24

All it proves is that Meghan Markle is gutless! How pathetic to use Archie's birthday as an excuse! If she'd been courageous enough to face the Royals & the British public, then Archie would have been able to celebrate his birthday with ALL his family! More lies!

5 Conclusions

This paper has aimed to examine how hostility and aggression against the public figure of MM are enacted by analyzing appraisal mechanisms in a sample of tweets. Sentiment analysis was initially carried out with LIWC-22 on a large sample. The statistical values for *Emotional Tone* pointed to a negatively polarized sentiment orientation in the tweets against MM, with high values for moralization words and those reflecting interpersonal conflict. Given these tentative results, a more detailed qualitative analysis that took insights from the pragmatic impoliteness framework as a starting point was carried out through the lens of the Attitude system to identify the most common semantic domains deployed to convey the posters' stance. Judgment sub-types are amongst the most frequent evaluative resources deployed to attack the celebrity, with an overwhelming majority of social-sanction judgment sub-types. Thus, a randomized sample of 400 tweets containing the word seed "Meghan Markle" was subjected to manual codification, revealing that respondents overwhelmingly assess MM through the negative judgment of propriety and veracity and – to a

lesser extent – through those of capacity, tenacity, and normality. These judgments, which sometimes rely on fallacious argumentation, are also conveyed through impolite-related language, especially pointed criticism and the association of MM with a negative trait, as positive impoliteness strategies that aim to smear her reputation and public image. On top of this, posters perceive that MM's behavior and actions lack propriety since they do not meet specific moral values that the community seems to share or expect of MM and women in general.

Likewise, while negatively judging the celebrity's behavior, actions, etc., posters tend to resort to core themes that tap into traditional stereotypes, as is usually true in online aggression towards women, where traditional and socially entrenched feminine stereotypes are reinforced. Accordingly, findings seem to suggest that Meghan Markle is a target for criticism from posters who perceive her behavior as a departure from traditional patterns and moral values that rely on stereotypical beliefs that consider that women must remain in a state of chastity until marriage (Valenti 2009), that condemn sexual behavior outside the bounds of normalcy as they are to remain sexually inexperienced (Valenti 2009), and that cannot conceive of a divorced person marrying into royalty, especially one of mixed race. Thus, posters tap into the well-known feminine stereotype that views women as virtue custodians and moral paragons while also activating the Jezebel stereotype that presents black women as hypersexualized, a fact reflected in the sexual slurs directed at her regarding her professional roles as an actress. Thus, MM, as is the case with other women experiencing online violence, falls prey to the Purity Myth, which embodies the belief that women's worth is defined by their sexual status (Valenti 2009). Her professional career is also a source of criticism, mainly due to the roles she has been in, which emphasize her sexuality over her professional worth. Likewise, her intelligence and capacity to perform as a mother, a royal, and a professional woman are questioned. At the same time, she is depicted as a hypocrite and a liar, seeking her economic benefit after having employed persuasive arts to seduce Prince Harry and isolate him from his family. MM is also judged as lacking any knowledge of British traditions and the monarchy and is accused of being untruthful regarding sensitive topics such as her pregnancy, which she is alleged to have faked, and her supposed biraciality, another aspect triggering adverse reactions questioning the veracity of her words and actions. The absence of exemplary moral behavior regarding her personal and private life results in her being judged in various respects by the posters.

Despite the sample size, it can be concluded that the hostile tweets addressed at MM aid the promotion and perpetuation of culturally bound and traditional beliefs about women. These beliefs reflect an underlying patriarchal system and its accompanying attitudes of sexism, misogyny, and women's objectification (Jeffreys 2005). Likewise, findings support previous studies that have corroborated that

aggression against women is rife and relies on gendered representations, as is the case of women politicians (Del Saz-Rubio 2023; Espósito and Breeze 2022; Silva and Ibarra 2022) or celebrities (Ouvrein et al. 2021). Last but not least, this paper opens up further avenues for research in the field of aggression through Appraisal Theory to further assess how the link between judgment, morality, aggression, and celebrity status materializes in responses.

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