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The Impact of Microaggressions on Racial and Social Experiences within K-12 Environments and Teacher Education Programs

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THE IMPACT OF MICROAGGRESSIONS ON RACIAL AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES
WITHIN K-12 ENVIRONMENTS AND TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

By

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A capstone project submitted for Graduation with University Honors

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ABSTRACT

One of the several factors affecting minority students' education are sociological factors such as

microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle insults stemming from racist beliefs affecting

everyone from students to teachers to staff. Microaggressions can have an impact on the receiver

as well as the school and classroom dynamics. Previous research has proven that

microaggressions pose negative impacts on school environments. This project reviews literature

surrounding the impact of microaggressions on racial and social experiences within K-12

environments and teacher education programs. By combining Critical Race Theory and

identifying common themes of microaggressions within educational environments, this led to a

connection between microaggressions and discriminatory practices. The consequences of

microaggression have affected students through unsatisfied/incorrect placements, cultural

disrespect, maintaining the status quo, and deficit thinking. For positive progression to our

education system, the importance of microaggressions needs to be addressed in order to resolve

the issues of racial discrimination in education and create sustainable and profound change that

serves students and educators of color. Understanding how microaggressions originate and

manifest will help us address racial biases to prevent racialized discourse in learning

environments. Creating a safer and a more stable learning environment among students, teachers,

and staff will promote diversity and inclusion in our society.

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BACKGROUND

School environments are typically considered to be a safe space where students are expected to learn and improve their knowledge as they go through the years, passing on to the next grade level. Schools are generally thought of as a "safe space" for students to express themselves and to learn critical concepts to help prepare them for their academic future and to become better citizens in the future. Educators are expected to have the students' best interests at heart, to teach them effectively, to be supportive, and to challenge them academically to be competitive candidates in this fast-paced society. However, within these sacred school environments, there is room for error, room for biases, and more significantly, room for discrimination.

As the student demographic continues to diversify, the potential for racial biases and racial discrimination in school environments increases. It would be favorable to both the student and teacher population if the teacher demographics diversified at the same rate as the student population. Unfortunately, this has not been the case historically or presently. In 2017, students of color made up 75% of the total student population in public schools (nces.ed.gov). In that same year, teachers of color only made up about 21% of the entire teacher population in public schools, revealing that the majority (79%) of teachers are white (nces.ed.gov). With these ratios, one can see the racial disparity of students compared to teachers. Racial and, thus, cultural differences in teachers and students can often lead to racial biases and racial discrimination, much in the form of microaggressions.

Figure 1

Percentage distribution of teachers in public elementary and secondary schools by race/ethnicity (nces.ed.gov)

Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time teachers rather than on the number of

Percent


Race/ethnicity

■ 1999–2000   □ 2017–18
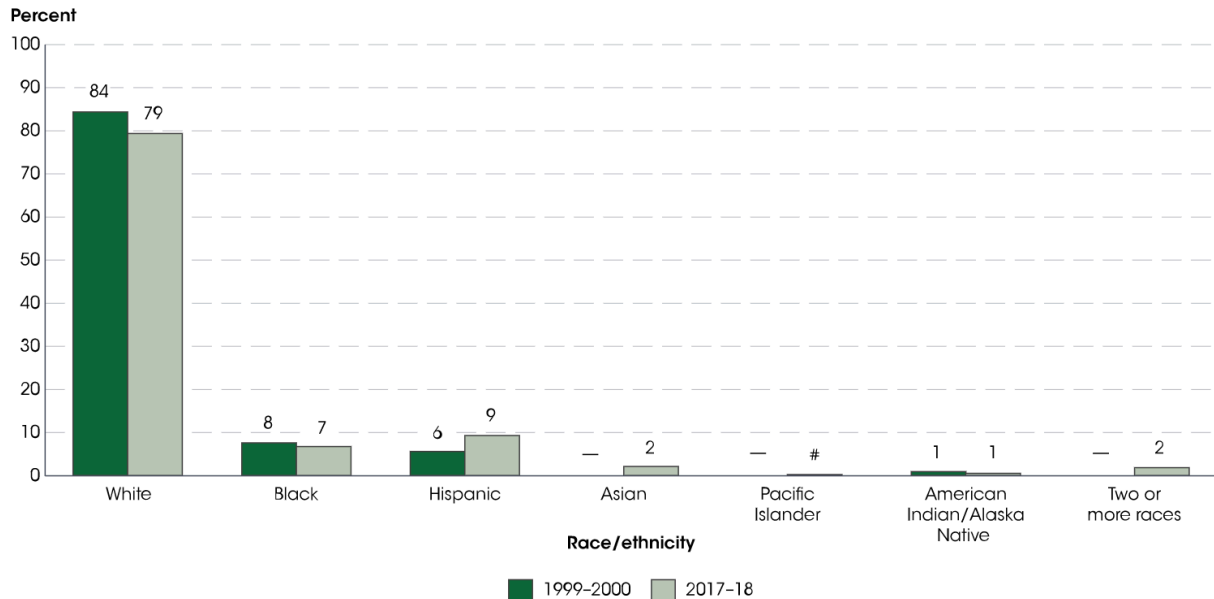
full-time-equivalent teachers. Teachers were classified as elementary or secondary on the basis of the grades they taught, rather than on the level of the school in which they taught. In general, elementary teachers include those teaching prekindergarten through grade 6 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being kindergarten through grade 6. In general, secondary teachers include those teaching any of grades 7 through 12 and those teaching multiple grades, with a preponderance of grades taught being grades 7 through 12 and usually with no grade taught being lower than grade 5.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Teacher Data File," "Charter School Teacher Data File," "Public School Data File," and "Charter School Data File," 1999–2000; and National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2017–18. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 209.22. (nces.ed.gov)

Figure 2

Percentage of public elementary and secondary school students enrolled in schools with at least 75 percent minority enrollment, by student race/ethnicity (nces.ed.gov)
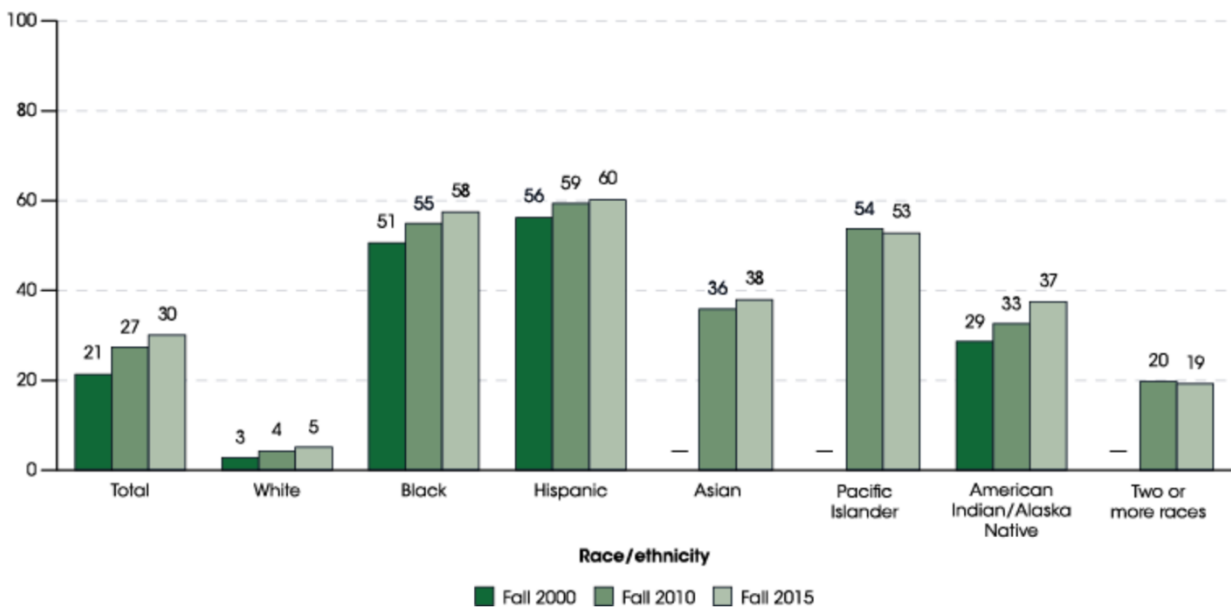
Minority students include students who are Black, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and of Two or more races. Prior to 2010, separate data on students who are Asian, Pacific Islander, and of Two or more races were not collected. Data reflect racial/ethnic data reported by schools. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey," 2000–01, 2010–11, and 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 216.50. (nces.ed.gov)

INTRODUCTION TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions are subtle insults that support and uphold a hierarchy of making the minority inferior (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). Although this paper's topic will be on racial and ethnic microaggressions, it is equally essential to address the different types of microaggressions that circulate in our society. Being the "minority" in a society does not necessarily correlate with race. Minorities can be women, individuals who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community, immigrants, and those who are disabled (Woodford et al., 2013; Forrest-Bank and Cuellar, 2018; Fergus, 2017; Fruja and Roxas (2016). In many cases, people find themselves being double minorities, in which case they are a woman *and* a person of color. Some may even find that their identities intersect with different categories, identifying with several types of minority groups. Microaggressions affect all kinds of minority groups, not just racially or ethnically based minority groups.

It is important to also note that racial microaggressions are an extension of racism (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). Our school education system, along with other established systems in our society, uphold the majority and oppress the minority (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). Historically, schools were created to teach white children, with white educators leading the classroom (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). Thus, leaving the education system without experience on how to ensure positive student performance levels on students from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. When the time came that students of color needed to be integrated into American schools, educators were told, if not encouraged, to ensure the assimilation of all students to "white Anglo-Saxon Protestant ideals" (Kaestle 1983; Gerstle 2001; in Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). Although schools have progressed considerably over the past century, there remains facets of racism and proof of schools favoring and perpetuating the dominant culture. This can actively be seen in

something as important as the school curriculum. In schools today, the school curriculum pushes a Eurocentric narrative while, in many cases, making ethnic studies courses an elective option for students to take if interested (de los Rios, 2020). School curricula perpetuate a white, narrow view of history without taking into account other perspectives that were also present in such historical events. Providing students with different historical perspectives is critical to identity development, especially in minority students. The lack of teacher diversity is another form of upholding the dominant culture in that white teachers by continuously hiring white education without considering racial equity in the education field will lead to educators not being able to effectively teach or accommodate their students accordingly given the vast difference in cultures and ideals. School funding also plays a role in upholding the dominant culture. Schools of color are notorious for lacking funding and critical resources to ensure the success of their students (Barker, 2011). Whereas schools with a predominantly white population usually have enough or more than enough funding to attract qualified educators, have enough learning resources, and quality learning equipment (Barker, 2011).

It is safe to say that microaggressions can be considered a side effect of having an education system that, by default, caters to the white population of students. History has demonstrated that the American education system makes little effort in accommodating students of color and frequently blames the students when they are not performing at the expected academic level. This deficit view invites stereotypes and negative assumptions about students of color that do not take into account external factors that impact their performance abilities and thus their schooling experience. This issue can only be addressed if all components of the education system collaborate with each other in order to ensure that educational environments are all-inclusive and accommodating. School districts should be working with school

administrators, and administrators should be working with teachers to ensure that classrooms are

creating positive learning environments through their teaching practice to combat this deficit

view and thus combat microaggressions. This would be a step in the right direction.
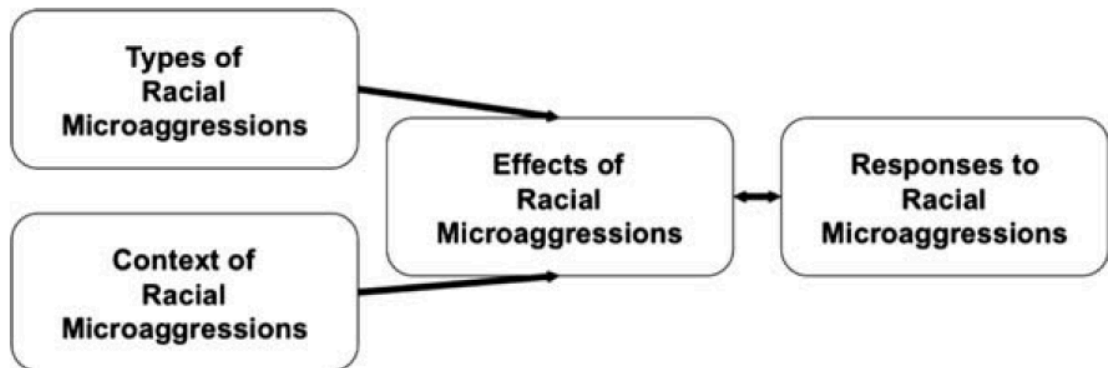
MICROAGGRESSIONS IN SCHOOLS

Racial microaggressions can take place in school environments. Microaggressions can be displayed by teachers, administrators, and even students themselves (Fergus, 2017; Tolbert and Eichelberger, 2016; Hernandez and Villodas, 2020; Rodriguez-Mojica and Rodela, 2020). They can occur through interpersonal exchanges and are often expressed as a subtle insult towards people of color in an automatic and indirect manner (Solórzano et al., 2000; Sue et al., 2007 in Forrest-Bank and Cuellar, 2018). Racial microaggressions are difficult to interpret in as people do not know how to respond and frequently question whether the action was directed to them, indirectly posing sentiments of confusion and stress (Forrest-Bank and Cuellar, 2018). Due to the confusing nature microaggressions cause in people of color, recipients of these actions experience more psychological distress compared to more direct forms of discrimination (Noh et al., 2007; Sue, 2010 in Forrest-Bank and Cuellar, 2018; Nadal et al., 2019). These subtle yet racist acts can attack any aspect of an individual, even aspects that one would not think twice about. The pronunciation of a name, the academic potential a student has, the effectiveness of an educator, the possible future outcome of a student's life can all be used in a way to attack a student whether an individual enacting such acts are aware of it or not (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012; Sosa and Gomez, 2012; Pollack, 2012). All individuals have biases; however, it is the responsibility of each individual to address those biases accordingly. What impact does it have on other people for one to have these inherent biases? In some cases, teachers and administrators have lost control of their biases and thus consciously or subconsciously attack students via microaggressions (Fergus, 2017). These actions are not exclusively directed to the student population. Teachers of color could also be victims of racial bias and racial microaggressions (Acuff, 2018; Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020; Tolbert and Eichelberger, 2014). Teachers have a

tremendous amount of influence on their students. Students, especially students of a young age, are like sponges. They absorb everything and anything in their surrounding environment without considering the positive or negative impacts. When an authority figure commits a microaggression, dismissing the deeper meaning behind the act, it can lead to students thinking it is socially acceptable to say such statements or do such actions (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012; Forrest-Bank and Jenson, 2015). Thus, educators play a key role in perpetuating racial biases through racial microaggressions that end up significantly affecting the identity and academic performance of a student. Moreover, tenured teachers can play a role in influencing new, wide-eyed teachers the "truth" about how students work and "what to look out for" (Pollack, 2012). This ends up creating a never-ending cycle of racial discrimination towards students and people of color.

Figure 3

Model for understanding microaggressions (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012)

"We must examine the different types of racial microaggressions that People of Color experience. Second, it is important to consider the various contexts in which racial microaggressions occur. Next, we need to understand the effects of racial microaggressions on the person on the receiving end. Finally, we need to know how People of Color respond to racial microaggressions" (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012).

Racial microaggressions can affect anyone at any age. In the case of schooling environments, educators have the most significant influence and impact on their students' schooling experience. They set the tone of the classroom and have the freedom to dictate what their teaching practice looks like. Whether they are an elementary teacher, an administrator, tenured professor, or a director of an education program (Ph.D., Master's, Teacher Education Program, etc.), these authority figures have the power of not only playing the role of gatekeepers but of making the experience of a student a positive or negative one. One of the responsibilities of an educator should be to reflect on their biases and analyze how their actions may or may not be negatively affecting their pupils. In the sacred space of a classroom, the only task a student should be occupied with is learning. It is the educators' responsibility to ensure that they have provided their students with the knowledge and tools necessary to succeed. Students should be the ones who define what their path or future looks like, not the educator.

EFFECTS ON THE INDIVIDUAL

It is essential to understand how racial microaggressions can have detrimental effects on one's identity. As mentioned previously, microaggressions can affect both the student's and the educator's identities (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012; Acuff, 2018; Forrest-Bank and Jenson, 2015). One of the most common and subtle racial microaggressions in school environments is the mispronunciation of cultured or ethnic names (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). This can prove to be a common occurrence in K-12 classrooms where it is customary to call on a student to answer a question or to declare themselves present when taking the classroom attendance. Children begin to develop their self-concept and understand their identity through their names (Sears and Sears, 2003 in Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). "A child begins to understand who they are through their parents' accent, intonation, and pronunciation of their name" (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). When the time comes to attend school and their name is mispronounced or modified to something that is easier for the educator to pronounce, then the name and identity in question is invalidated. It dismisses the love, care, and significance of the meaning behind the name (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012) as well as disrespecting the student. In many cases, when a students' name is difficult to pronounce, teachers tend to distort the student's name into a completely different name. There is this misconception that creating a new name is "the better option" in order to avoid mispronouncing the original name. However, it is frequently overlooked that creating a different name for a student is creating them a different identity (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012; Forrest-Bank and Jenson, 2015). This, in turn, will have the student believing that they are, for example, "Natalia" at home but "Natalie" at school. The names that are mispronounced are frequently tied to the individual's culture. By creating a name that "is easier to pronounce" or is more Americanized, it causes the student to feel like their place or culture has no value in US society

(Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). This results in them wanting to assimilate to the dominant culture and have feelings of resentment towards their culture and upbringing, critical and important factors that contribute to their being as a whole. When the student does not fully embrace their background and culture, they are not embracing themselves, or in other words, loving themselves. Negating their identity and culture can create a domino effect in the students' lives that can negatively impact their aspirations, motivations, and "love for their culture and themselves" (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012).

Moreover, it is important to note that educators and student-teachers specifically may also experience racialized microaggressions in schools. In order for this cycle to be broken, the source of this issue needs to be addressed. Seasoned educators hold tremendous influence not only with their students but also with student-teachers. Although many teacher preparation programs advocate for social justice reform and restorative justice practices, sometimes, the coordinating teacher (CT) selection process does not parallel the values of the program nor the student teachers (Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020). This can allow for CTs to impose their discriminatory teaching practices, deficit-view actions, and racist beliefs as they cooperate with the student teacher and as they teach the students of color that are in their classroom (Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020). For instance, when a teacher education program effectively teaches an aspiring educator how to incorporate social justice issues into their teaching curriculum, but is later disapproved by the CT due to "lack of time" or noting it as "unnecessary information," this is again done to uphold the dominant culture (Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020). This is often the case if the CT does not reflect the same values as the student-teacher or the program they come from (Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020). CTs encompasses many roles, of which a couple of them are of gatekeepers and "abiders of change" (Clarke et al., 2014 in Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020). If

student teachers are attempting to implement their identities and their knowledge into their teaching practices and are constantly being reprimanded by their white CT for not "getting to the point," then are they not attempting to stifle passion and diversity and further upholding the status quo? Without socially justice-aware CTs supporting new incoming teachers to teach in a way that sets them apart from the traditional manner of teaching, when will there be true change in the field of educators and socially just education for students of color? Student teachers of color who experience microaggressions that enable them to believe that their presence, their identity, or their teaching practice is a burden affects the way they place themselves in their role as a teacher and as an individual in society (Rodriguez-Mojica et al., 2020; Acuff, 2018).

Although it is teachers of color who are more likely to see themselves as change agents and are more likely to effectively teach and accommodate students of color, substantial research has been focused on ensuring that white educators learn to implement social justice issues and restorative justice practices in their classroom (Brown, 2014; Milner and Howard, 2013; Su 1996 in Tolbert and Eichelberger, 2014). The retention of teachers of color in teacher education programs and schools has not been successful due to reports of experiences not being valued, the reinforcement of stereotypes of communities of color, and racial microaggressions (Brown, 2014; Kohli, 2009; Wilkins and Lall, 2011 in Tolbert and Eichelberger, 2014). Frequently, teachers of color who were handpicked to be the future of the education field are faced with contradicting sentiments while enrolled in teacher education programs. Presently, many teacher education programs emphasize the importance of implementing social justice in the classroom curriculum and paint a picture of the hope there is for future educators of color to be agents of change. In some cases, the reality is that teacher education programs may not be adequately prepared to teach and retain aspiring teachers of color (Tolbert and Eichelberger, 2014). Many

pre-service teachers of color find themselves dealing with, tolerating, and responding to racial microaggressions (Tolbert and Eichelberger, 2014). Retention rates of teachers of color in teacher preparation programs are low due to them not being able to tolerate the "overwhelming presence of whiteness" in the programs" (Tolbert and Eichelberger, 2014). As higher education programs and teacher education programs advocate for teaching that is socially just, there may be a lack of self-reflection in those programs that are worthy to note. Encouraging teachers of color to apply to teacher preparation programs and then not effectively supporting them in their endeavor to establish a change in a discipline that requires uniqueness, boldness, and passion is ultimately setting up teachers of color for failure (Tolbert and Eichelberger, 2014). Instead of silencing student teachers of color perspectives, teacher preparation programs should be working to "prepare them with the political and diplomatic skills they will need to voice critique and dissent against inequitable educational policies and practices in student teaching placements" (Tolbert and Eichelberger, 2014). In doing so, teachers of color will be better prepared and motivated to work towards establishing positive social justice reform in their schools and communities as new educators.

When enduring racial microaggressions, students or teachers of color may experience what Acuff (2018) describes as "racial battle fatigue," which is the "exhaustion and stress associated with racial microaggressions" that can lead to negatively affect the physical, mental, and emotional health of teachers of color (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006 in Acuff, 2018). This framework allows for connections to be drawn between racial microaggressions and the detrimental physical and mental effects that students of color can experience during their academic journey in institutions of higher education (Hernandez and Villodas, 2020). Racial microaggressions pose negative consequences in terms of mental and emotional well-being in

both students and educators of color. Studies have shown that Latinx students specifically experience psychological stress responses such as "frustration, irritability, shock, disappointment, and agitation" (Franklin, Smith, and Hung, 2014 in Hernandez, Villodas, 2020). In addition, there is also evidence linking racial microaggressions with both physiological and behavioral stress responses (Franklin et al., 2014 in Hernandez and Villodas, 2020). Similar to the experiences of Black students and Black educators (Acuff, 2018), Latinx college students who experience racial microaggressions experience damaging effects on their mental health (Hernandez and Villodas, 2020).

It is no secret that microaggressions cause a deeper negative impact on students compared to blatant acts of racism. Due to their subtle nature, recipients of the microaggressions often do not know how to respond. In some cases, racial microaggressions are committed repeatedly such that students would rather give in rather than put up a fight. This can be seen when teachers mispronounce the names of the students without putting in a true effort to pronounce them. There comes the point when a student would give up rather than constantly be fighting against acts of microaggressions. Educators should be informed on the several consequences microaggressions or actions as a result of their biases may pose to their students. Being a person of color should not mean that one has to endure and tolerate acts of discrimination simply because those in positions of authority have not received anti-bias training or have been informed of the importance of having socially just teaching practices. Educators should always wear their "learning cap" and educate themselves regarding the ways that they can help and improve the schooling experience for students of color. It should also become part of their mission as a teacher to have respect towards their scholars, a golden principle that should always be kept in mind.

EFFECTS ON SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS

School culture and student performance rates can be negatively impacted by the use of racial bias and racial microaggressions. Schools should be safe and inclusive environments for both the students and the teachers. In terms of workplace culture, the inadvertent use of racial microaggressions can influence the manner in which student teachers learn, as previously mentioned. However, teachers and administrators can also perpetuate racial microaggressions by not addressing their racial biases, thus affecting their students (Pollack, 2012). It is not unusual for teachers to comment or discuss student performances, behaviors, attitudes, etc., amongst themselves. Nevertheless, these "casual" conversations, upon scrutiny, reveal more about how outdated teacher values and beliefs are and the importance of addressing teachers' lack of awareness of their deficit views of students and their connection to learning, teaching, and equity in schools (Pollack, 2012). The concept of having a "deficit view" blames the student, in this case, for the racial and economic disparities people of color experience (Pollack, 2012). Students who are on the receiving end of the deficit view are students who are primarily Latinx and Black (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012; Del Carmen Salazar and Franquiz, 2008; Pollack, 2012). It is crucial for educators, administrators, and other school staff to understand that their words and actions have consequences and to be aware that having an open mind to their students' performances, regardless of race or ethnicity, will allow for growth in their students. If school staff consistently project low standards and low expectations for their students, as a result of their racial biases, then students will not perform at a high level (Pollack, 2012). Much of the time, racial biases can be pointed out through the use of racial microaggressions in "informal teacher talk" (Pollack, 2012). "Teacher talk" is described as conversations between K-12 educators about students, families, and communities of color (Pollack, 2012). This informal talk includes stories,

gossip, comments, or even advice associated with students and their respective communities of color (Pollack, 2012). These conversations may hold a true reflection of the "beliefs and assumptions" an individual may have about a student based upon their race and the various intersecting communities they belong to (Pollack, 2012; Sosa and Gomez, 2012).

This problematic form of teacher talk is prevalent in school environments due to the drastic disparity between the diversity in the K-12 teacher population compared to their student counterparts. Teachers who do not share the same racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural background as their students and who do not put in effort to understand the background of their communities fail to truly accommodate and effectively teach them (Pollack, 2012). This is one of the critical factors that explains why teachers have negative attitudes or beliefs towards their "disadvantaged students" (Pollack, 2012). Pollack (2012) identifies the different narrative themes embedded in teacher discourse and the functions of each theme. "Telling it like it is" is one of the themes that automatically places low expectations on students and negatively assumes and believes that a student will not be able to either complete or achieve a task or goal (Pollack, 2012). In addition, it further establishes the speaker's role, often an experienced or tenured teacher, as an authority that holds "insider knowledge" about different students (Pollack, 2012). The functions of this theme are to mask the racial microaggressions as a "reality check" to new teachers, to seem like a piece of advice, and to overall justify why there is different treatment directed towards students of color based upon racial bias and stereotypes (Pollack, 2012). The second theme found in "informal teacher talks" is educators actively placing blame outside their sphere of control (Pollack, 2012). This takes the educators and the schools out of the pool of factors that could explain why students of color are not performing as high as other students (Pollack, 2012), thus reducing the sense of obligation from teachers due to them believing that

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students of color are not capable of improving or doing better (Pollack, 2012). Lastly, the third theme found in these conversations depicts the action of "othering" students of color by not only creating a clear line of division between "us" and "them" but also upholding negative or stereotypical ideas of these students based upon their race (Pollack, 2012). What is important to understand is what a tremendous impact negative assumptions or low expectations can have on an educator's teaching practice. If such teaching practices have become less challenging and therefore less engaging, then these educators who may not be aware of their biases and microaggressions are doing a complete disservice to the students who are trusting them to prepare them for higher education, society, and eventually the workforce. They are setting them up for failure in most cases. Without a doubt, the claim can be made that seasoned teachers influence new teachers into also endorsing the approach to "not work as hard," thus implying that students of color, especially those who come from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, are not worth the time, effort, and limited resources (Pollack, 2012).

In schools or classrooms where students are primarily minorities, specifically Latinx and Black students, it is important for the educator to help them build or strengthen their academic resilience. Academic resilience in students depends largely on teacher practice and attitude (Sosa and Gomez, 2012). Students who come from a disadvantaged background are subject to face additional stressors outside of their schooling environment that impacts their mental and emotional well-being and thus their academic performance as a student (Sosa and Gomez, 2012; del Carmen Salazar and Franquiz, 2008). Academic resilience in students allows for the students to immerse themselves in school, which leads them to become actively and deeply engaged as a form of coping with external challenges they may be facing in their lives outside of school (Johnson, 2008; Masten, 2001; Newman et al. as cited in Cefai, 2004 in Sosa and Gomez, 2012).

Teachers have a massive amount of influence in ensuring that their students perform up to par to standards and expectations, if not beyond that. An educator's teaching practice does not only pertain to how they teach a lesson to their classroom, but it also encompasses whether the teacher is able to form respectful and caring relationships, their ability to create and maintain a positive learning environment and have set classroom routines for their students (Sosa and Gomez, 2012; del Carmen Salazar and Franquiz, 2008). If teachers were equipped with the knowledge and awareness on how to improve their teaching practices to be more humanizing, then academic resilience in students could be strengthened and reared as they navigate the K-12 education system (Pianta and Walsh, 1998; Winfield, 1994 in Sosa and Gomez, 2012). However, in order to effectively implement this, educators must have at the very least some understanding of their students' upbringing and be consciously aware of how their experiences may implicate them. This connects to racial microaggressions in that if students are being viewed in a deficit point of view by their teachers, and teachers continue to display racial bias, enforce stereotypes, and commit microaggressions, then what type of classroom environment are they creating for their students, especially those of color? Student learning is heavily reliant on the nature of teacher-student relationships (Sosa and Gomez, 2012; del Carmen Salazar and Franquiz, 2008). The more respectful and empathetic the teacher, the more likely students will want to engage in the classroom content. This creates a domino effect where students will not only be more interested in what their teacher has to say, but they will become more motivated to learn and will thus persevere in their academic journey because they realize someone is looking out for them and someone cares to see them succeed (Sosa and Gomez, 2012; del Carmen Salazar and Franquiz, 2008). Microaggressions, along with racial biases and stereotypes pushes one to assume, in this case, the academic or future outcome of a student. Frequently, these assumptions are particularly

negative and, in some cases, reassure that students of color do not possess bright futures or have strong potential for success. As one has these assumptions, it makes the chance of lowering expectations for students more likely. Ultimately, this is not ideal for any student, but especially students of color, because once expectations are lowered, then students do not feel obligated to rise above those expectations and exceed standards. Not being aware that this is negatively impacting their path to success, teachers wrongfully believe that they are doing those students a favor by "lessening the load on them," or they may claim the students is a "lost cause."

Educators possess the means to change and can become effective teachers if an effort is invested into their practice. Small changes or "ounces of respect" (Sosa and Gomez, 2012) can truly change the manner in which students feel when in their classroom. By saying their names (and pronouncing them correctly), saying "good morning," asking about their day overall, and being attentive to their students promotes a healthy, positive learning environment where students feel safe (Sosa and Gomez, 2012; del Carmen Salazar and Franquiz, 2008). Teachers who do not take an interest in their students' lives are apathetic, and distant which promotes student disengagement and school dropouts (Fine, 1991; Venezuela, 1999 in Sosa and Gomez, 2012). By shedding the deficit view towards students and embracing the asset view, teachers understand that they are in control of their classroom but are aware that students have a lot to learn from them content-wise. With the asset view, teachers can now see that they have plenty to learn from their students and are aware that students have "funds of knowledge" (Moll and Gonzalez, 2004 in Sosa and Gomez, 2012), which positions students as experts of their own "experiences, family, cultural traditions, youth culture, and media" (Sosa and Gomez, 2012). Teachers who implement the four key elements: respect, mutual trust, verbal teachings, and exemplary model, are able to appeal to students of color, particularly Latinx students (del

Carmen Salazar and Franquiz, 2008). These key elements "reflect the values and interactions within Mexican households or cultural funds of knowledge" (del Carmen Salazar and Franquiz, 2008). By weaving a humanizing pedagogic practice into educators' teaching methods, teachers will be valuing and validating "students' background knowledge, language, culture, and life experiences" (del Carmen Salazar and Franquiz, 2008).

The implementation of a humanizing pedagogic practice, procuring and continuously practicing respect and mutual trust will foster caring relationships between students and teachers. Teachers who have positive relationships with the students and who genuinely take an interest in their lives encourage their students to engage in the classroom and promote learning. There are also benefits for the educator in that they will be able to better understand the external factors that are affecting their students and learn how to help them combat them through classroom teaching. Having a better understanding of their students' backgrounds will allow educators to accommodate students of color and effectively teaching them while creating a positive learning environment for their students to thrive in.

ANALYSIS

Data was collected from various research articles discussing the effects of microaggressions on students of color and their long-term impacts on the individual, schools, and classrooms. A careful review of the literature involving microaggressions and their impacts on school environments helped identify common themes relating to their negative impact on students. Each article used focuses on issues that arise pertaining to microaggressions and their impact on students of color specifically. All experiences of students relating to microaggressions were analyzed through cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and the Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenet, "The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge," which deems the "experiential knowledge of women and men of color [as] legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, practicing, and teaching about racial insubordination (Solórzano and Yosso, 2001). As common themes were generated, the literature on the experiences of educators of color was revisited to bring about a holistic contribution to how microaggressions affect not only students but also educators of color.

MAJOR FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The themes that were identified in this study are (1) unsatisfied/incorrect placements, (2) disregard for people's culture (i.e., cultural disrespect), (3) maintaining the status quo, and (4) deficit thinking. These four major themes are often propagated by microaggressions contributed to the discrimination of people of color in school environments ranging from K-12 schools to teacher education programs. In some cases, the use of microaggressions caused student-teachers enrolled in teacher education programs to feel unsupported and uncomfortable in their placement. When wanting to implement a socially just teaching practice, student-teachers were "corrected" into sticking the basics and not going above and beyond to giving an ethnically diverse teaching practice. The sentiments of the student teachers led to feelings of dissatisfaction and resulted in conflict between the student-teacher and the program while battling the dismantling of the status quo. Labeling one's different and diverse teaching practice as "extra" or "unnecessary" is a form of discrimination that works to maintain the dominant manner of teaching, which has been proven to not be beneficial to students of color. In regard to the students who are put in incorrect placements such as tracking, remedial classes, or ELL (English Language Learners), microaggressions play a role in reflecting the racial biases of the person who commits the racist act. Microaggressions reveal the biases a person has in such a teacher, which impacts their judgment on how a student will be categorized based on their race or ethnicity. Students who are Black and Latinx are disproportionately placed in lower-achieving tracks (Oakes, n.d.). Microaggressions are racial actions that work to invalidate people of color and work to uphold the status quo of whiteness. Microaggressions encourage assimilation (taking on the same biases and deficit point of view of seasoned teachers) and dismissing diversity (mispronouncing of students' names, renaming, and discouraging socially just teaching

practices). The last theme, deficit thinking, is interconnected with the prior themes. Deficit points of view blame the student and take responsibility away from the educator for not succeeding or attaining high levels of achievement. This thought process enables the educator to not only commit microaggressions but also discriminate against the student. This form of discrimination could be poor treatment, lack of effort when teaching this student, less academic support, incorrect performance placement (Pollack, 2012; Oakes, n.d.).

This study aimed to highlight the several ways that microaggressions impact school environments and the effect they have on students and educators of color. The use of racial microaggressions opens the door for discrimination to step through. A subtle racist action, compared to that of a crude one, poses more harmful effects towards people of color (students and teachers) as it is often confusing to interpret and correctly respond. Being part of an environment that is politically contested at all times can prove to be even more difficult to experience if microaggressions are commonly expressed. With the help of racial biases, microaggressions can set the tone for a tense and hostile learning environment as students are marginalized in their classrooms. This poses room for discriminating acts to occur. Microaggressions, which also stem from deficit-based forms of thinking, creates low expectations for students, directly impacting the effectiveness of the educator, justifying different forms of teaching practices, attitudes, behaviors, and rules for students of color compared to their white counterparts.

Without addressing implicit racial biases, deficit views, and microaggressions with educational leaders such as administrators and educators, segregation can occur at the classroom level. Microaggressions allow for discriminatory acts towards students to happen more easily and frequently. Discriminatory acts contribute to segregation in schools in contexts such as

tracking. Students of color can find themselves being incorrectly tracked, being placed in a low-achieving track, or a non-college-bound track based on their teacher's recommendations (Oakes, n.d.). Microaggressions create tense and hostile environments that can make teacher education programs unpopular for people of color and thus make teacher retention among educators of color difficult to accomplish. More research is needed to fully understand in a holistic view how those who commit the acts of microaggressions feel that they contribute to the upholding of the dominant culture and the traditional form of thinking. By creating a study that attempts to understand how people's implicit racial biases are created and how to effectively address them could prove to be useful in creating positive, inclusive environments by diminishing the prevalence of microaggressions and promoting an environment where everyone can thrive equally.

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