

Deconstructing Macroaggressions, Microaggressions, and Structural Racism in Education: Developing a Conceptual Model for the Intersection of Social Justice Practice and Intercultural Education

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Abstract

This article explicates the interconnectivity of microaggressions, macroaggressions, and structural racism. We undergird this work using the seminal ideas of microaggressions as well as microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. We describe the theoretical reasoning that anchors our conceptualization of macroaggressions in the educational context. Then, we move from theory to educational practice so we may operationalize this work for other social justice educators and present a conceptual model focused on the intersections of dominant norms and values, micro/macroaggressions, and sense-making. Lastly, we explore implications and next steps for social justice educators who experience incongruence in their beliefs and professional practice.

Building on work from Gorski's (2014) study of racial and economic consumerism as a form of systemic injustice, or *macroaggression* (described as participation in big systems of oppression), this article explicates the interconnectivity of microaggressions, macroaggressions, and structural racism. We undergird this work using the seminal ideas of microaggressions from Pierce (1970) as well as microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations from Sue et al. (2007). We describe the theoretical reasoning that anchors our conceptualization of macroaggressions in the educational context (Gorski, 2014; Pierce, 1970; Sue et al., 2007). Next, we move from theory to educational practice so we may operationalize this work for other social justice educators and present a conceptual model focused on the intersections of dominant norms and values, micro/macroaggressions, and sense-making. Last, we explore implications and next steps for social justice educators who experience incongruence in their beliefs and professional practice.

Understanding Macroaggressions, Microaggressions, and Structural Racism

As former educators and school leaders, we are interested in deepening our understanding of intercultural relationships in K-16 educational institutions. We examine how school community members interact with one another, understand the influence of personal bias, intersectionality of identity in decision-making, and negotiate differences including beliefs, values, expectations, and social/cultural codes. The ways in which school community members discover ways to bridge cultural divides, or sometimes create barriers to prohibit individuals or groups from gaining access to the same resources, when communicating with people across cultural groups is also of interest to each of us. Sometimes these deficit-laden behaviors and practices are readily apparent in K-16 school communities, and yet other times, the practices are more insidious. Thus, it may be more difficult to measure its impact on those who endure these interactions. For the purposes of this work, deficit-laden behaviors and practices include approaches based upon a child's weakness versus their strengths. In his book, Valencia (2010) defines the notion of deficit thinking as an internal explanation for the academic failure of low socio-economic status Students of Color (i.e. African American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican and other racial minorities). He puts forth *assumed* internal deficits (such as the limited intellectual abilities, the lack of motivation, language issues, family structure) are the cause of academic failure among low-SES students. It is "the process of blaming the victim" (p. XIV). This arcane, hegemonic way of thinking is rooted in historical racist discourses. Hegemonic refers to a theory of hegemony asserting oppressive conditions are created and recreated, because those impacted by such conditions (both positively and negatively) actively engage in their own domination and oppression. Hegemonic suggests society embraces an overarching set of beliefs aligned with the dominant culture's beliefs, which help to perpetuate oppression (Gramsci, 1971). Valencia warns deficit thinking is a pseudoscience in which ideology is embedded with science. He points out deficit thinking is supported by research that lacks scientific rigor: unsound assumptions, psychometrically weak instruments, data collection in defective manners, absence of control of important independent variables and omission of rival hypothesis. In his 1997 work, Valencia stated:

Presently, many behavioral and social scientists hold the deficit thinking model in disrepute — arguing that it is unduly simplistic, lacks empirical verification, more ideological than scientific, grounded in classism and racism, and offers counterproductive educational prescriptions for school success. However, because deficit thinking is so protean, taking different forms to conform to what is politically acceptable at the moment, and while the popularity of different revisions may change, it never ceases to be important in determining school policy and practice. (p.2)

These perspectives often deteriorate an educator's expectations for children and weaken an educator's capacity to recognize gifts, talents, and extraordinary abilities in diverse forms (Ford & Grantham, 2003). Deficit-laden thinking surfaces when differences, specifically differences between those deemed as "other" and ourselves, are seen as deficits. Deficit-laden behaviors and practices may be identified as microaggressions and macroaggressions. We contend they act in tandem with one another as they perpetuate oppressive, dominating behaviors and practices. These aggressive intercultural interactions may be experienced on a one-to-one personal level as well as operationalized as larger structures within society, such as corporations or educational

institutions. Over the years, a critical discourse challenging deficit perspectives continues to emerge (see Nieto & Bode, 2008) and unfortunately, the discourse rarely focuses or addresses the ideologies or conditions that often perpetuate deficit-laden perspectives, their impact on how we make sense of these experiences (see Boske 2011b; Duffy, 1995; Weick, 1995), and how these understandings influence our beliefs and decision-making.

Using the work of Pierce (1970), Sue (2010), and Gorski (2014), we examine the interrelatedness of microaggressions and macroaggressions in the education sphere. To do so, we explain the singular notion of each and then their interrelatedness.

Microaggressions

Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, and Wills (1978) put forth “the chief vehicle for pro-racist behaviors are microaggressions. These are subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of blacks by offenders” (p. 66). Microaggressions can be difficult to depict. These aggressive behaviors may not be overtly physically violent; however, they do create social/cultural conditions in which people may not feel as safe as members of a dominant cultural group. Furthermore Pierce (1974) recognized that:

These [racial] assaults to black dignity and black hope are incessant and cumulative. Any single one may be gross. In fact, the major vehicle for racism in this country is offenses done to blacks by whites in this sort of gratuitous never-ending way. These offenses are microaggressions. Almost all black-white racial interactions are characterized by white put-downs, done in automatic, preconscious, or unconscious fashion. These minidisasters accumulate. It is the sum total of multiple microaggressions by whites to blacks that has pervasive effect to the stability and peace of this world. (p. 515)

In this same vein, Davis (1989) defined microaggressions as “stunning, automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of black inferiority” (p. 1576). Kennedy (1989) put forth the notion that “although overt forms of racial domination described thus far were enormously destructive, *covert* color bars have been, in a certain sense, even more insidious” (p. 1752). Microaggressions are exemplified by dismissive and often innocuous comments, behaviors, or beliefs that minimize, exclude, or render insignificant. The *Microaggressions: Power, Privilege, and Everyday Life* website routinely has anonymous posts from people that provide commentary that exemplifies the pervasiveness of microaggressions. For example, a post from an individual on March 6, 2014 states: “Are you sure you have the right room number? This is the *honors* section.” The person who provided this post believed this comment originated from the fact the speaker was baffled a minority student would wander into an honors level classroom. Another contributor offered: “Upon having seen coverage of the Boston Marathon bombing, my mother, who is white, states, ‘Middle Easterners... always killing everybody.’ I’m Middle Eastern, early 20s, and her son. My little sisters, who are South Asian were also in the same room, and they heard that. I felt very angry, unsafe, disappointed” (April 23, 2013). The fact that the individual who provided the commentary was the speaker’s son seemed not to have any influence on the mother’s fundamental racist thoughts. Some other examples of microaggressions we experience as community members, teachers, school leaders, and faculty are noted below:

“Dyke! Eww...you make me sick...you are definitely going to hell!”

“That’s so gay!”

“You’re pretty smart for girl.”

“Are you sure you’re a lesbian? You look feminine.”

“I don’t think you are really Guatemalan. You don’t look Guatemalan to me.”

“You work hard for a woman.”

“I am surprised you speak English so well! I thought you wouldn’t because of your name.”

“You don’t seem anxious. I think it’s all in your head. Just step out of it.”

In addition to the microaggressions noted above, we also work alongside members of marginalized populations who shared similar experiences with us. For example, when Christa engaged in a field excursion for an instructional leadership course, two Men of Color shared the following experience:

We went for a field excursion in this White, wealthy neighborhood for class. We got out of our cars and these White guys on three different streets stopped dead in their tracks while walking their dogs. Here are two Black men earning their graduate degrees, and all these guys saw were two Black guys...they waited as we approached our White, female professor. As she opened her arms and greeted us with a hug, the White guys stood still...like statues. Once they realized we weren’t a threat to a White female, they continued walking their dogs. Our professor saw it right away and she shared what she was observing as we hugged one another. We had a conversation about us intentionally avoiding this town, because it’s dangerous to drive while Black.

In each example noted above, behaviors occurred between people, and were subtle enough to point out or measure their impact on those for which they were intended. The study of microaggressions adds to our psychological understanding of the process of being stigmatized, discriminated against, and experiencing bias. Research (see Pearson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2009) suggests the uncertainty of microaggressions on individuals is quite distressing and uncertain, especially for members of marginalized populations.

These current transgressions are classified as actual manifestations of aversive and subversive intercultural behaviors and illuminate the personal experiences of people impacted by microaggressions. These racial transgressions include microaggressions, microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. According to DeAngelis (2009), an example of a microassault is when someone yells, “Dyke! Eww...you make me sick...you are definitely going to hell!” This transgression is a verbal or nonverbal interaction including name-calling and/or avoidant behavior, such as crossing the street or walking around someone. The second example, “That’s so gay!” is considered a microassault or microinsult (DeAngelis), because the interaction

is hurtful towards someone based on race, ethnicity, gender, or in this case, sexual orientation. These may be more difficult to identify. Another microaggression example includes, “You don’t seem anxious. I think it’s all in your head. Just step out of it.” This interaction suggests a microinvalidation (DeAngelis), which contradicts, negates or devalues a person’s emotional or psychological experiences by invalidating them.

Although the term “micro” suggests something minuscule or small, these oppressive intercultural behaviors are neither minor nor insignificant. Microaggressions create sometimes subtle and sometimes not so subtle, but real and damaging social interactions. When a person experiences an onslaught of derogatory comments, invalidations, avoidance behaviors, and deficit-laden comments, the experiences may weigh heavy on an individual’s spirit, self-worth, and sense of self.

People who tend to engage in microaggressions are often people who are members of culturally dominant groups. They tend to adhere to oppressive beliefs about people from marginalized populations. For those who endure microaggressions, they are often members of disenfranchised populations and many, if not most, experience daily feelings of *dis-ease*, feeling unwelcome, being in danger, discomfort, and otherwise, being at odds with their surrounding cultural contexts. This *dis-ease* may occur especially when there is no evidence of people interrupting these microaggressions or counteracting these interactions with culturally responsive behaviors.

Sue et al. (2007) distinguished three types of microaggressions. They are: microassaults; microinsults; and microinvalidations. This research team describes a microassault as: “an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (p. 274). Microassaults are described simply as “good old-fashioned racism” (p. 274). While explicit, overt, and deliberate, they are deemed “micro” because they are often conducted on an individual or private level. Due to fact they are spoken in these “limited” settings, they provide the attacker with a semblance of anonymity.

In contrast, microinsults are characterized as: “...communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. Microinsults represent subtle snubs, frequently unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly convey a hidden insulting message to the recipient of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). Examples include instances when a Student of Color is asked, “How did you get into this doctoral program?” or when a Professor of color is told, “You speak so well!” These “communications” can also be non-verbal, for example, when a female student is consistently overlooked in a classroom even though she has her hand raised and is primed to contribute to the conversation. Last, microinvalidations are described as: “...communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 274). This can be exemplified by color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2009), which refers to the notion of “not seeing color” or seeing all people as “humans.” These sorts of comments invalidate the particularism that is associated with ethnic group identification, family heritage, and culture. Another example is when an ethnic minority woman regales to her White friends that she is constantly seated by the bathroom in restaurants and her friends reply that she is being “overly sensitive” or “looking for something that is not there.” Giving “everyone” a voice often silences or mutes minority voices.

Macroaggressions

Recognizing microaggressions is an important component of understanding the dynamics of the larger systemic issue of racism. However, it is important to interrogate why we stop the discussion at microaggressions. Is it a more convenient way to negotiate the painful spaces of inequity in our daily lives? Gorski's (2014) work helps us answer this question. He states:

I have come to use the term 'macroaggression' differently, to help me understand my own mindless participation in or compliance with big, systemic forms of oppression rather than interpersonal forms of bias or discrimination. It shares with 'microaggression' the quality of not necessarily being purposeful. (p. 6)

In his analysis, Gorski does not differentiate between the three different types of microaggressions. This is an imperative distinction to make. Knowing microassaults are, in fact, overt and deliberate (Sue et al., 2007), and aids in better theorizing of the idea of macroaggressions. Macroaggressions necessitate being examined from a deliberate, purposeful, and conscious space. If they are not examined in this manner, then we are running the risk of continuing to examine and understand the concept from a White hegemonic space, thus doing an even greater disservice to those that are most impacted and affected by the assaults.

Macroaggressions occur at a structural level encompassing actions that are meant to exclude, either by action or omission. Examples include not complying with disability rights laws (see Kent, 2011; Regan, 2008) or fast food chains denying their workers fair wages, such as noted in the documentary *The Hand That Feeds* (Lears & Blotnick, 2014). This film investigates the treatment of undocumented workers who were treated as indentured servants, making far less than minimum wage, working in dangerous conditions, and not receiving overtime. Another example of macroaggression includes corporations taking advantage of impoverished populations to deepen their pockets. In the documentary *The True Cost* (Morgan, 2015) examines the impact of the global clothing industry on people and to the environment; specifically, how the vast majority of workers are enslaved, majority women, notwithstanding dangerous working conditions, long hours, and a multitude of health risks while consumers around the world purchase more and more clothes for less and less money. However, the people paying the price are the workers who are marginalized due to their social and economic status.

In their article, *Examining the Impact of Macro and Microaggressions on the Lives of Black Women*, Donovan, Galban, Grace, Bennett, and Felicié (2012) state, "For the purposes of simplicity, we conceptualize microassaults as macroaggressions and microinsults and microinvalidations as microaggressions" (p. 186). While we agree with Donovan et al., it is best to disaggregate the notion of microassaults from microinsults and microinvalidations, we argue there is more than "simplicity" undergirding the separation. We offer macroaggressions are microassaults conducted in a public forum or sphere, and are buttressed by the nuanced behaviors that exist in a particular or specific context. That is to say, macroaggressions are verbal or non-verbal communications that are not only purposeful and deliberate, but are meant to create longitudinally debilitating and depressive results in the victim. They are persistent and malicious. Macroaggressions occur in the nebulous space between microaggressions and institutional/structural racism. They move past the subtle, unconscious aspects of microinsults and microinvalidations into a more literal and overt space. We use the term "macroaggressions" to showcase the aggressive and deleterious effect of macroaggressive activities. The term

macroaggression garners an immediate and powerful reaction solely through its lexical prowess.

Structural Racism

In this discussion, it is important to differentiate structural racism from macroaggressions. According to Lawrence and Keleher (2004), structural racism in the U.S. is:

...the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage whites while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color. It is a system of hierarchy and inequity, primarily characterized by white supremacy – the preferential treatment, privilege and power for white people at the expense of Black, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab and other racially oppressed people. From structural racism emerges institutional, interpersonal and internalized racism. (p. X)

The difference between structural racism and macroaggressions is macroaggressions are purposeful, deliberate, and blatantly damaging acts that make an impact at the individual level.

Structural racism is integral to everyday, ordinary interactions. Those who engage in these oppressive practices speak as though there is one vision of the ideal society; however, such elitism, with one group determining what is “right,” suggests exerting power and promise offers ways to leverage efforts to perpetuate oppressive practices and policies. Efforts to pursue politically guided practices that address the nature of oppression, lived social realities, and a vision of social justice coincide with Freire’s (1985) conscientization:

A political illiterate regardless of whether she or he knows how to read and write—is one who has an ingenuous perception of humanity in its relationships with the world. This person has a naïve outlook on social reality, which for this one is a given, that is, social reality is a fait accompli rather than something that’s still in the making. (p.103)

Microaggressions and Intercultural Interactions

Denigrating aggressive exchanges have the capacity to influence individual or group membership by considering and reconsidering what is deemed “normal” or “acceptable.” Although microaggressions happen often, people may not realize the impact of these aggressive intercultural interactions. They are dangerous, therefore, because, more often than not, they are not easily discerned. This in part is due to societal and individually held beliefs that often drive intercultural behaviors. These behaviors, furthermore, are part of larger societal systems that perpetuates dominant cultural beliefs, practices, and policies. Often times, these intercultural exchanges place one party in a more powerful social or cultural position. These positions suggest those who are members of the dominant cultural group are not in positions in which they are expected to reflect on the impact of her/his behaviors; therefore, people with less power is expected to change their interactions to align with, adjust to, and/or tolerate harmful intercultural interchanges. For those who are marginalized, their realities go unnoticed, they are often rendered invisible, and yet these dominant beliefs are embedded throughout intercultural communication, beliefs, interactions, and policy.

When examining intercultural communication, it is important for people who are members of dominant cultural groups to not only understand what is trying to be communicated, but the cultural context in which observed behaviors are occurring. These aggressive behaviors often happen, because cultural expectations may be deficit-laden. For example, a person who identifies as heterosexual may assume only women who look “boyish” or “masculine,” according to Western societal stereotypes, could possibly identify as “lesbian” or “gay.”

Microaggressions may involve well-intended members from dominant cultural groups engaging in aggressive intercultural behaviors; however, these same dominant cultural members may also engage in overt, deliberate acts of bigotry towards marginalized populations due to race, class, gender, family structure, sexual orientation, native language, immigration status, gender expression, ability (social, emotional, physical, cognitive), beliefs/faith/religion, age, and other dimensions of cultural diversity. For those who identify as members of dominant cultural groups, they have the capacity and responsibility to minimize real intercultural conflict by coming to terms with personal bias, and countering aggressive exchanges against individuals or marginalized groups.

Within the last five years, the field of psychology embarked in understanding the influence of negative stereotypes and the extent individuals respond to what is called stereotype threats (Steele, 2010). Stereotype threats have the capacity to influence the extent individuals identify with negative beliefs aligned with specific aspects of personal identity. For example, if women are informed through the media and in school they are not as capable of excelling in math as men, women’s extra worry, and personal beliefs regarding these negative stereotypes could influence how they perform on a math exam. Women’s discomfort and anxiety while preparing for and taking the exam may play a role in understanding their capacity to perform. Daily structural macroaggressions communicate to women they do not have the same math abilities as men. These aggressive sociocultural intercultural interactions, which have the capacity to impact how people, and in the example provided, women, not only interact with one another, but understand how they are judged.

We contend these dominant cultural norms influence not only the structural and local sociocultural interactions, but promote judgment, criticism, and stereotypes aligned with both dominant and marginalized groups. According to Steele (2010), these judgments or stereotype threats provide sociocultural cues or circumstances influencing how people understand the intersectionality of their identity and its influence on intercultural interactions. Therefore, dominant cultural norms influence not only broader societal and local contexts, but also influence the extent by which people internalize judgment and criticism. This in turn, influences how people make sense of their world. Their sense-making impacts an individual’s beliefs, ideas, and responses. Furthermore, because we are interested in understanding the influence of micro/macroaggressions in K-16 educational institutions, we contend educators who serve specific school contexts need to consider how they make sense of the intersectionality of their membership with dominant intercultural groups, and how these intersections influence their ways of knowing and responses within school communities.

Educators and school leaders may be members of dominant intercultural groups. And at other times, they may identify as members of marginalized groups. For example, a White, lesbian, mother of an adopted child from Brazil may be a member of dominant intercultural group racially, however, as a women, lesbian, parent of an adopted child, and parent of a child born in Brazil, she is a member of several marginalized groups as a school leader within a specific school context.

The extent to which educators adhere to the notion of conformity within school contexts influences not only their intercultural interactions, but how they make sense of their experiences; specifically, how they understand their relationship of self to those who are marginalized. Therefore, the intensity of local microaggressions and stereotype threats have the capacity to challenge an individual's belongingness to an identity, intercultural interactions, and ultimately, their sense-making. And for those who serve K-16 educational institutions, how they make sense of macro and microaggressions, stereotype threats, and the extent they conform to local dominant values and norms may influence how they understand their capacity to serve/lead within diverse school contexts; specifically, having the capacity to interrupt, promote, and sustain justice-oriented work to empower underserved populations.

These oppressive intercultural interactions reinforce the call for a theory regarding connections among dominant values and norms, macroaggressions, microaggressions, stereotype threats, identity, sociocultural interactions, and sense-making. Finding connections among these concepts has the capacity to undergird what it means for people to interrupt local aggressive intercultural interactions often facing marginalized populations across diverse contexts and utilize their sense-making to actively engage in justice-oriented work. Because power structures and current discourse regarding aggressive intercultural interactions in the field of educational leadership may not be deemed as worthy within mainstream leadership texts, there is a need to consider how dominant cultural norms, macroaggressions, microaggressions, and stereotype threats influence justice-oriented work in K-16 educational institutions. We propose a conceptual model (see Figure 1) suggesting connections among dominant norms and values, microaggressions (local), macroaggressions (beyond local), conformity, dominant intercultural groups, marginalized groups, and sense-making. Specifically, we refer to Pierce's (1970) work on micro/macroaggressions, Steele's (2010) stereotype threats, educator's sense of functioning (i.e., Marx, Brown, & Steele, 1999; Steele, 1997), and extant literature on sense-making (Boske, 2011b; Dewey, 1929; Gershon, 2011; Howes, 2009) to understand an individual's capacity to utilize their experiences to promote intercultural communication aligned with justice-oriented work within specific contexts.

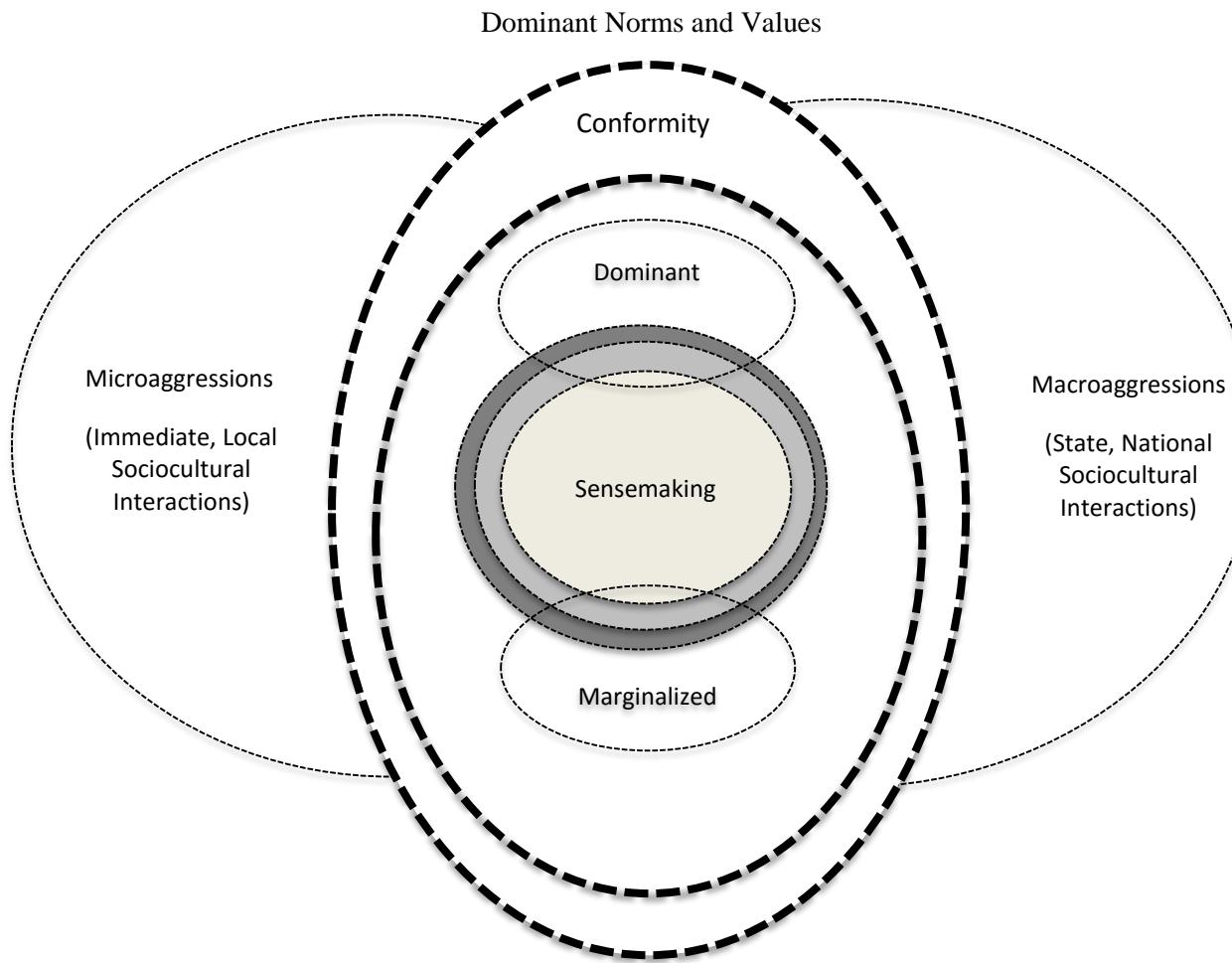


Figure 1. Micro/Macroaggression Ecological Conceptual Model.

Dominant cultural norms and values influence what society deems appropriate. The problem often lies in understanding the influence dominant cultural norms and values have on individuals and their capacity to engage or not engage in aggressive intercultural exchanges. Combatting aversive bias, views, and behaviors is traditionally seen as changing conscious attitudes and overt expressions of bias; however, because microaggressions are often subtle, eliminating bias is often ineffective when considering traditional interventions or legal practices (Stephan & Stephan, 2001). Therefore, dominant values not only influence structural intercultural understandings and interactions, but also impact local aversive exchanges or microaggressions. The influence of both macro and microaggressions can be pervasive, but may exist, because it remains largely under the radar, and therefore, is not addressed. The challenge understands the extent macro and microaggressions influence in individual's tendency towards conformity. This passive form of influence does not directly influence how members or the extent to which members influence others. People observe group actions and adjust their beliefs, feelings, and behaviors accordingly (see Cialdini, 2001; Cialdini & Trost, 1998).

The challenge of understanding the impact conformity plays in individuals perpetuating or interrupting aggressive intercultural exchanges represents a fundamental discrepancy between how people make meaning from these experiences and their responses towards marginalized

populations. Without significant recognition of the influence of conformity to dominant norms and values, people may believe they are not biased or engage in aggressive intercultural communication or discriminate in subtle, but consequential ways. Without sufficient understanding of the influence of dominant norms and values on macro and microaggressions, and the intersectionality of membership in dominant and marginalized groups, aversive intercultural interactions may progress and continue to influence social relations and behavior.

Within the conceptual model, both microaggressions i.e., assaults, insults, and invalidations of the person) and macroaggressions (i.e., include assaults, context, policy, delimitations of boundaries and space, and gatekeeping) influence and are influenced by an urgency to conform. Together, they impact how people make sense of the world (i.e., policies, procedures, processes, interactions). This influence, as described by Gorski (2010), plays an integral role in individuals and institutions perpetuating a deficit-laden ideology.

This deficit-laden ideology is based upon a set of assumed truths about the world and relationships that develop from within. Dangers associated with deficit-laden ideologies suggest differences are perceived as deficits. Therefore, micro and macroaggression allow people to focus on examining perceived weaknesses or fixing the individual versus addressing the systemic conditions causing controversy. As individuals internalize deficit-laden beliefs and engage in perpetuating macro and microaggressions, these beliefs become woven into the fabric of society and its socializing institutions such as schools influencing hidden bias and perpetuating oppressive practices and policies in schools (see Gorski, 2010; Sleeter, 2004). These deficit ideologies develop over a time, because institutions house professionals who often accept the status quo ideology as the norm; and therefore, people do not tend to challenge deficit-laden norms, which are aligned with micro and macroaggressions.

Because we are storytelling organisms, how we make sense of dominant values and norms, micro and macro aggressions, and conformity influence how we understand the world. Making sense, therefore, is how individuals understand their world in relation to self and others, immediate and less local ecologies, and themselves. However, sense-making involves understanding the influence dominant norms and values have on intercultural exchanges, and how these exchanges influence the extent to which people conform to dominant cultural values and norms. Sense-making urges us to look for explanations and answers regarding how people understand their world rather than structures or systems (Weick, 1995); therefore, an individual's experiences influence their way of thinking. This approach to thinking about and understanding an individual's way of knowing and understanding the world is grounded in identity construction suggesting sense-making is in the eye of the beholder. And although the sense-maker is an individual, the sense-maker is comprised of many identities (see Boske, 2011a; Weick, 1995). Because sense-making is a social process, the way in which we think and interact as people and our social functioning are essential aspects to how we understand and respond to the world (Resnick, Levine, & Teasly, 1991). As people continue to make meaning from these experiences, such experiences may serve as catalysts, which may become indicators of personal transformation (see Boske, 2011a, 2011b; Lather, 1986). Therefore, in making sense of the world both figuratively and literally, people make meaning predicated on local, broad norms, and values. As such, meanings are deeply personal as well as ideological, and in short, making sense-making political with interpretations among a myriad of possibilities. Therefore, one's sense of self, which is ultimately unique to that individual, is dependent on the sociocultural contexts, personal preference, and bias.

What a person does may depend on another; and therefore, direct influence of these

experiences, interactions, and new ways of knowing may be unclear. However, understanding sense-making encourages us to pay closer attention to sufficient cues, stereotypes, communication, and roles and recognizes this is an ongoing process. These connections play a critical role in understanding people's everyday experience of making sense of aggressive intercultural communications, which often constitute experiences of marginalized populations in K-16 educational contexts across the United States. These intersections, therefore, provide a lens for understanding how meaning is constructed and often resonates across sociocultural contexts (see Erlmann, 2004).

In regard to K-16 schools, dominant cultural norms and values create spaces for people to conform to dominant cultural norms. As people encounter and experience these norms, at times, those who are marginalized may experience aggressive intercultural communication, and for those who are members of a dominant cultural group, they may consider the extent to which they conform to participating in perpetuating aggressive intercultural exchanges. As people experience these intercultural exchanges, they draw meaning or make sense from their experiences. Throughout this sense-making process, people question their experiences of sensation (i.e., the senses), make meaning from their experiences (i.e. emergent experiences), and respond to their experiences (i.e., intercultural exchanges in understanding self in relation to others as well as understanding self). Therefore, making sense of the influence of micro and macroaggressions within dominant cultural values and norms becomes integral to understanding human experience. Kumashiro (2008) reminds us that these common sense understandings reflect dominant norms and values, which may perpetuate the marginalization of Othered populations and individuals. Therefore, teaching social justice-oriented pedagogies disrupts students' common sense notions about people, ideas, and ideals. How people understand and make sense of the impact of aversive aggressive intercultural communications is therefore shaped by nested layers of sociocultural contexts through which an individual's experiences and understanding are mediated, especially when considering how to reduce bias, promote social responsibility, and engage in justice-oriented actions (Boske, 2011a; Dewey, 1929; Gershon, 2011; Howes, 2009).

Moving from Theory to Practice

We explore the implications of this knowledge in the work and daily practices of an educator. Within this frame, it is important to posit questions, self-reflective, dismantling questions, like: Is this metacognition helpful? What should you do? What can you do as an educator for social justice? Both intercultural and multicultural education need to evolve as frameworks and movements for educational equity. This is the only manner in which educators can negotiate entrance into and become part of the movement to respond effectively to contemporary and emerging sociopolitical and economic realities around the world. It's imperative.

Moving forward from this point, we argue in order for organic social justice-oriented work to occur, we must push past the falsely static boundaries of microaggressions to initiate, advocate for, and produce a critical mass of knowledge with regard to a holistic and more meaningful understanding of the interconnectedness of micro- and macroaggressions. Important to this research is the notion of educational information sharing and to ensure that this type of academic vulnerability is reciprocal. Academic vulnerability (hooks, 1994) is not only aimed at personal academic development, but can also be a tool by which educators can pedagogically engage and empower others. hooks stated: "Engaged pedagogy emphasizes well-being. That

means that teachers must be actively involved committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well-being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers [others]" (1994, p. 15). This being said, it is an imperative to understand and promulgate recommendations that stem from aspects of culturally relevant leadership. According to Osanloo (2012),

Educational leaders should have an acute awareness and instructive sensitivity of the sociocultural and political climate that they will be working in to adequately address the issues facing students in a global context. Moreover, educational leadership preparation programs should aggressively integrate both conceptual and pedagogical tools of social justice to comprehensively and holistically educate practitioners working with intercultural and multicultural students. (p. 46)

Preparation programs for prospective leaders must move beyond theoretical notions of social justice and minimize the binary of "knowing and doing" by facilitating more activist scholarship (James, 1996, p. 191). According to James, to fully understand social justice work students must learn how to "live, learn, and teach without elitist assumptions by doing activities that confront and diminish oppression" (1996, p.191). In order to facilitate crucial changes in schools that challenge oppressive structures, including macro and microaggressions, leadership preparation programs must help leaders develop the skills to counter oppression and "transform silence into language and action" (Lorde, 1984, p. 43) in schools. Harris and Alford (2005) found that students reported social justice issues as important and believed that increasing their awareness of equity issues led to the formation of more socially just beliefs.

According to Asher (2007), teachers and leaders must be taught to grapple with ideas and intersections of race, culture, and gender through courageous, but critical, dialogue and personal reflection. Cambron-McCabe and McCarthy (2005) encourage school leaders to question assumptions that drive policies and practices. Furthermore, prospective leaders should be taught to focus on solving problems of practice through problem-based learning. Students often need concrete examples of social justice action because they lack the appropriate frames of understanding (Schmidt, 2009). According to Schmidt (2009), case studies require students to confront problems in a simulated way so that they can consider whether similar problems exist in their schools and decide how they might resolve them. According to Rusch and Horsford (2008),

Learning about social justice is far different from engaging in the emotion-laden work of learning social justice. Frequently, instructors of aspiring educational leaders find that when social justice content is introduced, the adult classroom becomes a messy community, filled with untidy and unexamined viewpoints, multiple stereotypes, and carefully crafted biases. (p. 353)

Learning to become a socially just leader means to engage actively with value-laden issues (Rusch, 2004).

Implications for Practice

This article proposes a conceptual model identifying certain imperatives in the field of educational leadership may want to act upon in understanding social justice-oriented work and reconceptualizing and deconstructing macro and microaggressions. Though the field has seen a

significant increase in social justice dialogue (Brown, 2004; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005), the inclusion of these concepts in administrator preparation programs has occurred at a much slower rate. While school leaders are increasingly called upon to work with diverse student populations (Osterman & Hafner, 2009), a significant number of practicing administrators reported that their preparation programs failed to prepare them to lead diverse school environments (Levine, 2005), much less macro and microaggressions.

We contend, leadership preparation programs must engage with histories, theories, and practices that have led to greater inequity and hegemonic policy in a global context. The dialogue around social justice is not separate from the dailiness of school leadership practice (Bogotch, 2005). So, while some university faculty have begun social justice dialogues, this is not enough. Espoused theories on social justice must find a visible presence in leadership education classrooms because, according to Theoharis (2007), principals who lead with a commitment to equity: raise student achievement; enhance staff capacity; strengthen school culture. Principals with a social justice orientation also actively resist deficit thinking and make it their mission to create a safe space in schools (Mansfield, 2013).

How, specifically, do we teach leaders and prospective leaders to counter oppression and respond to macro and microaggressions? We need to “retool teaching and courses to address issues of power and privilege - to weave social justice into the fabric of educational leadership curriculum, pedagogy, programs, and policies” (Brown, 2004, p. 78). According to Newcomb and Mansfield (2014), we must help leadership students become responsible for their own learning, help them assess their own assumptions and beliefs, and encourage them to reflect, and, sometimes, change.

Understandings that leadership preparation programs can facilitate to develop principals who can demonstrate a commitment to equity include, but are not limited to:

- Problematizing what is meant by dominant norms and values and their influence on practices and policies in K-12 schools;
- Developing educational and community leaders committed to eradicating macro and micro aggressions through social-justice oriented work;
- Pursue research aligned with identifying the influence of macro and microaggressions on the ways in which schools conform practices and policies and their impact on dominant and marginalized populations;
- Promulgate research focused on the impact these school practices and policies play in providing educational access to young people;
- Develop ways to understand the extent schools conform to dominant norms and values plays in how youth make sense of their world;
- Establish and maintain a critical dialogue among school communities regarding ways to assess the influence of micro and macroaggressions on the dispositions of young people; and
- Develop new ways to utilize sense-making to deepen an individual's understanding

regarding the impact of macro and microaggressions on self and Others to create socially just-oriented dispositions of young people, educators, school leaders, and community members.

The University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) may play a significant role in further conceptualizing the influence of macro and microaggressions on young people and schools by bridging school leadership preparation programs and this conceptual model. Important to this work is that we endeavor to aid other social justice scholars in diversity-building practices that can be a boon to paradigmatic shifts focused on a better understanding of the intersectionalities of identity in professional and personal spaces. In other words, housing this conceptual model inside an educational leadership program affords opportunities to critical examine the extent this model may address deficit-laden pedagogies and curriculum. We encourage readers to consider the extent Shields and Bogotch's (2014) work (i.e., regarding new theories and actions to address social justices) and Marshall and Oliva's (2010) bold assertions (i.e., to identify engaging in social justice work as a privilege) are aligned with an urgency to disrupt macro and microaggressions in schools. This conceptual model asserts those who prepare school leaders can no longer promote pedagogies and curriculum that are not grounded in the history and purpose of education, dominant norms and values, dimensions of diversity, equity, macro and microaggressions, and critical reflection. It is critical for those engaged in this work to understand how the way in which we make sense of dominant values and norms influence our beliefs, decisions, and actions that often perpetuate further marginalization of university educational leadership preparation in addressing social injustices.

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