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Microaggressions and Macro-Injustices: How Everyday Interactions Reinforce and Perpetuate Social Systems of Dominance and Oppression

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Abstract

This article provides a framework that reveals microaggressions as an integral component of systems of social injustice. Microaggressions are a subset of micro-interactions, minute components of everyday interactions such as facial expressions, gestures, and words. Research and theory in social cognition provides the context for why microaggressions, usually based in race, gender, or sexual orientation, exert such a powerful impact on individual experiences and social behaviors. This framework illuminates why the experiences of dominant-class people who commit microaggressions are often so disparate from those of targeted-class individuals, and why microaggressions exert such power over the recipient. This article also examines the role of microaggressions in sustaining the very macro–systems of oppression and structural injustice from which they arise. This connection has been largely overlooked in scholarly analysis, in part because different scholarly disciplines use different lenses to analyze social systems, e.g., psychology privileges individuals and interpersonal interactions, while sociology focuses on populations and social norms. Drawing upon multiple disciplines, this framework recognizes that a multitude of interactions between individual people leads to emergent characteristics at the population level. These characteristics in turn affect individual experience and behavior. The micro constructs the macro; the macro shapes the micro.

Keywords: microaggressions, social injustice, social cognition, race, gender, sexual orientation, implicit bias, systems, oppression

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"Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

"Don't be so sensitive; get over it!"

These familiar words of advice send the message that to be wounded by the words and seemingly minor deeds of others is to be weak. In other words, "Buck up!"

Along with the message to toughen up, these admonitions convey a sense of the world as a rough-and-tumble place where being the recipient of a bit of the rough and some of the tumble is just the way it is.

We believe that these refrains are misguided—and troubling. First, they place the responsibility for managing the hurt that often is caused by the words and seemingly small deeds of others solely upon the recipient. Second, they rest on an assumption of universal understanding and vulnerability; in other words, they assume that a particular word or deed conveys the same meaning to all listeners or observers. This assumption allows me, then, as an observer of harsh words directed at you, to judge both the degree of pain that you should feel and how you should respond. In other words, if I can shrug off a "sling or arrow," you should be able to as well.

This false assumption of universal sensitivity is applied even when the words and deeds in question are directed at individuals with identities frequently discriminated against or oppressed. "Microaggression" is the term used to describe the everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to individuals "because of their group membership (people of Color, women, LGBTs)" (Sue, 2010, p. 24). The term was first coined by Harvard psychiatrist Chester Pierce in 1970 and later widely popularized by Derald Wing Sue, a counseling psychologist at Teachers College, Columbia University. Sue and his colleagues' broad body of research defined, categorized, and studied the impact of microaggressions on individuals (Sue et al., 2007; Sue et al., 2008). This scholarship has had a powerful influence within the field of counseling psychology and, more broadly, in public discourse. The word itself is frequently invoked in conversations about racism, sexism, and anti-LGBTQIA+ rights. And yet, there remains disagreement about how microaggressions should be understood and how they should be addressed. Underlying the disagreements are the two issues we raised above. First, who decides how harmful a particular act is or should be to a recipient? Second, if a recipient is hurt by a comment or gesture, is it up to them to swallow the pain? Or does the person who spoke or acted in a manner that was received as harmful have some responsibility, at least for greater self-awareness?

In the public discourse about microaggressions, there are divergent views about how the harm triggered by these everyday words and deeds should be calibrated and addressed. Concerning racial microaggressions, for example, social critics such as Ibram Kendi and Ijeoma Oluo argue that the prefix *micro-* minimizes the cumulative harm caused by these everyday interactions that target an individual's racial identity and thus trigger a history of discrimination and oppression (Kendi, 2019; Oluo, 2018). As Oluo describes it, "the cumulative effect of these constant reminders that [because you are Black] you are 'less than' does real psychological damage" (Oluo, 2018, p. 169).

Alternatively, Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt (2018) recommend that those who experience microaggressions employ strategies to modify their responses

to these painful words and deeds. These authors privilege the presumed intent of an individual whose act is received as a microaggression (citing the reasoning of moral philosophers) for determining whether he or she is guilty of bigotry or racism. Lukianoff and Haidt do acknowledge that "some members of various identity groups encounter repeated indignities because of their group membership" (2018, p. 43). However, they advise microaggression recipients to dial down their experience of pain through employing cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) techniques. They also suggest that this strategy will avoid making bad interpersonal encounters even worse. With their focus on the perpetrator's *intent*, Lukianoff and Haidt refer only tangentially to systems of "marginalization or oppression" (p. 44) or to the role of implicit biases.

The bulk of the scholarly work to date, primarily by Sue and his colleagues, has been focused on the individual; it documents, describes, and categorizes the effects of microaggressions on individuals. Most popular discourse has used this lens as well. We believe that identifying the impact of these everyday words and deeds on people who identify with targeted groups in our society is an extremely valuable first step.

However, the framework we present in this article allows us to step back and take a larger, more systemic view. This vantage point makes clear that to understand the harm experienced by a recipient of a microaggression, we must consider the social location of both the actor and the recipient. And, importantly, this framework reveals the relationship of the "micro" to the "macro" and how microaggressions are an integral component of our systems of social oppression. The role of microaggressions in sustaining the macro—systems of oppression and structural injustice—has been largely overlooked in scholarly analysis. In part, this lacuna results from the fact that different scholarly disciplines use different lenses to analyze social systems. For example, psychology focuses primarily on individuals, interpersonal interactions, and small groups, while sociology mostly explores populations and social norms. And yet, a multitude of interactions between individual people leads to emergent characteristics at the population level. These characteristics, in turn, affect individual experience and behavior. The micro constructs the macro; the macro shapes the micro.

The broader, multi-layered framework presented here also addresses two important limitations of the existing scholarship on microaggressions. First, current work fails to situate the phenomenon of microaggressions within the extensive psychological literature about the processes of human social cognition. Microaggressions are not a unique, isolated phenomenon but rather a subset of a much larger universe of micro-interactions between individuals: the tiny bits of information produced and shared in the dance of social exchange. Situating microaggressions in this broader context gives further weight to their importance and why they should not be minimized or dismissed. And, contrary to the old saws with which we began this article, social cognition research explains why and how mere words, a prevalent form of micro-interaction, do matter – not only in the context of microaggressions but universally. *Microaggressions*, then, should be understood as instances of the universe of micro-interactions, the lingua franca of social interaction.

Second, as noted above, microaggressions have systemic as well as individual effects. Social systems manifest and are reinforced not only by explicit laws and rules but also by billions of everyday interactions and micro-interactions between individuals. All of us are socialized through these large and small touches: words and actions from our parents and families, our friends and teachers, and later from our colleagues and the wider world (Harro, 2000). We are also socialized to occupy many different roles, and we soak up this knowledge and act through and from it. Microaggressions are a class of micro-interactions that serve to reinforce existing practices of social oppression. Social oppression may occur based on race, gender, and sexual orientation, as described by Sue, and along other social lines of hierarchy (Wells, 2013).

The framework that we present here incorporates these important—and previously excluded—properties of microaggressions. Situating microaggressions in the universe of micro-interactions helps to explain their powerful impact. This framework also highlights how microaggressions are an essential and integral part of macro systems of social oppression. Using this frame provides insight into the mechanisms through which systemic social oppression is sustained and therefore, ideally, to our capacity to dismantle it.

Social systems holistically belong to no single discipline. As a result, our framework draws from both psychology and sociology as well as from the academic disciplines of philosophy and law. We bring to this analysis an overall multi-disciplinary understanding of social systems as complex adaptive processes comprised of interacting individuals. The organization and style of this article reflect the cross-, inter-, and multi-disciplinary ways in which its frame emerged from wide-ranging discussions between the authors. Specifically, the article proceeds as a conversation in which two distinct disciplinary melodies thread through in counterpoint. Claudia brings the perspective of a cognitive social psychologist and a practitioner who consults to organizations about individual and systemic change and development. Palma offers an understanding of injustices as emergent properties of complex social systems in which legal institutions and structures are accepted and patterned modes of interacting that reproduce predictable outcomes. Both of us are grounded in the inter-disciplinary field of conflict engagement. Both of us have extensive practice engaging in and facilitating cross-racial conversations about race and racism. In addition, both of us have experiences as women "interlopers" who have been on the receiving end of gender microaggressions in male-dominated professions. And as White cis-gender individuals, both of us have observed racial and sexual orientation microaggressions targeted at others.

We begin by laying the groundwork for the framework—both micro and macro. In Part I, Dr. Cohen describes how microaggressions should be framed theoretically as a subset of the much larger universe of micro-interactions rather than as an isolated phenomenon. She also documents how an individual's history and social location determine the impact that this category of micro-interactions has upon them. Then, in Part II, Palma offers an overview and analysis of how macro-hierarchies of power and oppression are reinforced through everyday interactions between individuals. Moving to our central focus, Cohen provides in Part III an account of how microaggressions arise from and

"call up" individuals' cognitive architecture of social associations, including, but not limited to, those based in hierarchy, privilege, and power. Next, in Part IV, Palma describes how microaggressions reinforce systems of power and oppression. Finally, in Part V, we reflect together on the implications of this analysis, both intra- and inter-personally, as well as on the enhanced potential for strengthening our collective ability to disrupt and transform structural oppression. Part VI offers conclusions and takeaways.

Microaggressions Are Not an Isolated Phenomenon: The Micro Matters (Claudia)

Derald Wing Sue and colleagues have developed a taxonomy of microaggressions that contains three categories or types of actions: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Sue et al., 2007; Sue et al., 2008; Sue, 2010). *Microassaults* are the most explicit form of microaggressions; they are verbal or even physical assaults which may be characterized by violence, name-calling, and discriminatory actions. Sue describes *microinsults* as characterized by "rudeness and insensitivity;" often, they demean an individual's racial heritage, gender, or sexual orientation (Sue, 2010, p. 31). Finally, *microinvalidations* are communications that "exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of certain groups, such as people of [C]olor, women and LGBTs" (Sue, 2010, p. 31). In our discussion of microaggressions, we focus on the latter two categories—microinsults and microinvalidations—as they are more often unseen or overlooked by observers and perceived as relatively harmless. Naming and defining these three categories make it easier to discuss differences within the universe of microaggressions. The taxonomy, however, does not provide insight into the troubling evidence that the target of a microaggression and its perpetrator often have wildly differing perceptions of its importance and impact.

Sue's (and others') framing of microaggressions as a unique phenomenon is limiting in two ways. First, from a scientific perspective, this location leads microaggression researchers to overlook a large, relevant body of theory and research in social cognition and psychology (Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1981; Cohen, 1981a; Cohen, 1981b; Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Freeman & Ambady, 2011; Wyer & Srull, 2011). Second, from a social justice perspective, treating microaggressions as an aberration, existing in isolation of other sorts of cognitive processing, allows people in dominant groups to ignore or discount the existence of microaggressions and the harm they can cause. Understanding that *microaggressions* are a subset of micro-interactions and that they operate from universal socio-cognitive processing addresses both of these issues.

As noted previously, Sue's work focuses on the individual target of the microaggression, appropriate within the field of counseling psychology but overlooking the broader cultural context through which stereotypes and implicit biases are transmitted to individuals and groups, thus seeding the soil for microaggressions and their harmful effects. Our framework assumes that all micro-interactions activate connections to broad bodies of knowledge received throughout a lifetime. Therefore, as with other micro-interactions, microaggressions are not processed by the people who experience them as one-offs. Rather, these activated messages have an impact that extends far beyond a single remark; microaggressions

may trigger a lifetime's worth of messages. When those messages demean one (or more) of the target individual's core social identities, these tiny micro-interactions—microaggressions—bring to bear on the recipient the weight of an entire social structure. A microaggression is like a magnifying glass that focuses sunlight to the point of combustion.

Understanding microaggressions within a broader understanding of cognitive processing adds clarity to Sue's (and others') descriptions of the nature of many microaggressions as subtle or hidden. Let us name two issues that run through the microaggression literature and clarify how we address them here. First, the prefix *micro-* signals the brief, casual, and discrete nature of these interpersonal moves. They may be contained in a single word, a grimace, a head shake, a brief phrase; *micro* conveys that if the move is not relevant to you, you might easily miss it or perceive it as not meaningful. "Subtle" or "hidden" are ways that Sue conveys this property. We will rely on the prefix *micro-* to convey the description we provide above.

The second theme is related but distinct. The reported experience of many individuals who commit a microaggression (as experienced by the recipient) is that "they did not mean it." This can be confusing to analyze and calls up a complex and fraught conversation about defining "consciousness" as well as "intent." The professor who tells a Black student, "You are so articulate!" *does* intend to use those words and may well report that they were meant as a compliment. At the same time, the note of surprise in her tone may well belie an underlying learned implicit bias: "Black students tend to be less 'articulate' than fellow White or Asian students." A fuller discussion of consciousness and intent is outside the scope of this article. However, we affirm that because an actor's web of associations related to the social location of another is often outside of their conscious awareness, the perpetrator of that particular microaggression may well report that she did not mean it. And yet, this speaker is influenced by and reaffirming damaging stereotypes about Black and White communication styles. The combination of acting based upon one's web of associations while not consciously intending harm makes the conversation about what an actor meant understandably complex.

A substantial body of research in social psychology confirms that micro-interactions—small bits of information contained in brief interactions—can have a surprisingly powerful impact. For example, in the 2010 book "Whistling Vivaldi," social psychologist Claude Steele recounts the compelling story of a young Black academic psychologist walking to his home in Chicago after dark.[i] The psychologist is well aware that he may engender unfounded and potentially dangerous fearful responses from the White residents he passes by based solely on his skin color. He discovers that when he whistles Vivaldi's "Four Seasons," a well-known piece of classical music, he neutralizes those unwarranted (and racialized) fear reactions. This small bit of information, a few notes from a classical masterpiece, evokes a very different association with his Black body: a cultured individual who does not pose a threat rather than a thug, who does.

Greg Walton and his associates have conducted a series of studies that reveal how what they refer to as "brief social-psychological interventions" can powerfully impact individuals' experiences, behavior, and even achievements (Walton & Cohen,

2007; Walton & Cohen, 2011; Walton & Crum, 2020; Walton & Wilson, 2018). This work is part of a broader initiative in the social sciences to promote positive behavior change in various settings such as voting in elections, greater student engagement, and signing up to be organ donors. Walton and Cohen (2011, p. 18) distinguish two forms of intervention: snapshot interventions (also referred to as "nudges"[ii]) and movie interventions. In social-psychological experiments, *snapshot interventions* are designed to influence an individual's behavior at a specific point in time. *Movie interventions* are meant to impact an individual's underlying beliefs about themselves and their abilities and thus affect their behavior over time and in a variety of settings. For example, in the Walton and Cohen (2007) social-belonging intervention study, college students were provided with a narrative for their feelings of uncertainty and "not belonging;" they were reassured that many students feel this way at first but over time come to feel at home. Remarkably, a single one-hour session with an at-risk student during their first year in college raised their achievement levels over the next three years. This movie intervention was of far longer duration and greater complexity than the micro-interactions we have discussed. However, though this social-belonging intervention was scaled up in terms of duration and complexity, this outcome reinforces more broadly the surprising power of relatively brief "moves" or communication acts.

The previous references and many others substantiate the underlying premise of microaggressions: a small bit of information such as a joke, a glance, or a chuckle calls up a complex web of previously learned associations. As a result, meaning is created. Thus, placing microaggressions in the larger context of normal cognitive processing reveals that we should not be surprised that substantial meaning is communicated via relatively brief, minute signals; rather, we should expect it.

Further, small exchanges can carry large emotional weight. Individuals who operate from high-power or low-discrimination social locations may accept that these associations occur yet still be skeptical about the emotional impact of these brief interactions. They may discount it, reasoning, "Okay, so this word (or gesture) calls up unpleasant associations. No big deal…get over it!"

To counter this dismissive response and highlight how universal the vulnerability to being wounded can be, even for those in privileged social locations, consider the following thought experiment: Imagine that you are the sole non-athlete in a large family of super-athletes. Growing up, you witnessed your folks and siblings excelling at swim meets, in tennis tournaments, and impromptu touch football games. You had no aptitude for these activities, and you gravitated to pursuits where you were more talented, such as reading or playing chess. Despite your other accomplishments, you always felt "othered" and diminished by your lack of physical skill. Now, fast forward to the present day. You are with a group of colleagues in the city, sprinting for a train whose doors are about to close. You reach the door dead last and just barely make it onto the train. As you stumble to a seat, one of your colleagues' quips, not knowing your sensitivity about physical prowess, "I bet you weren't on the track team in high school!" You feel simultaneously ashamed and angry, though you are not sure why.

The offhanded comment made by your colleague triggers your discomfort and even buried shame at being seen as a non-athlete. In your family, this identity meant that you were an outsider; you didn't belong. Because of your personal background, athletic "chops"—or lack thereof—became a charged emotional component of your identity. You thus experience your colleague's casual joke in a visceral and emotionally laden way due to the powerful response it invokes through your particular network of meaning. This occurs even though your colleague did not intend to harm you.

Someone with a different family history might well react differently, perhaps with humor, to your colleague's comment and might be puzzled by your "over-reaction." Their formative experiences related to "being a super-athlete" were very different. Their personal network of meaning may ascribe little valence—positive or negative—to athleticism.

What else can we take away from this thought experiment about micro-interactions and microaggressions? First, the impact of the micro-interaction upon a recipient cannot be evaluated accurately by *anyone else*, including and perhaps in particular, by the perpetrator. This is particularly true about microaggressions, as an identity-related subset of micro-interactions. Because these interactions are micro, they may be of little notice or importance to the initiator of the interaction. Yet because of the fine-tuning of human social cognition, they are often highly significant to the receiver.

Second, the wounded, non-athlete scenario, while painful for the hero, would not be considered a microaggression in Sue's taxonomy. Microaggressions occur in the context of power and privilege differentials, especially connected to race, gender, or sexual orientation. In the case of microaggressions, the triggered associations are not solely individualized as in the wounded, non-athlete example. Rather, they bring to bear a lifetime's awareness of the social hierarchy of being excluded, silenced, diminished, and marginalized because of the very identity one is reminded of.

An alternative scenario reveals how microaggressions operate within a system of targeted identities and related oppression. Imagine that you work at a large tech company holding its yearly management "all hands" meeting at a local conference center. You are standing with the Senior Vice President of Sales, Bill Cooper, whom you know slightly, each of you nursing a beer. You and Cooper each identify as White and non-Latinx. Manuel Garcia, a newly hired marketing manager whom you know slightly, approaches you to say hello. Cooper, failing to identify Garcia as a management employee, asks him to get you each another "cold one." Clearly, Cooper is assuming that Garcia is a member of the wait staff. Your heart sinks, and you are frozen, unsure what to say or do. Leaving you to your discomfort, let us examine this micro-interaction between Cooper and Garcia—what Sue would surely label a "microaggression."

Senior Vice President Cooper, insulated perhaps by his Whiteness, maleness, and powerful role, does not notice that his assumption that Garcia is a part of the wait staff is contradicted by some data: Garcia is wearing a sport coat rather than a uniform jacket, and there is no name tag affixed to his lapel. Rather than investigate further, however, Cooper issues the request (order?) to Garcia to refresh his drink. Further investigation by Cooper could entail having

been attentive to racial and ethnic disparities in the company's staffing and having participated in efforts to recruit more minorities. It might also entail becoming attuned to his stereotypes of who comprises the population of marketing managers (predominately White males and some females) and examining each Latinx or Black individual more carefully to distinguish management employees from wait staff or other roles.

For Garcia's part, we imagine that he is wounded and humiliated as a result of this misidentification and yet not surprised. Being mistaken for the wait staff calls up dozens and hundreds of social messages received throughout his lifetime reinforcing that he does not belong at a tech company, much less in a managerial role. This micro-interaction is disorienting and painful for Garcia, though not, unfortunately, unique. This is true even though Cooper may not have consciously intended to wound but apparently did so through carelessness…along with a lack of self-knowledge and a blindness toward systems of racial power and privilege.

This micro-interaction, like the "track team" comment described previously, evokes a message of non-belonging. However, the message here invokes not the dynamics of a particular family and an individual's experience within it but rather a systemic social hierarchy in which White people are executives and people of Color serve them. Cooper's drink request (order?) reminds Garcia of this social hierarchy. Cooper's comment also reminds you, a White and non-Latinx bystander, of this social hierarchy. Another co-worker and bystander, who is Latinx, is also reminded of this hierarchy and her place in it. And because Cooper is a senior vice president in the company, his comment communicates not only his personal view of who belongs where but the fact that the company he belongs to is structured so that his personal view is normative, and therefore he thinks nothing of expressing it.

Situating microaggressions in the larger context of normal processes of social cognition reveals not only the potency of micro-interactions generally but, more importantly, the particular potency of microaggressions. The vast body of research and theory describing human cognitive structure and processing illuminates why microaggressions carry such strong social and emotional messages. This framework also sheds light on how and why microaggressions are interpreted through one's particular life experience and social location.

Overall, expanding the analysis beyond Sue's focus on the individual target of a microaggression to the broader field of socio-cognitive theory and research allows us to understand it as part of a much larger phenomenon. It also invites inquiry into the wider issue of how stereotypes and implicit biases, based on cultural hierarchies, are transmitted to individuals and groups, seeding the very soil for microaggressions. We pursue this inquiry in Part III.

Part II

Macro-Systems of Power and Oppression Emerge from Individual Interactions (Palma)

As we have seen, microaggressions have powerful effects at the individual, interpersonal level. But we claim that they are also significant at the social, structural level—at the macro level. This claim rests on an analysis of how social systems operate and, in particular, of how social systems of

power and privilege are sustained. A relational understanding of power connects system-level structural injustices to individual-level interactions.

The word "power" is a noun, and we generally use it as such. *Power*, we tend to say, is something we have—or something we do not have. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), political philosopher Iris Marion Young calls this a distributive paradigm of power: "Conceptualizing power in distributive terms means implicitly or explicitly conceiving power as a kind of stuff possessed by individual agents in greater or lesser amounts. From this perspective, a power structure or power relations will be described as a pattern of the distribution of this stuff" (p. 31).

Young (1990) asserts, however, that "power is a relation rather than a thing" (p. 31). A relational understanding of power illuminates power dynamics in modern societies, where institutional structures dominate. Power dyads between two individuals occurs in a larger context. Young gives the example of a judge and a prisoner and the power relation between the two:

> A judge may be said to have power over a prisoner, but only in the context of a network of practices executed by prison wardens, guards, recordkeepers, administrators, parole officers, lawyers, and so on. Many people must do their jobs for the judge's power to be realized, and many of these people will never directly interact with either the judge or the prisoner. (p. 31)
>
> Where is power in this web of interconnections? According to Young (1990), the "dynamic processes of interaction within regulated cultural and decision-making situations" produce power, and "many widely dispersed persons are agents of power without 'having' it, or even being privileged" (p. 33). The judge's power over the prisoner emerges from the contributing and coordinated interactions of the various actors in the criminal justice system. A clerical member of the structure is part of this production of power, though they may feel powerless.

Young's (1990) insight illuminates the microaggression example of Cooper and Garcia discussed in Part I. Cooper mistakes Garcia for a member of the wait staff, a microaggression that Garcia experiences as an exercise of Cooper's power—the power to define who is a professional and who is not. Part of what sustains that power is the silence of bystanders, their affirmation of Cooper's power vis-à-vis Garcia—not only Cooper's personal power but also his empowerment (dominance) as a member of the White racial group relative to the disempowerment (subordination) of Garcia as a member of the Latinx racial or ethnic group. In this example, the microaggression both evinces and reinforces existing systemic power dynamics.

As Young eschews a distributive view of power, she also eschews a distributive understanding of justice. "Justice," she writes, "should not be conceived primarily on the model of the distribution of wealth, income, and other material goods…The scope of justice is wider than distributive issues" (1990, p. 33). Rather, justice relates to whether the institutions of a society serve to support individuals in realizing two values that Young relates to the ability to live a "good life": "(1) developing and exercising one's capacities and expressing one's experience, and (2) participating in

determining one's action and the conditions of one's action" (p. 37).

According to Young (1990), then, injustice arises when institutional conditions and processes interfere with people's ability to develop and express themselves. She terms this kind of injustice "oppression"[iii] (p. 38). Injustice also arises when institutions "inhibit or prevent people" from influencing the social conditions that govern them. She terms this kind of injustice "domination" (p. 38).

Again applying Young's insight to Cooper's microaggression toward Garcia, we can see how Cooper's reminder to Garcia of his membership in a subordinate group may interfere with Garcia's ability to express himself and with his influence in the social context of the business meeting. When we are reminded that we do not belong, stress and anxiety spring into action to impede our capacity to contribute. Work on stereotype threat, for example, has documented how Black test-takers who are simply asked to provide their racial information under-perform on standardized tests (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Steele and Aronson (1995) conclude that this effect occurs because Blackness has historically been viewed as inconsistent with high academic achievement. Reminders of being Black trigger stress associated with the pressure of going against social expectations, and that stress can interfere with performance.

Similarly, when individuals are reminded that members of a certain group (women, for example) do not belong, receptivity to those group members' contributions diminishes. For example, *mansplaining* was coined to describe the phenomenon of women's contributions to a discussion being overlooked. These same contributions are rendered visible and valuable only when repeated by men (Rothman, 2012).

The Cooper-Garcia microaggression contains the potential for both oppression—Garcia's diminished capacity to contribute due to stress associated with this reminder of lower status and non-belonging—and domination—the discounting or dismissal of what Garcia has to offer. Both, per Young, are manifestations of injustice.

The forms of injustice Young (1990) describes enable members of one group of people—those who are included or belong—to take advantage of and resources from members of another group. This advantage may take the form of appropriated labor, exaggerated autonomy, monopolized attention, heightened recognition of value, particularized personal safety and security, or more control over collective decision-making. The corollary disadvantage to members of groups of people who are excluded or "do not belong" may take the form of expropriated labor, diminished autonomy, lessened attention, lowered recognition of value, threatened personal safety and security, or less control over collective decision-making. The key is that society is structured into "haves and have-nots"—though because of different gradients of oppression and domination, most people will experience both conditions in different elements of their lives.

The social dynamic underlying these forms of oppression and domination is one of a kind of "othering" that operates to exclude, a dynamic that creates injustice by denying the fulfillment of another individual's full humanity. When social structures provide opportunities to members of one group and deny those opportunities to members of another group, an Us-versus-

Them, insider-outsider dynamic emerges. In this dynamic, some people and some groups matter; they belong. Other people and other groups do not matter or matter less; they do not belong. These fundamental messages of relational power underlie institutional and structural arrangements that benefit a dominant group and disadvantage a subordinate group. These arrangements channel how individuals interact with each other in the context of social institutions, and as individuals interact in alignment with these messages, they reproduce injustice.

Returning to the Cooper-Garcia-bystander microaggression once more, the essential social message contained in the micro-interaction is one of non-belonging, of power-over, of exclusion. Sue's taxonomy categorizes this as a "second class citizen microaggression" (Sue, 2010, p. 33). This microaggression serves to remind Garcia of his membership in a socially defined outgroup vis-à-vis corporate power. At the same time, it reinforces the ingroup-ness of both Cooper and the silent White bystander. Because this micro-interaction arises in the context of group-based social oppression and evokes that power dynamic, it constitutes a microaggression.

Overall, Young (1990) parses the convoluted language of power and injustice in today's institutionally structured society. She illuminates for us how individuals acting and interacting within institutional collectives create and re-create oppression by ensuring, denying, or limiting access to opportunities and participation. Many of the actions taken by individuals constitute only a small contribution to large-scale production and exercise of power relationships; each individual interaction may seem insignificant and its causal link to the overall effect difficult to discern. Yet when many individuals—hundreds or thousands or more—act, the cumulative collective effects of those acts cascade into substantial social phenomena. Per Young, individual interactions contribute to the creation of injustice.

Individual interactions thus reinforce the social roles that individuals occupy and perform. As people interact, they reproduce social institutions and hierarchies and strengthen these structures for themselves and those around them. Social roles and structures then manifest power, privilege, oppression, and injustice, perpetuating social order and hierarchy. But it is through individual actions and interactions that these roles and structures are maintained.

Many of the social roles that Young (1990) describes are explicitly delineated and defined—the social roles of judge and prisoner, for example. Other social roles, however, are more amorphous and implicit, and we may engage in them less intentionally and with less awareness. In the next part, we consider how cognitive processing theory illuminates the functioning of the latter.

Part III

Social Cognition: We See the World as We Are (Claudia)

To better understand why and how microaggressions—and other micro-interactions—operate, it is essential to begin with a review of how people process social information more generally. "Process" here means how we collect information about the interpersonal universe: what we notice, how we interpret it, and what we conclude and remember about it.

A common saying reflects the current understanding of cognitive-social

processing: "We don't see the world as it is; we see the world as we are."[iv] While the scientific evidence bolstering this claim is not cited by those who have used this phrase, there is a vast body of knowledge that supports and documents this observation in the social-psychological field of social cognition.

The social cognition field was born roughly fifty years ago. In 1973, psychologist Eleanor Rosch popularized the concept of the *schema* as an internal structure for organizing perceptual and semantic categories. This structure accounts for experimental data describing the errors that observers make when recognizing examples of categories such as bird or chair. Rather than identifying a bird, for example, by checking off a comprehensive mental list of features (e.g., beak, wings, feathers, etc.), data suggest that people recognize a "bird" holistically, as if comparing the image with the prototypical bird (e.g., a robin) they have stored. This conclusion is based on the extraordinarily rapid response times in which people can identify images as birds. Also, when participants make errors, they frequently report "seeing" or "remembering" attributes of a specific bird image that are more consistent with a prototypical bird (e.g., robin) or bird schema than with the specific bird that they actually observed.

Early applications of schema theory, including in the field of person perception, can be found in this author's work and that of other contemporaries (Cohen, 1981a; Cohen, 1981b; Crocker et al., 1984; Hamilton, 1979; Hastie, 1981; Markus, 1977). These cognitive social psychologists argued that people's social perceptions, such as perceptions of other people, must logically also be stored and processed in a manner similar to that of a bird or chair. In one study by this author, participants who observed a video vignette of a woman at home, interacting with her husband, noticed and remembered different things about her based on whether they were told she worked as a waitress versus as a librarian (Cohen, 1981b). If participants believed her to be a waitress, they more often reported that she had been drinking beer[v] while those who thought that the woman, they observed was a librarian were more likely to remember that she drank wine. This was also true for many other features of waitress and librarian stereotypes or schemas (e.g., musical taste, appearance, demeanor).

More recent research in social cognition and person perception specifically confirms this early work and offers a more detailed analysis of person perception processes. Freeman and Ambady (2011) offer a theory of person construal that extends our understanding of how schemas or stereotypes operate in action. Underlying the perception of other people is a "dynamical system involving continuous interaction between social categories, stereotypes, high-level cognitive states, and the low-level processing of facial, vocal and bodily cues" (Freeman & Ambady, 2011, p. 247). This model confirms the saying cited earlier—"We don't see the world as it is; we see the world as we are"—and offers a greater understanding of how the "we are" influences the "seeing the world."

Social psychological theorists have also applied a schema-based model to perceptions of members of oppressed and/or less powerful groups: the domain of microaggressions.[vi] Sandra Bem studied popular conceptions of masculinity and femininity and explored the much-debated question of how sex-typing develops in children (Bem, 1981). She defined *sex-typing* as the process "by which a society transmutes male and female into masculine

and feminine" (Bem, 1981, p. 354). In other words, she asked: how does a culture pass on male and female gender roles, including behaviors, attributes, and self-concept, to the next generation of boys and girls? Bem argued that this gender-role-related information becomes organized into a "heterogenous network of sex-related associations" or a "gender schema" (p. 355). Children develop the gender schemas dictated by their particular culture. Bem further contended that sex-typing results when an individual's self-concept is assimilated into the gender schema. She posits that the children who most completely incorporate gender schemas into their own self-concept are the most likely to become sex-typed. These children are more likely to perform the behaviors and attributes of masculine or feminine with little question or self-scrutiny.

Another line of research adopts the term "implicit bias" to describe how, within a society, people have widely shared internalized schemas[vii] that relate to gender, race, and other social-group signifiers. Banaji, Greenwald, and associates demonstrate how societally-provided associations (e.g., men & work; women & home; White & good; Black & bad) underlie how we perceive our world. At a level below our awareness, the term "woman" is more closely associated with home than work, while for the term "man" it is just the reverse (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). Banaji and Greenwald (2013) argue that many of the associations that shape our expectations are based on images promoted in the media, in advertising, and in entertainment (such as movies and television), rather than in first-hand observations of actual persons in real settings.

These lines of research in social cognition demonstrate that we are highly influenced in our ongoing perceptions of others and their behavior by our vast mental database of knowledge and associations, organized into schemas and other patterns of associations. As noted, these processes generally operate outside of conscious experience. Micro bits of data—a few words, a gesture or facial expression—coalesce into a cohesive back-story. We complete the picture and fill in the gaps, confirming what we expect to see. And we rarely recognize the perceptual and cognitive leaps we have made. Chris Argyris provides another useful analysis of social cognition, the concept of the *ladder of inference*, to describe those mental feats of analysis that operate outside the realm of our conscious thoughts (Bartunek, 2014).

Consider a colleague who has frequently failed to observe the norms of the workplace. One day, she arrives very late to an early morning meeting, carrying a "to go" cup of coffee. Likely you will conclude that she does not care about punctuality and even that she stopped at a local coffee house on the way to work, making her even later! Now imagine a different colleague who is always punctual and very concerned about how he is perceived. He arrives late to a different meeting, also with a tell-tale take-out cup. You will likely construct—at a below-conscious level—quite a different story about this colleague. Maybe he left home early but then had car trouble. Or, unexpectedly, he had to take his child to school. Maybe someone else handed him the coffee. Most likely, and importantly, you will be unaware that you are actively interpreting these behaviors. The ladder of inference does its work outside of our arena of consciousness. Rather, you will find that your perception of colleague #1 as a dissatisfied, rule-breaking employee is reinforced without remembering why or how you came to that conclusion. And you

may not remember the tardiness of colleague #2 at all, or, if you do, you may approach him with concern later in the day to see whether he is all right.

"Seeing the world as we are," then, refers to the ongoing analysis and interpretation of the words and behaviors of others, filtered through our previous knowledge and associations and mostly below our level of conscious awareness. The raw input of what we see calls to the surface preexisting schemas and other psychological structures, and they in turn shape what we perceive. What we perceive, in turn, affects the actions we take.

The judgments that one might make about a colleague's behavior based on a to-go cup of coffee have a very localized and limited effect. But the stereotypes and schemas that society promotes about members of oppressed or targeted groups have widespread and substantial consequences.

One well-known study, for example, demonstrates that potential employers prefer candidates with White-sounding names over candidates with identical qualifications who have Black-sounding names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003). Another study found gender bias in evaluation of the characteristics and achievement of medical students, with men more likely to be described as quick learners than women (Axelson et al., 2010). Because of social cognition's grounding in schemas and implicit associations, people who are in positions to offer opportunity—employers, medical personnel evaluating medical students—may swing doors open for some and shut them in the face of others. And yet, the evidence shows that people normally act without awareness of these associations or schemas, which leads individuals to strongly resist being labelled "racist" or "sexist." These actions, which represent tangible allocations of important social advantages—and disadvantages—are grounded in the same schemas that manifest as microaggressions or other micro-interactions that enforce norms and roles.

The research-based socio-cognitive architecture described above informs the answers to several questions about microaggressions. First, how do brief comments, actions, or gestures have the power to powerfully wound, demoralize, or demean the recipient of these microaggressions? Second, why do some bystanders receive the noxious message, vicariously impacted like the recipient, while others remain oblivious and perhaps even make judgments about the "over-sensitivity" of the target person? And, finally, what does a socio-cognitive lens reveal about intentionality or consciousness on the part of the perpetrator of a microaggression—an issue identified in Part I above?

Imagine that after a female colleague has made a big sale, a successful male member of a sales team says to her: "It's no surprise that you made that sale; the client could not keep his eyes off of you!" Despite the apparent embedded compliment about her appearance, that is not what she experiences. From a socio-cognitive lens, his comment may well invoke two different schemas or webs of association: on the one hand a schema of a “master salesman” who is male and on the other hand a schema of an “attractive female” who is subordinate to the male, perhaps a secretary. It is not surprising that the female sales colleague would feel diminished. She has covertly been reminded that she does not belong on the sales team and that her looks are her strongest attribute,

not her smarts or her extensive on-the-job experience.

As to the first question, microaggressions wound or demean the recipient because they are micro-reinforcements of social structures of power and hierarchy that remind individuals of their place. The socio-cognitive architecture described above illuminates how naturally that occurs. Targets of microaggressions have been carefully taught and frequently reminded of their one-down status. Brief utterances or subtle gestures call up relevant schemas and webs of association; that is the way our cognition operates.

Regarding the second question, why might two colleagues—one male and one female—who overhear the remark mentioned above perceive it differently? A male colleague may perceive the comment as complimentary if his schema for attractive woman is invoked and his “male-salesman” schema is dominant. A female colleague who hears the exchange, in contrast, may share the target's experience of dissonance between the successful male-salesman schema and that of the attractive-subordinate woman. The female observer is also reminded of the different spaces in which men and women may comfortably operate, as dictated by the web of associations transmitted by the culture.

Finally, what about intentionality and consciousness? Understanding the functioning of socially-defined schemas casts these constructs in a different light. The successful salesman intended both to comment on the success of his colleague's big sale and to make a statement about her attractiveness. Did he intend to demean her? Perhaps because of his membership in the male-dominant sales culture, it did not occur to him that reminding her of her gender would call up the web of association in which being female means one is subordinate and thus out of place as a leader on the sales team. At a minimum, this is a failure of empathy on his part. He also intended to praise her sexual attractiveness in this context, an even greater failure of empathy because it implied that her success is based on appearance rather than competence. Either he was oblivious to the possibility that he might be insulting her, or if he knew that the possibility existed, he was not affected by it. Perhaps he was even annoyed that a politically-correct analysis would be used to interpret his behavior.

The socio-cognitive architecture framework, implicit bias research, and Argryis' ladder of inference all observe that these associations often occur outside consciousness. As noted in Part I, Cooper likely operated without conscious awareness of his schemas and associations about the roles that Latinx men (and women) are likely to play in the corporate workplace. As a White man in a powerful role, his failure to explore his implicit bias may well align with the corporate culture and thus continue undisturbed.

Part IV

The Micro Enacts and Reenacts the Macro, Including Oppression and Injustice (Palma)

Though schemas operate psychologically on individuals, the actions that they drive have broader social effects. Schemas provide an internal image with which our actions seek to align. Among other effects, this impetus toward alignment leads us to the "should" associated with various social roles and also to actions to align our behavior and that of others with those roles.

Where Young (1990) brings into focus the phenomenon of how institutional structures operate to create injustice through myriad individual interactions, sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway reveals how everyday interactions between individuals reinforce and reproduce social structures and practices. Ridgeway studies gender relations. She wondered why traditional system-level patterns of men working longer hours outside the home and women taking more responsibility for work in the home persist, given substantially increased social attention to gender equality (2011).

In *Framed by Gender* (2011), her careful exploration of this question, Ridgeway concludes that when spouses talk through and arrive at joint decisions about caretaking and work allocation, they both come into the interaction with gender schemas and paradigms—stories and frames about what men and fathers do and what women and mothers do. They—we—learn and internalize these stories from our parents and families, from the media, from other community members, and from how the larger institutions of our society are organized. They—we—are socialized and acculturated to recognize and reproduce traditional gender roles.

According to social psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, these *social roles* can be understood as the ways humans interact in a social ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner, a key aspect of human development is learning, adapting to, and eventually occupying social roles. As children, we learn about the roles of parent, child, sibling, friend, teacher, and more. As we learn the roles, we are also socialized to adapt to them; others instruct us overtly and indirectly in performing them as we fit into social niches. Eventually, we reinforce the roles and relationships we have learned and internalized in our interactions with others. So, for example, when boys and girls encounter and are socialized to perform traditional gender roles, they tend to reproduce those roles and enforce those roles on others.

Ridgeway's findings make visible an important dimension of individual decision-making: "As contemporary men and women confront social situations at the edge of social change in the United States, then, the cultural stereotypes they have to draw on to frame their encounters with one another will be considerably more traditional than the innovative circumstances they face" (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 171). Cultural stereotypes or schemas that reflect female domesticity supporting male-gendered "ideal workers"[viii] who are free of care responsibilities, for example, will be at play when spouses who both work full-time make decisions in situations in which work needs and care needs conflict. When spouses negotiate the daily allocation of who will get the kids up and fed in the morning, who will do the grocery shopping, who will mow the lawn, who will make time for doctor's appointments, and who will arrange for childcare to enable a business trip, the sociocultural stories of gender are in the room. In fact, the spouses bring those stories (or roles, norms, schemas, and frames) into the room with them. These traditional frames hold sway even when both spouses have market work outside the home. And the power of these stories is such that men and women are drawn to reenact them, perhaps even when consciously they do not buy into them. The perpetuation of traditional gender patterns is the result.

In other words, couples do not sit down and have a summit in which they decide that the man will take on the more traditionally masculine role and the woman will take on

the more traditionally feminine role. Rather, in incremental negotiations over small-scale tasks and everyday decisions, the siren call of traditional gender stories pulls each outcome a little bit away from gender equality—and over time, the swerve becomes apparent. Accretive everyday interactions between individuals build to macro-level patterns of gendered activities, including structural and institutional reinforcement of social norms and roles.

Though Ridgeway (2011) does not flesh out the specific nature of the individual interactions she highlights, experience tells us that many of these interactions take the form of subtle cues—micro-interactions—rather than explicit negotiation. A father might telegraph hesitancy or inexperience in a hurried exchange over who will change a child's diaper; a mother might look bewildered in the face of the need to tighten a leaking faucet.

In these everyday interactions, the individuals involved are unlikely to consider how their in-the-moment responses and reactions align with existing gender roles. They are unlikely to be thinking of how falling into habitual gender roles reenacts social patterns. And they are even more unlikely to be conscious of how their interactions contribute to macro-level social oppression and domination, to structural injustice. Philosopher Kate Manne, however, draws the connection between everyday micro-interactions and the exercise of relational power that perpetuates social hierarchies.

Manne's description of the social phenomenon of misogyny, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (2017), begins by describing accepted gender roles for men and women. Women's socially accepted role, Manne asserts, is to support and assist men. Women should be neither too "out in front" in terms of doing their own outstanding work nor too remiss in failing to support men in fulfilling roles of prominence, leadership, and achievement.

Manne characterizes *misogynistic enforcement* as the fallout that women receive when they step out of line—out of their assigned and expected gender role. She asks, "What could be a more natural basis for hostility and aggression than defection from the role of an attentive, loving subordinate?" (p. 49).

And what might that hostility and aggression look like? Though it might take the form of physical violence, its more common form is verbal or emotional aggression or correction. Women who talk are talked over. Women who take the lead are met with sniping or undermining remarks. Women who fail to defer to men find themselves targets of particularly pointed criticism. Women who work long hours are undercut by questions about their dedication to their children. Women who do not act as they "should," in fact, are reminded via microaggressions from others (often, but not always, men) that they are stepping out of their lane—and should hasten back into it.

Misogyny defined this way is the enforcement arm of the social system of patriarchy. And, importantly, enforcement here is not undertaken by some sort of centralized patriarchal police force that steps in whenever departures from patriarchal norms and practices occur. Instead, enforcement is undertaken by men (and sometimes women) who happen to be on the scene. Everyday patriarchy takes the form of misogynistic enforcement by co-workers and colleagues, family and friends. This enforcement is sometimes direct and overt,

more often indirect and implicit. And it results in precisely the kind of decentralized reproduction of gender roles that Ridgeway (2011) describes.

Awareness of how micro-interactions communicate and reinforce social norms and roles calls to mind an anecdote from this author's childhood—an interaction with my grandfather. I was perhaps nine or ten. Old enough to have, for whatever reason, learned to whistle. Young enough to still just be a kid. I was visiting my grandparents and demonstrating my new achievement.

My grandfather said to me, "Whistling girls and cackling hens come to bad ends."

I remember that his remark caught me off guard. It was clearly not meant as praise but as an admonition it was oblique. Was I supposed to be somehow like a cackling hen? And what was the problem with a hen cackling? What kind of bad end were we talking about here—it seemed uncertain but ominous? And, which perhaps exercised me the most, why whistling girls in particular?

Later, I asked my mother what it meant. I cannot remember exactly what she said, but it was along the lines of I should whistle as much as I wanted, but perhaps not in front of Grandpa.

These kinds of everyday comments are the way that others instruct us and remind us of our roles.

I would not place my grandfather's elliptical admonition into the same category as the misogynistic microaggressions that Manne (2017) describes. I do, however, note that his little rhyme contained a message about gendered social schema: It invited and warned me not to whistle so as to not come to a bad end—rather, in other words, to be "ladylike."

Among the roles that we learn through socialization are, of course, roles related to gender. Ridgeway (2011) highlights how internalized traditional roles shape men and women's behavior and individual interactions as they navigate everyday family and spousal duties. Manne focuses on how decentralized individual interactions, including microaggressions, keep women within patriarchy-defined gender roles.

Ridgeway (2011) and Manne (2017) reveal that social roles do not magically reproduce themselves: We occupy and re-create roles through norms and stories that we have learned and internalized. We also send messages to others about what roles we find appropriate for ourselves and what roles we find appropriate for them, especially as their actions-in-role intersect with our actions-in-role. As noted previously, much of this process is probably outside of our conscious awareness, though some of it may be intentional. Though these messages may be small and subtle, they are nonetheless significant: Micro course corrections steer a macro journey.

Ridgeway (2011) and Manne (2017) are both investigating gender relations, but their insights apply more broadly. Racial roles and relationships, for example, are reproduced through everyday individual interactions similar to those Ridgeway describes. While misogynist microaggressions enforce a system of patriarchy, racial microaggressions enforce a system of racism or White supremacy. The microaggression of Cooper toward Garcia described in Part I, for example, reminds Garcia of his racial/ethnic place. It establishes Cooper's privilege of

obliviousness. And it reminds bystanders of the "proper" social order and the norm of White solidarity and silence. The microaggression of the senior salesman to his female colleague in Part III similarly reminds her that she does not belong as an equal. It establishes his power to violate professional norms by invoking her attractiveness. And it reminds other members of the sales team who the "real" salesman are—and are not.

Individual interactions, then, reinforce the social roles that individuals occupy and perform. As they interact, individuals reproduce social structures and institutions. As noted, these individual interactions may be extremely brief, seemingly insignificant words or phrases. They may even be wordless facial or vocal expressions such as a smirk or a laugh. Nevertheless, these interactions can and powerfully do affect the recipient. Despite their brevity or offhanded nature, communication occurs; the message is delivered.

When social roles and structures manifest power, privilege, oppression, and injustice, micro-interactions reinforce and reproduce power, privilege, oppression, and injustice. Through these microaggressions, a lower-power individual—and other witnesses—are reminded of that person's one-down position. Microaggressions are thus far from insignificant. Instead, they are the everyday decentralized enforcement and reproduction of social oppression and injustice.

A final point has to do with the brevity or offhanded nature of the interactions mentioned above. As actors and observers, we are often unaware of the details of the specific micro-interaction or microaggression that triggered a sense of discomfort or non-belonging, even as we are very aware of the impact. Because the work of schemas and the ladder of inference is lightning-quick and often hidden from us cognitively, we may be puzzled by exactly what it was that conveyed the message. This "what just happened?" quality of micro-interactions and microaggressions may contribute to a failure to give credence to the significance of their effects. Yet awareness of those effects cautions us to pay attention, diagnose what did happen, and address it rather than ignore it. Not doing so perpetuates existing power dynamics.

Part V

Microaggressions and Macro-Injustices

Many of the overt institutional arrangements that have historically enacted power and oppression in the U.S. have been discarded. These institutional structures, created and endorsed by explicit and formal law, designated and enforced insider and outsider roles of advantage and disadvantage. Slavery, Jim Crow, exclusions from voting, married women's lack of capacity to own property or be protected from domestic violence, including rape, and lack of status for same-sex relationships—these and other legal provisions expressly set forth relationships of hierarchy and injustice.

Though much overt discrimination has been repudiated by law, the social roles and relationships that prior laws articulated and enforced persist (Strand, 2015). Norms, attitudes, and expectations embedded in roles producing oppression linger. Implicit bias research, as described above, has shown that people in the U.S. have internalized longstanding understandings and expectations about racial and gender roles that lead to positive associations for Whiteness and negative associations for

Blackness, to associating men with high-status occupations and women with other occupations (Axt, Ebersole, & Nosek, 2014; Raymond, 2013). Schemas and stereotypes associated with racial, gender, and other power hierarchies persist.

Micro-interactions frequently communicate approval when people fulfill assigned or expected social roles appropriately and disapproval when people step out of line. Micro-interactions of approval affirmatively endorse and reinforce expected and normed social roles. Micro-interactions of criticism or disapproval negatively enforce those same norms and roles. These micro-interactions matter because humans respond to even very subtle social cues. Micro-interactions are like the electric zings from an invisible fence that remind us of our role boundaries so that we adhere to the social roles that others continuously remind us of. Micro-interactions, including those we call microaggressions, thus play a critical part in reproducing the social order of the macro-world by working to keep us all in our socialized roles. The macro social order both elicits and reinforces micro-interactions that reproduce and reinforce it.

This function of micro-interactions can be benign, as when the social roles and organization of the macro-world align with our values and beliefs, with equity and justice. But the macro-world does not always so align; equity and justice are not the universal norm. The world we live in is one in which some social positions are dominant and others are subordinate. Belonging to one social group or another matters in terms of access to various resources and the ability to perform certain functions in a range of ways. As with all roles, we are socialized to dominance or subordination by an accumulation of social interactions, including micro-interactions as well as explicit instruction. When micro-interactions reinforce social roles of hierarchy, oppression, and dominance, they become microaggressions.

These microaggressions reproduce macro-injustices. We described above how microaggressions affect interpersonal reproduction of hierarchies and recreate lines of belonging and exclusion. The social structure enforcement function of microaggressions operates most directly on people who are its targets. But the *effects* of microaggressions extend to members of all social groups. For members of a socially dominant group, for example, microaggressions serve to enforce group solidarity: Members of the socially dominant group must not step out of line by showing empathy for or solidarity with members of the socially subordinate group. Racial or gendered jokes, for example, let members of a socially dominant group know who is to be objectified and stereotyped and reinforce in listeners the work of objectifying and stereotyping. The silence of listeners in the presence of these jokes, like the silence of bystanders about Cooper's microaggression toward Garcia or of the sales staff about the microaggression the sales manager directed toward his female colleague, supports the social status quo.

This foundational understanding of the social-oppression function of microaggressions dovetails with work on the maintenance of the systemic status quo of structural injustices. Essentially, microaggressions serve to remind members of different social groups of their place. While each individual microaggression may be brief and perhaps overlooked by many observers, the cumulative effects on the recipient of many are pervasive and potent. In response to a question we raised earlier

about this role of "boots on the ground" enforcer of social roles, it does not make a difference that some—or indeed many—microaggressions may be unintended by the perpetrator. Moreover, awareness of how microaggressions operate to enforce social oppression suggests that the injury they cause may be particularly acute. Harmful words that reproduce well-established social stigmas are likely to carry heavier social weight than words that evoke more individualized or transitory pain or discomfort.

Microaggressions thus represent the daily and mundane face of structural and systemic oppression. Within institutions such as workplaces, schools, neighborhood groups, and families, individuals regularly remind others of the roles and relationships that they consciously or unconsciously expect. People of Color are reminded directly and indirectly that they are lesser, not as important, do not belong in certain historically White spaces (Anderson, 2015), are not normal, are dangerous and deviant (Steele, 2010), that their experiences and stories are irrelevant and unimportant, that they are suitable for menial roles, lack merit, and more. Women are reminded directly and indirectly that they are lesser, not as important, do not belong in certain historically male spaces, are not normal, are threatening and deviant, that their experiences and stories are irrelevant and unimportant, that they are suitable for menial roles and sexual objectification, lack merit, and more. Conversely, White people and men are reminded directly and indirectly of their one-up position and that they have a social role to play in maintaining racial and gender hierarchies.

The deniability of the importance or very existence of microaggressions by perpetrators and observers represents an additional layer of oppression, which we call *epistemological oppression*. As we noted in Part I, Sue and others use terms like "subtle" and "hidden" to describe the nature of microaggressions (Sue, 2010). The brevity of microaggressions in combination with the assertion of intent (or lack thereof) as the determinant of social responsibility gives rise to deniability. This deniability sometimes occurs at the individual level, and it sometimes takes the form of a more global challenge to the use of the word "aggression" to describe microaggressions at all—*aggression* being contended to require a level of intent. When a member of a dominant group commits a microaggression against a member of a subordinate group and then claims that a lack of intent on his part trumps injury that she experiences, he effectively invokes the power of his epistemology over hers. What he experiences and knows submerges what she experiences and knows. Hewing insistently to intent as the crucial variable for assessing the responsibility of people who engage in microaggressions endorses a kind of societal gaslighting of the lived realities of people who are the targets of microaggressions as members of socially oppressed groups.

Philosopher George Yancy, referring to race, describes a social epistemology born of "a shared history of Black people noting, critically discussing, suffering and sharing with each other the traumatic experiential content and repeated acts of white racism" (Yancy, 2008, p. 849). When the interpretation of a particular epistemological community (e.g., Blacks, women) is consistently disregarded in favor of the interpretation of another epistemological community (e.g., Whites, men), oppression is compounded. The target of a microaggression is thus reminded of their socially subordinate status, of their not belonging. On top of that, through

deniability—which turns on a lack of intent—a person experiencing a microaggression is also reminded that they lack the power to define what is or is not real or not socially recognized as real. If it suits the purposes of members of a socially dominant group to disregard harm caused, that is their prerogative.

Microaggressions, in this view, take on additional significance. Women, such as our talented sales associate who experiences misogynistic microaggressions in the workplace, are being reminded of their place and the consequences of stepping out of that place. They do not belong; they do not count. They are herded into a subsidiary and supportive role by repeated verbal "zaps" that chastise and correct them when they depart from being appropriately supportive or seek to assume a leadership role. Their experience of all of this is, moreover, discounted and denied. Students of Color in a classroom who experience racialized microaggressions in the form of microinvalidations (Sue, 2010) are reminded that they do not count and that they are unlike those who have succeeded academically before and who are likely to succeed in the future. They do not belong; they are different, no matter how “articulate” they are. They are alienated into a separate and marginalized role through subtle but triggering messages of subordination and exclusion. Their experience of all of this is, moreover, discounted and denied. Bystanders to these microaggressions are also reminded of the existing social hierarchy and warned not to disturb it. And that message is presented in a manner that can be denied when it is convenient to do so.

Overall, microaggressions are an essential contributor to the perpetuation of systems of social injustice. Microaggressions, operating through ubiquitous and lightning-quick psychological processes, are the decentralized and relational enforcement of social roles and hierarchies. Microaggressions, far from being insignificant, are the individual locusts that make up the swarm of a macro-unjust culture. Individually, the locusts may not be significant; as a swarm, they define an environment.

Conclusion and Takeaways

We started working on this project with the conviction that microaggressions matter. We suspected that a cross-disciplinary, micro-macro exploration of microaggressions in the context of systems of injustice and oppression would yield useful perspectives for understanding their potency. We believed that a new lens and theoretical framing could help to make sense of the discrepancies between the testimonies and lived experiences of people experiencing the power and pain of microaggressions and the reports of those who do not notice them or are skeptical about their importance. We conclude that microaggressions, when understood in the larger psychological context of social cognition, perform an under-acknowledged yet critical role in the enforcement and perpetuation of social systems of hierarchy. That they are brief, decentralized, and often unnoticed by some does not render them trivial or unimportant, nor does it warrant ignoring their role. Rather, the very fact that they are pervasive and yet frequently overlooked by many gives them formidable reach and power.

We offer three major takeaways from this understanding of the fundamental importance of microaggressions in the production of systemic social injustice.

First, while the construct of microaggressions has been widely adopted, it has also been widely criticized by both scholars (Lilienfeld, 2017) and social commentators (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018). Placing microaggressions within the larger realm of micro-interactions provides the psychological context for understanding how microaggressions operate and why their effects on targeted recipients are inevitable, substantial, and not to be minimized. The seemingly minute verbal or nonverbal reminder of subordinate social status can trigger an avalanche of well-learned schemas and messages about social value and place. "Who are YOU" demands a microaggression against a member of a historically oppressed group, "to think that you can step out of the place to which centuries of social practice have assigned you?" Ibram Kendi captures the magnitude of the cumulative effect of microaggressions' repeated reminders of non-belonging: "A persistent daily low hum of racist abuse is not minor…Abuse accurately describes the action and its effects on people: distress, anger, worry, depression, anxiety, pain, fatigue, and suicide" (Kendi, 2019, p. 47). At the same time, the broader psychological context helps illuminate why actors of superordinate social status are frequently oblivious to the impact of microaggressions that they commit…as well as uncurious about them. These micro-interactions, operating below level of the socially dominant actor's conscious attention, are unlikely to be emotionally laden for them. They may even think they are being complimentary ("You are so articulate!") and are not motivated to explore their implicit biases or their schema of "articulate student" that provokes such a comment.

Second, understanding the role of microaggressions contributes to and solidifies an understanding of social systems of oppression. Young's (1990) work describes how power is relational and how myriad individual interactions are the essence of structural injustice. Ridgeway's (2011) work reveals how traditional system-level patterns and social roles are reproduced through interactions and mini-negotiations between individuals that reproduce social roles. Manne's (2017) work highlights how decentralized reminders of accepted social roles enforce power hierarchies. The work on schemas by Bem and by Cohen connects individual cognitive processing with observed and experienced social structures. Taken together, this body of work connects structural injustices to everyday interactions and relationships. These everyday interactions and relationships, it turns out, are the kind of light-touch, brief, off-the-cuff comment or gesture that we all engage in. Understanding microaggressions as instances of micro-interactions and placing them in the context of social cognitive processing connects the sociological and political to the psychological and individual and so brings systemic injustice home to us. The personal reflects the political; the political emerges from the personal; the personal reinforces the political.

Third, recognizing the psychological avalanche that the smallest microaggression can cause makes it disturbingly clear that chiding recipients to "get over it!" and "not be so sensitive" reveals a profound obliviousness on the part of some members of the dominant group. This very obliviousness helps perpetuate a dominant group member's privilege within a larger system of social group oppression. This obliviousness of individuals with the greatest privilege can be seen as a symptom of epistemological oppression because it means that a dominant's group version of the

world operates as if it holds unchallenged sway.

These three takeaways point toward actions that each of us can take to counter microaggressions and their individual and systemic effects. Understanding how microaggressions reinforce, sustain, and recreate oppression, particularly oppression based on race, gender, and sexual orientation, reveals the many opportunities individuals have to interrupt them. Structural injustice can appear so vast and entrenched as to be impervious to resistance and change. And yet it is through individual interactions (often individual micro-interactions, in the form of microaggressions) that the social systems maintaining injustice are reproduced and sustained. Because the macro does indeed emerge from the micro, individuals can commit to shifting from perpetuating a cycle of socialization to creating a new cycle of liberation that can disrupt systems of injustice (Harro, 2018). The personal-political mutually reinforcing feedback loop *can* be interrupted. The personal *can* destabilize an established political.

This is the everyday work of social justice. When we challenge prevailing social roles of dominance and subordination in our spheres of influence (Tatum, 2017), we create disturbances in the system. If enough of us undertake those challenges in our spheres of influence, change is possible. We can choose to forgo the defensive talisman of "lack of intent" and instead listen to and honor the lived reality of people in oppressed social locations. Once we become aware, we can notice and interrupt ourselves prior to engaging in a microaggression. As bystanders, we can speak or otherwise intervene to identify and challenge a microaggression, listen when the recipient names its impact, and contribute to dismantling an epistemology of obliviousness and ignorance. We can be in solidarity with people who experience the social harm of a microaggression by engaging intentionally in micro-inclusions-—small, everyday interactions that send messages of belonging to members of historically marginalized social groups.[ix]

Microaggressions, we conclude, are integral to the reinforcement and perpetuation of social systems of dominance and oppression. Microaggressions ground and manifest macro-injustices. Microaggressions bring the weight of these macro-injustices to bear on individual people. To challenge and dismantle systems of injustice, we must step up and name, counter, and interfere with these small yet powerful acts.

Notes

[1] The psychologist is Brent Staples, PhD, who has gone on to be an acclaimed journalist. Staples recounts his story in an essay titled "Just Walk on By: A Black Man Ponders His Power to Alter Public Space" (1986) *available at* https://www.livingston.org/cms/lib9/NJ01000562/Centricity/Domain/723/Just%20Walk%20on% 20By%20A%20Black%20Man%20Ponders%20His%20Power%20to%20Alter%20Public%20S p ace%20by%20Brent%20Staples.htm.

[2] For further discussion of "nudges" see Richard Thaler & Cass Sunstein, (2009) *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Penguin.

[3] In discussing oppression, Young highlights manifestations of injustice that go beyond, though they may include, distribution of resources. She identifies "Five Faces of Oppression": "exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence" (p. 40). These differentiated forms of oppression all interfere with people's self-development and self-expression.

[4] This saying has been variously attributed to Anaïs Nin, H. M. Tomlinson, Steven Covey and even scholars in the Talmudic tradition.

[5] If the research were conducted in 2021, my students report that she would be seen "taking shots."

[6] Ambady and associates have also applied their Person Construal theoretical framework to the perception of race and to how racial prejudice interacts with the perception of Black versus White individuals. See Pauker, K., Apfelbaum, E. & Ambady, N. (2010) Race Salience and Essentialist Thinking in Racial Stereotype Development, 118(2) *Child Development* 1799-1811.

[7] While Banaji and Greenwald do not use the term "schema," their model rests in assumptions about closely associated characteristics of individuals that are stored in such a way (e.g., a schema) that they are called up together.

[8] See, for example, Williams, J., (1999). *Unbending gender: Why family and work conflict and what to do about it.* Oxford University Press. Williams describes the "ideal worker" as someone with no care responsibilities, gendered male.

[9] The term "micro-inclusions" is drawn from a presentation by Lauren Aguilar, "Belonging in Science" on file with Author (Strand).

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Understanding & Dismantling Privilege
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#SAYHERNAME and Tell Her Story: Investigating News Media Coverage of Black Women Killed by Police Violence

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Abstract

This project investigates the lack of online news media coverage of two Black women killed by police: Rekia Boyd and Korryn Gaines. Despite their premature deaths, news coverage and mentions of these individuals in three of the top digitally circulating U.S. news sites, *CNN, The New York Times, and Fox News,* are far lower than for two Black men and one White woman killed under similar circumstances. Ultimately, these disparities in coverage speak to a tendency of media to disregard, erase, and make invisible police violence as one of the manifestations of intersecting oppressions in the lives of Black women.

Keywords: Black women, racism, sexism, news media, police violence

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Presently, instances of white-on-Black[i] police and vigilante violence against Black victims have captured significant national attention. Yet, by-and-large, much of the media attention has centered Black men.[ii] Facing similar types of police violence in Black bodies, the deaths of Black women like Charleena Lyles, Janese Talton-Jackson, Sandra Bland, Tanisha Anderson, Breonna Taylor, Renisha McBride, Rekia Boyd, and Korryn Gaines are also of consequence. However, with few exceptions, the persistent killings and non-fatal brutal treatment of Black women have been comparatively overlooked by major news media outlets.

Rather than an interrogation of their killings, this article investigates online news media treatment of these women – the erasures, indirect silencing, and lack of media attention to the violence they experienced.[iii] These silences serve to mask, erase and ultimately make invisible the raced and gendered forms of state-sponsored violence to which Black women are vulnerable (Mowatt et al., 2013; Neely, 2015).

That is, the media silence surrounding these women fails to bring attention to the concrete vulnerabilities to police violence they experience *because* they are Black women, while at the same time bringing attention (in some ways) to the systemic violence experienced by Black men.[iv] Yet, in failing to discuss, name, or humanize Black women who are victimized by police, certain national news publishers are complicit in erasing racialized police maltreatment of Black women, as well as the concrete violence and marginalization to which they remain potentially subject.

This disparity between the remembrance of Boyd and those of the others reflects a popular conception that racial discrimination and violence in America, past and present, are almost exclusively aimed at men: When we talk about lynching, police brutality and mass incarceration, we are almost always talking about African-American men, not women. Being a target of racism is seen as patrilineal, a social and political disadvantage that Black fathers unwillingly bequeath to their sons but not their daughters. The result is a dyad of vulnerability and invisibility that most African-American women, including me, learn to navigate at an early age. (Tillet, 2015)

Consequently, such media erasure results in the invisibility of Black women's vulnerability to police violence.

To be clear, this article does not attempt to minimize the very real threat of violence experienced by Black men. Black men are subject to a unique history of lynching and being viewed through the controlling image of the Black brute, used to justify violence exacted on them as means of social control in the early 1900s and beyond (Bay, 2010). Instead, the aim of the article is to highlight the similar, yet unique racialized and gendered victimization to which Black women are vulnerable.[v]

To this end, I compare rates of coverage of Korryn Gaines' and Rekia Boyd's killings to those of Black men who died at police hands, Ramarley Graham and Alton Sterling.[vi] I investigate the coverage of these individuals by searching their names for articles published in three of the highest circulating digital news sites, *CNN, Fox News Brand,* and *The New York Times*

Brand.

Hypothesis: Despite their premature deaths, news article coverage of these two individuals is far lower than these figures for two Black men killed at roughly the same times through police/vigilante intervention (Collins, 2008; Harris-Perry, 2011; Jiwani, 2006; Neely, 2015).

Similarly, to interrogate the intersection of gender with race, I compare rates of coverage for Boyd and Gaines, to digital circulation rates for Justine Ruszczyk's death, a white woman killed by a Black Somali American police officer in Minnesota. Ultimately, these disparities in coverage speak to a tendency of the media to overlook, erase, disregard, and make invisible the varied manifestations of intersecting oppression in the lives of Black women (Mowatt et al., 2013; Neely, 2015). Yet, as is evinced by the disparities in coverage between Black and white women of state-sponsored violence, when white women die at police hands, it is officially time to report on, and resolve the issue (Hill, 2016). In all, the article argues media disregard and erasure of Black women's vulnerability to police violence speaks to the overall tendency to overlook Black women's oppression in the society (Neely, 2015).

Black Feminist Theory and Literature

Gender, Silencing, "Symbolic Annihilation"

Tuchman (1996, p. 12) addresses the marginality and underrepresentation of women in media, noting

> the very underrepresentation of women, including their stereotypic portrayal, may symbolically capture the position of women in American society – their real lack of power. It bespeaks their "symbolic annihilation" by the media…just as representation in the media signifies social existence, so too underrepresentation and (by extension) trivialization and condemnation indicate symbolic annihilation.

Lazar (2005) and Tuchman (1996) highlight similar processes, and provide feminist contributions critical discourse theory. Lazar (2005, p. 1) addresses the increasingly subtle nature of gendered power relationships and their production, reproduction, and resistance through text and talk. Further, Lazar identifies concrete manifestations of these subtle hegemonic relationships in work and political life. Lazar's (2005, p. 19) "marked inclusion" critiques the "benevolent inclusion of critical and/or feminist discourse studies from non-Western geographical regions in international for a, but marked as 'other' instead of mainstreamed."

This project also rests heavily on Black feminist theoretical traditions. Commonalities among Black feminist theorists of intersectionality also include approach to structures of race, class, and gender oppression as intersecting/interlocking, mutually-reinforced social structures (Combahee River Collective, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242; Collins, 2008). They experience membership in a racial minority differently than Black men, who have access to the privilege of gender majority status. Similarly, white women have access to many privileges of being a part of the dominant racial group in the society, though

they are members of a gender minority (Crenshaw 1991, p. 1252).

A number of Black feminist and other feminist researchers have advanced new metaphors and lenses to address the silencing, dismissal, and disregard that Black women navigate, often reinforced and perpetuated in media. Interstices, for instance, interrogates symbolic representations of Black women, highlighting intentional discursive silences that foster feelings of non-belonging, marginalization, and invisibility for members of the group (Spillers, 1984). Such silences may symbolically overlook Black women, negate their belonging in certain spaces, and minimize existence as complex beings (Harris-Perry, 2011; Lorde, 2007; Mowatt et al., 2013). Similarly, Harris-Perry (2011) developed the concept of the crooked room, to describe the constant struggle against a longstanding history of racial and gender stereotypes with which Black women must contend.

When they confront race and gender stereotypes, Black women are standing in a crooked room, and they have to figure out which way is up. Bombarded with warped images of their humanity, some Black women tilt and bend themselves to fit the distortion…. To understand why Black women's public actions and political strategies sometimes seem tilted in ways that accommodate the degrading stereotypes about them, it is important to appreciate the structural constraints that influence their behavior. It can be hard to stand up straight in a crooked room. (Harris-Perry 2011, p. 29)

Other researchers help illustrate the ways "standing in a crooked room" becomes especially difficult, when Black women are represented in media. Specifically, regarding news stories, the overt identification of marginalized racial, gender, or sexual characteristics to ensure an individual's or group's classification as non-white, non-male, non-cisgender, non-heterosexual, non-mainstream – that is, other – alongside the failure to name powerful, privileged groups, thereby mainstreaming, and universalizing, the latter identities as normal, and their perspectives as representative of the taken-for-granted knowledge of the society.

Mowatt et al. (2013) note when Black women are discussed in media, they are often elucidated as hyper visible in problematic ways that harken back to historical stereotypes about Black women's over sexuality, attitudinally, rebelliousness, and lack of femininity. Members of this group have historically been inaccurately framed in news, scholarly, and popular discourses as bestial, physically sturdy, less feminine, more capable of withstanding pain, and overall, less human than the oppositionally-positioned, normative, unspoken, frail, dependent stereotypical conjuring's of "true White womanhood" (Harris-Perry, 2011 Winfrey Harris, 2015). Further, according to Mowatt et al. (2013), when they are not represented in these fashions, Black women are otherwise systemically erased and invisible in larger society.

Consequently, when popular culture repeatedly omits Black women, or draws on controlling images of Black womanhood, the larger outcome is the reproduction of Black women's oppression (Hill Collins, 1986). The erasure, invisibility, and marked representations of Black women victims of police violence contributes to their symbolic

annihilation (Mowatt et al., 2013; Tuchman, 1996).

However, not only are women marginalized and symbolically annihilated in the media, but race, gender, and class oppression are mutually constructed. Black women, trying to stand in a crooked room, experience various types of symbolic annihilation simultaneously. And with that symbolic annihilation, they are erased, and their oppressions, particularly their vulnerability to state-sponsored violence, are largely invisible in mass media. This critical feminist discourse conceptual tool can be expanded and applied with Black feminist theory.

Discourse

According to discourse scholars, the society is constrained by structures of race, class and gender oppression that are partially upheld by work the common-sense-making media does in presenting people of color and whites in ways that bespeak and normalize the racial and gender stratification of society. Media representations of people of color are constrained by power relationships that have historically influenced the development and presentations of media images, particularly regarding people of African descent in the U.S. Consequently, packages of ideas that surround the presentation of media messages about or including women of color may be connected to longstanding racial stereotypes and ideologies that were created to justify their position within a racist and sexist social order, and continue to do that discursive work today (Jiwani, 2006; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Meyers, 2004; Van Dijk, 1991, 1993, 2000).

These theorists highlight 1) historical structures of racism, sexism, and classism that have continued to influence options for representation of non-white, non-male, non-cisgender, non-heterosexual groups, especially women of color; 2) the ownership of institutions of cultural production by a predominately white, wealthy class of men (Semmes, 1995); 3) strategic naming and silences that may harken to historical and stereotypical tropes, and reinforce the normalcy, universal nature of whiteness and maleness, alongside the othering, abnormality, and naming of difference, (e.g., nonwhiteness, youth, "urbannness") (Jiwani, 2006, p. 4; Jiwani & Young, 2006; Reid-Brinkley, 2012). The way this normalization reinforces and reproduces white supremacy is by distorting its presence and making whiteness the unnamed universal. Further, these scholars unearth the semantic moves that frequently, though now subtly, mark women and people of color as problematic, different, other, and subordinate (Davis & Gandy, 1999; Entman & Rojecki, 2004; Feagin, 2013; Gandy, 1996; Meyers, 2004; Reid-Brinkley, 2012; Semmes, 1995; Van Dijk, 1991, 1993, 2000).

The strengths of this approach are in its ability to capture historically problematic representations of nonwhite groups, their connections to the maintenance of racial, gender, and class inequality through media representations. Additionally, the hegemonic approach does capture the disproportionate representation in ownership of modes of cultural production by white male elites, and the historical use of media, by those elites, to secure their positions at the type of a racially and sexually stratified social hierarchy.

Methods

Coverage

Each individual's name was used as a search term in three of the most highly-circulating digital news sites in the U.S.: *The CNN Network, Fox News Digital Network,* and *The New York Times Brand*.[vii] These were selected for the availability of verification resources for rates of coverage, including search engines for the publication sites, cnn.com and foxnews.com.

Results were limited to articles (i.e., "stories") published from the date of death to July 30, 2019.[viii] Videos and articles that did not actually mention subjects' full names in the article content were excluded. Searches were conducted for exact hits on articles including individual names (e.g., "Korryn Gaines") specifically mentioned within the titles and/or written content of articles. Because this project centers on online news coverage, articles in traditional print were excluded from the count. Often, for *The New York Times,* articles with the parallel titles and content were printed in traditional format, as well as published online.

1. Rekia Boyd – Black woman, 22, unarmed, killed 21-Mar-12 by off-duty police officer in Chicago, IL
2. Korryn Gaines – Black woman, 23, armed, killed 1-Aug-16 by police barricaded in home in Baltimore, MD – videos of police entry
3. Ramarley Graham – Black man, 18, unarmed, killed 2-Feb-12 by police in home without warrant in New York, NY
4. Alton Sterling – Black man, unarmed, 37, killed, shot point blank 5-Jul-16 by police in Baton Rouge, LA selling CDs– video of shooting
5. Justine Ruszczyk – White woman, 40, unarmed, killed in front of home by Minneapolis, MN police on 17-Jul-17

To illustrate disparities in rates of coverage for Black men and women killed by police, I gathered the total number of articles published online via *CNN, The New York Times Brand, and Fox News Digital Network* for Rekia Boyd, Koryn Gaines, Alton Sterling and Ramarley Graham. Next, I compared rates of coverage, i.e., "article hits," for the four Black men and women included in the sample. Table 1 and Table 2 display the results of this comparison.

Focusing on national audiences provides a lens into the different levels of national attention to each death, as compared to the police-related deaths of two Black men, Ramarley Graham and Alton Sterling. This was done to illustrate that, as compared to Black men killed by police under similar circumstances, Black women are often ignored, overlooked, and dismissed as victims of racialized state-sponsored violence although they are vulnerable to it (Hill, 2016).

Across three of the major digital news sites, there were obvious disparities in the number of articles published online for Korryn Gaines and Rekia Boyd, as compared to Alton Sterling and Ramarley Graham. Between 2012 and 2017, *CNN, The New York Times Brand,* and *Fox News,* published 37 articles on the killing of Rekia Boyd, and accompanying adjudication **(Table 1**). Ramarley Graham, an eighteen-year-old killed by New York Police, received a total of 98 article hits during the same period (**Table 2)**. Similarly, between 2016-2019, these publishers issued 30 articles on the death of Korryn Gaines

(**Table 1**). Alton Sterling was discussed in 683 articles in the aforementioned years (**Table 2**). Updates, information, and discussions about the experiences of Graham and Sterling collectively far exceeded those of Boyd and Gaines, largely because of the number of articles on Sterling.

Comparing Rates of Coverage – Race

To illustrate disparities in rates of coverage for Black women and white women killed by police, I gathered the total number of articles published online via *CNN, The New York Times Brand, and Fox News Digital Network* for Rekia Boyd, Koryn Gaines, and Justine Ruszczyk/Damond. Next, I compared rates of coverage, i.e., "article hits," for these individuals. Table 1 and Table 3 display the results of this comparison.

As noted above, between 2012 and 2019, *CNN, The New York Times Brand,* and *Fox News,* published 67 articles specifically naming Rekia Boyd and/or Korryn Gaines. Contrarily, Ruszczy was discussed in 215 articles by the aforementioned digital publishers. Updates, information, and discussions about the experiences of Ruszczy far exceeded those of Boyd and Gaines, collectively. That is, in the two years following the death of Justine Ruszczy, the former received *over three times more* coverage than Gaines and Boyd in multiple years following their deaths. Such a finding is not surprising, as Neely (2015) and Jiwani & Young (2006) highlighted similar results in their comparisons of coverage of white and Black women victims of violence.

Discussion & Conclusions

By the time of its publication, this manuscript may appear to provide a retrospective look into news media coverage (or lack thereof) surrounding murders of Black women by police between 2012-2019. Yet, the time period selected for this project is of consequence. The persistent vulnerability and identity-based marginalization experienced by Black women exists within a larger context of racial attitudes that deny the continued significance such differential treatment, disregard inequality, and fail to give it attention. At the same time, subtle scapegoating, xenophobic, anti-immigrant political rhetoric were used in the 2016 election to silence vulnerable groups; to align supporters against "others" on the grounds of Americanness (read: whiteness) – and more concretely, to later justify the execution of presidential mandates intended to restrict women's rights, and immigration to the U.S. As such, investigating media that address racialized police violence during this period provides a unique window into the significance of the topic to publishers, along with expectations of importance, and readership.

It is of great significance that Black women victims of police violence are ignored by large news media outlets. As shown by Neely (2015), Jiwani & Young (2006), and other scholars of critical media and discourse theory, media representations tend to influence readers' responses and subsequent public outcry. This applies to both rates of representation (e.g., news coverage), and styles or "framing" of victims to audiences (e.g., ideas used to describe victims and shape their stories for readers). Put simply, when police killings of Black women are under-covered, public attention is not drawn to these atrocities, and

by extension, public outcry may be limited thereby. This situates state-sponsored violence against Black women as anomalies – outliers that do not require public responses. As such, the lack of coverage and attention for police violence against Black women can also limit public responses, (e.g., calls for changes to policing).

In failing to discuss, name, or humanize Black women who are victimized by police; in overlooking responses to oppression that address it directly, certain national news publishers are complicit in silencing/minimizing unfair treatment of Black women, as well as the concrete violence and marginalization to which they remain vulnerable. In short, the underrepresentation, invisibility and marked representations of Black women victims of police violence contributes to their symbolic annihilation; the erasure of the violence exacted upon their bodies; and the invisibility of such violence to members of the public (Mowatt et al. 2013; Tuchman 1997).

Ultimately, however, the problem of police violence against Black bodies persists, and Black lives are continuously eliminated prematurely. Often, these killings are followed shortly thereafter by other (often young) Black lives cut short by state-sponsored powers.[ix]

Scholars and activists have specifically addressed the unique types of violence, marginalization, silencing and dismissal to which Black women are vulnerable in contemporary U.S. society. For instance, the #sayhername hashtag was popularized on Twitter, Facebook, and other social media platforms[x] to spotlight the lack of media attention to the murder of Sandra Bland and other Black women, as compared to male victims of police violence.[xi] This emergent protest movement continues to highlight police/vigilante brutality against, and prosecutorial disregard for Black bodies through social media, boycotts, and publicized protests.[xii] The names and stories of Breonna Taylor, Korryn Gaines, Ma'Kiha Bryant, and others have been publicized due to this hashtag, and the democratizing power of social media and other forms of digital media dissemination.

Other scholars have investigated the media treatment of Black women and women of color who are victims of violence (Jiwani & Young, 2006; Neely, 2015). This article is unique, as many other studies have not compared rates of coverage for Black women to that of Black men, and white women, in order to access their erasure and invisibility in that fashion.

Ultimately, I anticipated significant national coverage of Gaines, as police both killed her, and injured her five-year-old son for failing to nonviolently de-escalate their interaction. That is, prior to her murder, Gaines allegedly threatened police with her gun. This is likely why Facebook granted The Baltimore County Police Department's request to deactivate her attempt at live streaming the police and counter and her later death (Weiner & Bui, 2016).[xiii] And more so, it is perhaps why national news sites have failed to adequately cover her police-related murder.

Interestingly, police shooting Gaines' five-year-old son did not garner significant attention or sympathy. Black children's ages do not negate the disposability of their lives because of their color. In 2010, the killing of seven-year-old Ayanna Jones during a

Detroit Police raid, along with the 2014 murder of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, killed by Cleveland Police while playing with a toy gun in a park, both serve as evidence of the overt disposability of young Black lives in the U.S.

Furthermore, police encounters with armed whites have illustrated the ability to deescalate volatile encounters, though Gaines was not extended the same liberty. The reaches of white privilege, and the differential treatment Blacks receive become apparent when similar situations are compared by race. That is, the police murders of these armed and unarmed Black victims contrast the slow, deliberate response of authorities to violent murderers like Dylann Roof, James Holmes,[xiv] or to the armed Oregon Bundy family militia (Ellis et al., 2015). After killing nine Black service attendees at UAME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, targeted by the killer because of their race, Roof was apprehended alive by police. Officers reportedly took Roof to Burger King, prior to booking him on charges. Further, like Korryn Gaines and Philando Castile, the militia was armed, yet remained in occupation of a federal wildlife refuge on Native American Paiute land for forty-one days. All but one of the seventeen-member group were apprehended alive and members of the militia were later acquitted of trespassing and occupation charges (Ellis et al., 2015).

Overall, the findings of this article do not seek to minimize the deaths of Black men at police hands. Neither Black adults nor Black children should suffer such violence and vulnerability. However, the silencing, disregard, or lack of attention to these killings serves to erase them from public view, and thereby make invisible the atrocity and systemic nature of these crimes. Even when Black women died under similar conditions, and during the same time periods they were still not given similar attention to what Black men were given by news media.

On the other hand, contemporary media – particularly due to technological advances and the popularity and accessibility of social media to millions of Americans – function as dialectical spaces. Major news publications included, media serve as contestation of meanings, for critiques of the social status quo, and for unearthing systemic forms of racism and sexism. Media serve as spaces for the reinforcement of social structures, as well as for those structures' destabilization. Within these spaces occur the contestation of racial meanings and their significance (Campbell et al., 2012; Cole & Jenkins, 2012; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gamson et al., 1992; Gandy, 1996; Gross & D'Ambrosio, 2004; Haider-Markel et al, 2007; Markovitz, 2011; Meyers, 2004).

Growing access of members of the American public to social media (including Instagram and Facebook Live, SnapChat, and Twitter), and cell phones with video capability, has meant that individuals can not only capture, but share everyday microaggressions, differential, and obviously racialized treatment online. These media allow also for the unadulterated display of live streamed and videoed police violence against Blacks – as occurred with the deaths of Philando Castile, Eric Garner, and Korryn Gaines. These videos are shared with millions of users, untainted by intentional misremembering or intentionally/unintentionally falsified reports (e.g., the killing of Freddie Gray). Often

these recordings facilitate the generation of ire against, and protest of these killings (Gray et al., 2014; Hill, 2016).

The utility of such social media sites for the capture and dissemination of instances of fatal and non-fatal police violence is becoming clear. The video of Eric Garner's strangling by a New York City police officer generated ire, heavily through circulation online. The murder of Philando Castile, in front of his fiancé and four-year-old daughter, also gained attention after being livestreamed on Facebook. Similarly, Facebook confirmed terminating Korryn Gaines' Facebook Live stream of her attempted arrest, and later police murder; Baltimore County Police requested that Facebook shut down the life feed prior to storming her apartment.

Yet, despite social media serving as a democratizing force, some disseminators of national news media are still failing to adequately cover police killings of Black women. One major reason Black women's deaths are not covered appropriately in news is because Black women's suffering in the country tends to be overlooked, silenced, minimized, and disregarded. As noted by Mowatt et al., (2013), Tuchman (1996), and others, their underrepresentation is hegemonic, and symbolic of a larger lack of power within systems of marginalization in the country. That a mother was killed by police in front of her child, and that those police injured that five-year-old during the altercation, resonated less with media outlets and the American public than the fact that she brandished a weapon, and barricaded herself in her apartment against police.

In sum, the most jarring finding in this article was media disregard for police killings of Black women. I found erasure. I found invisibility. I found silences – the lack of representation, the lack of discussion, and a lack of attention to Black women who died in connection to interactions with police under similar conditions to Black men. As shown by the rates of coverage in news, two Black women's police-related deaths generated far less media response than those of Black men or a single white woman.

Limitations & Prospects for Future Research

Among the limitations to this study were my access to available digital publications. That is, my article searches were restricted to publishers for whom I had access via the university licenses at my disposure. These licenses permitted me to restrict/define search criteria; search article publications over multiple years; and to access search results without incurring additional costs. On one hand, I was able to access and analyze trends among three highly circulating digital publications, nationally. Notwithstanding, my analysis of these three publications may fail to capture fluctuations in localized coverage in the areas where victims were killed. It is possible that Korryn Gaines in Baltimore, MD and Rekia Boyd in Chicago, IL received stronger news coverage in each of those localities than they received from national publications. Yet, it is also possible that Ramarley Graham in New York, NY, Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge, LA, and Justine Ruszczy in Minneapolis, MN, would have still received higher coverage in their respective locales. This would be an interesting prospect for future research.

Additionally, the analysis in this project excluded videos, blogs, and other digital

news sources that many in the U.S. employ to stay abreast of current events. However, the cause of this was the difficulty of mixing diverse types of content in searches (while excluding others), and ability to use search tools to ensure accuracy of counts. Still, comprehending rates of digital coverage for all sources of digital media could speak further to rates of news coverage – another topic that would make for promising future investigation.

Further, this manuscript excluded analysis of the actual article content (e.g., words, ideas, concepts) that was used to present Gaines and Boyd to national audiences. Another prospect for future investigations could include a qualitative content analysis of the images, concepts, and ideas used to represent victims to national audiences. Similarly, future research might also interrogate differences and similarities amongst publishers on representations of individuals killed by police violence.

Moreover, future investigations might also delve into the media treatment of Breonna Taylor, who was killed by police in 2020. Specifically, it would be interesting to compare rates of coverage, as well as subtle framing suggestions in the representations of Ms. Taylor to the public. That is, given that Ms. Taylor was killed in her home while asleep, it would be interesting to address ways publishers frame culpability and victimhood to readers – as well as to investigate the presence of controlling images of Black womanhood in news stories about her murder.

As a final prospect of future research, I propose investigations of rates of coverage, news media framing, and public responses to victims of police violence. Investigations of associations between media representations and public policy responses are already a promising area of critical media studies, and such investigations would contribute greatly to the field, and to understanding the significance of media and public responses.

Notes

[i] In reference to race, I intentionally capitalize "Black," although I do not capitalize "white" throughout the article. This is done to linguistically de-center whiteness, in response to ways whiteness is centered, privileged, and made silently (and overtly) universal throughout U.S. society. Further, I use the language in this manuscript to push back against the historically consistent trend of marginalizing, minimizing, and ignoring the significance and humanity of Black people throughout the African Diaspora.

[ii] In 2012, Jordan Davis, an unarmed teenager, was murdered by a white gas station patron over an altercation regarding loud music (Alvarez, 2012). In early August 2014, Eric Garner was also killed by an illegal chokehold from a New York City police office, stemming from a dispute over the sale of illegal cigarettes (Baker, Goodman, & Mueller, 2015). He was unarmed. That same month, a recent high school graduate, 18-year-old Michael Brown, was also killed by police in Ferguson, Missouri (Berman, 2014). He was also unarmed. Similarly, Ezell Ford was murdered by police on August 13, after an altercation with the LAPD during an "investigative stop" (Sieczkowski, 2014). The list continues. Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Ramarley Graham, Amadou Diallo, Sean Bell, Akai Gurley, twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, killed by Chicago police while playing with a toy gun in the park (Quah & Davis, 2015).

[iii] Rekia Boyd was killed by Dante Servin, an off-duty Chicago police officer. Late on the evening of March 21, 2012. Boyd was attending a social event with friends. After ordering the group Boyd was with to quiet down, Servin fired into the crowd. One of Servin's bullets hit Boyd in the head, and she died two days later from her injuries. Over one year later, Servin was charged, and acquitted of involuntary manslaughter (Hutcherson & Burnside, 2015). Three years later, Servin was fired (*Chicago Sun-Times,* 2016). Servin, similarly, justified his actions through allegations of feeling threatened. The second subject, Korryn Gaines, was murdered in her apartment by Baltimore County Police in front of her five-year-old son. Gaines was shot, after brandishing a legal shotgun, as police executed an arrest warrant at her apartment for a traffic violation (Knezevich & Rector, 2016). Gaines was live-streaming the incident. However, Facebook Live acquiesced to requests from the Baltimore County Police to shut off the video feed, prior to their entry into Gaines' apartment (Weiner & Bui, 2016).

[iv] This disparity in coverage may also be because police killings of Black men are more directly connected with the longstanding trope of the Black brute. This overexaggerated stereotype played upon Black men's supposedly "visceral" and "violent" nature, to justify raced lynching and brutality against Black men as means of social control in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Bay, 2010).

[v] To reference my previous example, although it receives scant attention comparably, Black women were also subject to rape and lynching as forms of racial violence in the Jim Crow south.

[vi] These subjects were selected because Graham's and Sterling's deaths were publicized under similar circumstances (e.g., video streaming), and during the same years of Gaines's and Boyd's deaths.

[vii] These publishers were selected due to the availability of resources. These sites permitted the use of their own search engines, along with multiple other sources, including Google News, University of Maryland, and Michigan State University ProQuest Databases to confirm publication rates.

[vii] These dates were selected to allow for at least two years between death of the most recent victim of police violence included in the sample (Justine Ruszczyk/Damond), and the end date for data collection. This was done to secure an adequate sample for all individuals included in the sample. Additionally, the dates provide a window into media representations of Black women victims of police violence prior to the end of the racially turbulent Trump U.S. presidential administration.

[ix] Quite recently, in March 2020, police in Louisville, Kentucky murdered emergency medical technician, Breonna Taylor, after executing a no-knock warrant on the wrong address. Ms. Taylor was killed by police as she slept in her home.

[x] In May 2015, The African American Policy Forum released a report entitled "Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality against Black Women", which outlined the goals and objectives of the SayHerName movement.

[xi] Further, the murder of Janese Talton-Jackson – a young Black mother killed for refusing a Black male suitor – provides one example of the particular ways gendered oppression, marginalization, and violence may influence their lives. In general, although Black men might be vulnerable to racial marginalization as Black people, the sense of entitlement her murderer felt to Jackson's body existed because Jackson was a Black *woman* in a patriarchal society (Young 2016).

[xii] The untimely, publicized police murders of unarmed Black victims such as Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice parallel the slow, deliberate response of authorities to a White Oregon militia in January 2016. Unlike each of the aforementioned individuals, the militia was armed, and remained in occupation of a federal wildlife refuge on Native American Paiute land for forty-one days. All but one member of the armed group was apprehended alive (Urquhart 2016).

[xiii] For further information, please see the following *Washington Post* article. Weiner, R., & Bui, L. (2016, August 2). Korryn Gaines, killed by police in standoff, posted parts of encounter on social media. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/maryland-woman-shot-by-police-in-standoff-posted-part-of-encounter-on-social-media/2016/08/02/d4650ee6-58cc-11e6-831d-0324760ca856_story.html

[xiv] In 2012, Holmes killed twelve people in an Aurora, Colorado theater. He was also apprehended alive by police.

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Table 1
Online News Coverage of Black Women Killed by Police

	Rekia Boyd	Korryn Gaines	Total Article Coverage of Black Women
Date of Death	21-Mar-12	1-Aug-16	
News Date Coverage End	29-Jul-19	29-Jul-19	
CNN	6	7	13
The New York Times Brand	24	7	31
Fox News Digital Network	7	16	23
Total Number of Articles Published	37 Boyd	30 Gaines	67 Boyd & Gaines

Table 2
Online News Coverage of Black Men Killed by Police

	Ramarley Graham	Alton Sterling	Total Article Coverage of Black Men
Date of Death	2-Feb-12	5-Jul-16	
News Date Coverage End	29-Jul-19	29-Jul-19	
CNN	5	198	203
The New York Times Brand	63	192	255
Fox News Digital Network	30	293	323
Total Number of Articles Published	98 Graham	683 Sterling	781 Graham & Sterling

Table 3:
Online News Coverage of Black White Women Killed by Police

Justine Ruszczyk/Damond		Total Article Coverage of White Woman
Date of Death	17-Jul-17	
News Date Coverage End	29-Jul-19	
CNN	42	42
The New York Times Brand	40	40
Fox News Digital Network	133	133
Total Number of Articles Published	215	

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Path to Empowerment: African Nova Scotian Strategies to Navigate the Intersection of Race and (dis)Ability

Wanda Elaine Thomas Bernard
Kimberly Berry **Rajean Willis**

Abstract

Descriptions of intersectionality frequently rely on images of roads and intersections to represent how multiple systems of oppression converge. In these metaphors, roads represent the route by which negative forces of exploitation and oppression travel and interact. Roads and paths can also be used to represent an egress route taken to escape harm and move toward something better. This paper presents the voices of African Nova Scotians who have both identified patterns of harm and suffering within their community and pointed researchers in the direction of improved outcomes for African Nova Scotians living with (dis)Abilities including mental illness and addiction. Their shared observations and experiences identify key barriers to remove and bridges to be built if African Nova Scotians who are caught at the intersection of race and (dis)Ability are to have access to timely and effective care. The article concludes with discussion of pathways to empowerment for those caught at the intersection of race and disability oppression

Keywords: intersectionality, race, disability, empowerment

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Descriptions of intersectionality frequently rely on images of roads and intersections to represent how multiple systems of oppression converge. In these metaphors, roads represent the route by which negative forces of exploitation and oppression travel and interact. Roads and paths can also be used to represent an egress route taken to escape harm and move toward something better. This paper presents the voices of African Nova Scotians (ANS) who have both identified patterns of harm and suffering within their community and pointed researchers in the direction of improved outcomes for African Nova Scotians living with (dis)Abilities including mental illness and addiction. Their shared observations and experiences identify key barriers to remove and bridges to be built if African Nova Scotians who are caught at the intersection of race and (dis)Ability are to have access to timely and effective care.

Between 2013 and 2015, the Nova Scotia Association of Black Social Workers (NSABSW) conducted a participant action research (PAR) study, which helped to fill gaps in the scholarship on intersectionality, racism, and ableism. The study also provided vital opportunities for grassroots community engagement, education, and empowerment on race and (dis)Ability issues in Nova Scotia. The study, called *Out of the Shadows*, focused on issues of mental illness, substance abuse, problem gambling and (dis)Ability within the ANS community, with the goal of bringing greater awareness to stakeholders in both the African diaspora and the (dis)Ability communities. This paper shares the voices of African Nova Scotian participants in the study, acknowledges the profound and complex harms that result from the intersection of race and (dis)Ability, and considers strategies to mitigate these harms.

What We Already Know: A Brief Review of the Literature

Despite the long and complex history of racism and ableism in Canada, there is not much written about the connection between these two oppressive systems. Scholarship in the United States offers considerably greater examination of this topic. As early as 1998, Faye Z. Belgrave contended that almost all African American families are affected by (dis)Ability and/or mental health concerns. Taylor (2008) found that, particularly as they age, people of African descent suffer higher rates of (dis)Ability than the population as a whole. In their examination of health service statistics, Warner and Brown (2011) found an obvious race and gender-based hierarchy within age trajectories of (dis)Ability. This hierarchy coincides with the racialized and gendered hierarchy, with White males experiencing the lowest levels of (dis)Ability and Black women experiencing the highest levels of (dis)Ability. According to Frederick and Shifrer (2019), the medical model of (dis)Ability sees (dis)Ability as a problem that is located in the body of an individual. The medical model of (dis)Ability regards inequalities faced by individuals as natural consequences of problematic bodies. The social model identifies ableism as the source of these inequalities, including disproportionate rates of unemployment and poverty. In 2014, only 17% of working-age people with (dis)Abilities were employed, compared with 65% of those without (dis)Abilities (Frederick & Shifrer, 2019, pp. 201). In Canada, people reporting a (dis)Ability makeup over 40% of the low-income population, and approximately 25% of people reporting a (dis)Ability earn less than one-half of the national median income (Wall, 2017, pp. 6). Similarly, Lo et al. (2014) showed "chronic mental illness is more prevalent among African American

populations than Caucasian populations" (p. 254) and suggest rather than a purely medical phenomenon, mental illness stems from low socioeconomic status and is therefore a result of systemic racism.

Anglin et al. (2006) found that stigma and attitudes toward mental illness within communities of African descent differ from the dominant community in significant ways. For example, African Americans are more likely to believe that people with mental illness are prone to violence toward others. Yet, African Americans were also found less likely to blame the individual for their violent acts or call for punishment (Anglin et al., 2006).

Kiecolt et al. (2008) argued that African Canadian and African American communities experience similar or lower levels of serious mental illness despite higher exposure to chronic stressors such as low socioeconomic status and racism. Some scholars contend that research methods used to study mental health in these communities are biased toward dominant groups and, therefore, produce inherently flawed results when examining African American populations (Mouzon, 2013).

Indisputably, the experience of African Canadian and African American individuals in relation to health care generally, and to (dis)Ability including mental illness specifically, is set within the context of medical and health care systems, which are themselves characterized by a long history of exploitative and violently oppressive racism. Indeed, many African Canadians encounter profoundly negative experiences when they seek services and support from the health care system (Beagan et al., 2012; Maddalena et al., 2013). These experiences are rooted in a history of unequal access to mainstream services for African Canadians (Este & Bernard, 2003; Pachai, 1990). Krakauer et al. (2002) explains:

> The history of American medicine includes torturous exploitation, deception, withholding of needed treatment, experimentation without consent, coerced treatment, and stigmatization, perpetuated by healthcare institutions and physicians upon African American and other minority patients. (p. 186)

These are not only problems of the past. MacDonald and Friars (2009) found that even in the contemporary context, people in helping professions cause significant harm to people with (dis)Abilities because of their lack of insight and understanding of attitudes of ableism and racism, and the intersectionality of both. Danzer (2012) makes similar observations about how historically rooted trauma manifests barriers to therapeutic engagement when African Americans are paired with White therapists. Not surprisingly, while problems with historic and systemic racism and ableism linger within health care, a well-founded mistrust of medical and mental health professionals persists among many people of African descent (Dossa, 2005; Burke, 2008; Gamble, 1993; Bhopal, 1998; Krakauer & Truog, 1997). Like all barriers to care, this mistrust can prevent individuals from seeking care until a crisis is imminent (Maddalena et al., 2013). For people with (dis)Abilities, other similar historic and systemic barriers endure. For example, it remains common practice for individuals with (dis)Abilities to be denied rights and opportunities allotted to typically abled individuals. In the case of decisions about resuscitation being made without consent or discussion with the individual, medical practice threatens a "modern-day extinction of people with (dis)Abilities" (Stienstra &

Wight-Felske, 2003, as cited in MacDonald & Friars, 2009, p. 130).

When looking at the intersection of race and disability, the murder of Eric Garner at the hands of a police officer can be used as a case study. Eric Garner was a 47-year-old Black man who was killed in 2014 in an act of homicide by a White New York police officer. This incident was filmed by a bystander. The video showed Garner complaining of police harassment and subsequently being wrestled to the ground by an officer who wraps his arms tightly around Garner's neck (Ogden, Fulambarker, Haggerty, 2020). Completely immobilized, Garner struggles to repeat the phrase, "I can't breathe," 11 times. The video later shows Garner's body lying lifeless on the sidewalk for a full eight minutes (Ogden, Fulambarker, Haggerty, 2020). The medical examiner's report clearly ruled the cause of death as homicide resulting from a chokehold maneuver that led to the compression of his chest and throat (Ogden, Fulambarker, Haggerty, 2020). Garner's social identities as a Black man and a person (dis)Abled by obesity and asthma make the story of his homicide, and its media coverage, an ideal and tragic case for examining the compounding effects of structural racism and ableism (Ogden, Fulambarker, Haggerty, 2020). For Garner, the intersection of race and ableism had an impact on his life and his death. Unconscious biases that stem from this stigmatizing process, wherein the normalization of Whiteness and ability result in Blackness and (dis)Ability being labeled as deviant (Ogden, Fulambarker, Haggerty, 2020). His intersectional identities also contributed to the societal response to his homicide. Those caught at the intersection of race and (dis)Ability face more barriers and challenges because of their social locations.

The intersection of race and (dis)Ability remains a neglected area in sociology, even though racism and ableism are powerful interacting forces in contemporary issues (Frederick & Shifrer, 2019). Despite the critical importance of the topic, significant gaps in scholarship in this field remain. There is a scarcity of scholarship about (dis)Abilities that includes a race analysis, and much of the scholarship on the experiences of Black people excludes the realities of those with (dis)Abilities, rendering exclusion the norm in both communities. There are relatively few explorations of the impact of intersecting social and cultural identities, an absence of first-person experiential accounts, few studies within the Canadian context (Dossa, 2005), and a complete absence of robust study within Nova Scotia specifically. Hence the need for this study.

The Out of the Shadows Project

The *Out of the Shadows* project engaged participants from across the province to explore perceptions and experiences of (dis)Abilities including mental illness and addictions among African Nova Scotians—essentially moving their realities out of the shadows. Participants included both Black Nova Scotians with multi-generational history and recent African immigrants. Those multi-generation Black Nova Scotians are descendants of members of the African diaspora who made their way to this province in several key migrations during the second half of the 18th century and throughout the 1800s. These waves of migration included enslaved individuals among the New England Planters in the 1760s; Black Loyalists between 1782 and 1784; Jamaican Maroons exiled in 1796; Black refugees of the War of 1812; and Caribbean immigrants who immigrated to Cape Breton during the 1890s (African

Nova Scotian Tourism Network, 2013). The African immigrants in this study are individuals who migrated from Africa within the two decades preceding the *Out of the Shadows* study. For the purpose of this paper, all participants of African descent who resided in Nova Scotia, whether indigenous or recent immigrant, are identified as African Nova Scotian (ANS). By virtue of their racialized identity in the context of the historical and ongoing racism in Nova Scotia, all African Nova Scotians are an oppressed group.

Initially, the *Out of the Shadows* study focused on issues of mental illness, substance abuse and problem gambling within the Indigenous Black Nova Scotian population. In response to participant comments, the study expanded to include both New Canadians and African Nova Scotians living with (dis)Abilities. In total, the project engaged 145 participants in eleven communities through three participant engagement methods: kitchen table talks, youth focus groups, and individual interviews.

The participatory action research approach (PAR) is a critical component of the study. Research conducted within the ANS community must be both with and for the people. It is essential to establish a level of trust and understanding between participants and researchers in order to achieve an authentically mutual goal. PAR is characterized by three features: shared ownership of the research project, community-based analysis of social problems, and an orientation toward community action and change (Etowa et al., 2007; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). Due to the emphasis on the experiences of participants, the PAR approach is in keeping with Africentric social work values. For this study, PAR ensured that the research was conducted in a culturally appropriate manner, and that the process and findings aligned with the values of the ANS community. The PAR approach also ensured that the research outcomes can be used to influence change, whether through future research or to inform and influence policy discourse and decision making. Other social research methods which seek to include community in the research design and process do not hold community action and change as an intentional, deliberate component.

The project began with the identification of community leaders within eleven communities throughout Nova Scotia. These local "hosts" organized kitchen table talks either at their own home or at a community focused venue. The hosts played a key role in establishing trust and collaboration between participants and researchers. They also facilitated the recruitment of participants who would feel safe enough to share their experiences of the intersectionality of race and (dis)Ability. Specific hosts were identified to facilitate sessions with groups of youth held at local junior high schools. Each session also included an ANS health care professional as a guest speaker, which created a valuable opportunity for these health care workers to hear firsthand the challenges and concerns of the ANS community. These sessions also allowed community members an opportunity to gather information about what services and supports are available, and to see their racial and cultural identity represented in a participating health care professional. Whether formally, through culturally specific community-driven programs and initiatives (Boudreau, 2015), or informally, through personal accounts of the importance of cultural representation, the ANS community recognizes the value of

mentorship models for improving trust and engagement with health care professionals.

What We Learned from Participants

The study found that racialized ideas and experiences commonly prevent ANS individuals from either seeking or receiving effective intervention or treatments for issues related to (dis)Abilities including mental illness and addictions. African Nova Scotia participants repeatedly expressed concern that delays in effective intervention and treatment for these issues result in a prolonged lack of well-being and in poorer outcomes. They consistently described how African Nova Scotians living with (dis)Abilities, mental illness, and addiction to drugs, alcohol, and/or problem gambling were too often in need of more immediate and more appropriate care. They described a path to treatment and well-being that is filled with barriers and too often missing bridges which might ease access to effective intervention and timely treatment. Two major themes emerged through the analysis of the findings: barriers to care and effective interventions. Each of these themes is discussed in more detail below.

Barriers to Care

Amid the descriptions of the barriers to timely and effective care, two key sub-themes emerged: stigma and access. Experiences related to stigma, judgement, ostracization, and discrimination encountered by individuals living with issues of (dis)Abilities, mental illness, and/or addiction loomed large in participant discussions. Participants described how individuals have attempted to protect themselves and their loved ones from stigma with strategies of silence and denial. They shared stories of how stigma has been internalized to produce embarrassment and shame. Chief among the strategies to protect against the stings of stigma and shame were to hide, to minimize, and/or to deny that the issues existed. Participants indicated that fear of stigma has played a significant role in the custom of silence and secrecy which has been taught, practiced, and enforced around these issues for generations. The following stories are examples of the power of silence and stigma:

> The Black race is very private, proud group … [we] do not talk about it … [I]n our culture we have to be strong … back in the day it was not acceptable to talk about certain things. (Romaine)

> [I]n our community you're brought up … with the idea that, what goes on at home stays at home … that's very much entrenched in us … you're taught that it's a negative thing [and] you're not going to talk about it … you cover it up. (Marquel)

Participants also indicated that fear of stigma, judgement, and rejection has been a driving force behind the hyper concerns about confidentiality which many had observed within the ANS community. Unfortunately, in what has become a vicious circle, the silence and secrecy employed to protect people from the damage of stigma and judgement has also inhibited awareness, knowledge and understanding of these issues. In the absence of good information and proper understanding, ignorance and misperceptions about these issues has flourished; this in turn has fed the stigma, judgement, and discrimination which prompted the silence in the first place. Just as stigma has prompted silence, the silence has promoted stigma. This cycle leads to a lack of intervention or access to care to properly address the (dis)Ability issue.

The second key sub-theme related to barriers to care is the issue of access. Participants identified a variety of ways in which access to services and resources has been hampered for African Nova Scotians. They spoke about the absence of services and resources located within the ANS community, the costs and challenges associated with travel to communities where services have been available, the barriers related to interpreting and navigating the spaces where services were provided, the racial and cultural barriers which have existed between patients and practitioners, and the communication barriers created by the medical jargon and terminology. Participants shared experiences of racialized discrimination within the health care system. They also shared examples of ways in which the health care system and care providers have failed to deliver effective intervention and timely treatment.

It is important to note that all of these barriers, whether related to stigma or to access, were profoundly racialized. Perhaps the most powerful example of the racialized nature in which issues of (dis)Abilities have been conceptualized and experienced was found in participants' descriptions of ANS perceptions of mental illness and related issues.

Participants described a common impression or belief among many African Nova Scotians that issues related to mental health were not relevant within the ANS community. They explained that issues of (dis)Ability, mental illness, and addiction were seen by many African Nova Scotians as *White* problems. Furthermore, because of the racialized nature of the health care system, many African Nova Scotians have concluded that the supports, services, and treatments available only offer solutions for *White* people. One participant, Hanna, commented, "You would never think in the Black community, in terms of mental health … they don't think they could have a mental health issue." Another participant, Able, stated, "[B]esides our community … healthcare [was White] … that's who [you] see … working in the hospitals, and it's pretty much the same now … it's still predominantly White professionals." Participants noted that the inability to find culturally relevant treatment services leaves many without services. Many must find interventions on their own or in their communities.

Effective Interventions

Perhaps because of the many challenges to accessing professional care, participants described a long tradition of care and support within their community. One participant, Krys, stated, "I was able to effectively take control of my own life [because] I've been supported by the Black community." Another participant, Jimmy, described his family support, "Everyone in my family supported me the best way they knew how." Several participants found support through programs, organizations, and institutions connected to the ANS community such the Transition Year Program (TYP) at Dalhousie University, the Nova Scotia Association of Black Social Workers (NSABSW), and their local churches:

> [Community leaders at TYP] were always accessible and you knew that they were always around, and you knew [at] key moments … you might interact with them and get ... support ... in your decision. (Tyrell)
>
> I [found my friends and NSABSW] very supportive … I had some friends …

> someone to hear me out, listen to me. (Hanna)

> Church supports and stuff like that is what really helped me out. Spirituality took me to where I'm at today, more so than anything. (Dre)

Although community and family support has been invaluable for many people, there are limits to the amount of protection and intervention some individuals receive. With the advantage of hindsight, some participants questioned whether the support they received within the ANS community was adequate:

> [the person] who raised me, whom I loved, I talk about him all the time, but the reality … is—he didn't help me. I was in that situation for years and he didn't do anything to pull me out. So, I … had to ride that wave by myself. (Marlene)

> Community in those days [would just say] 'that's [name], that's what she's like.' But the behaviour was so erratic and bizarre that [I have to ask] why didn't somebody identify that something was wrong? (Romaine)

While helpers among family and community members were not always the most qualified or informed practitioners of therapeutic support, they were sometimes the only trusted support available.

Historically, mainstream medical care was even less accessible (Spigner, 2007; Krakauer et al., 2002); therefore, people of African descent employed the practices and treatments which were most familiar and available. As one participant, Junior, described: "[W]e learn[ed] to deal with it [and] we deal with it in our own way."

Participants also indicated that many ANS individuals have long benefited from the emotional, psychological, and spiritual support found in their religious faith. Participants spoke about the healing benefits of their faith. Like the findings from Este and Bernard (2006) and Bernard (2009), spirituality was a key strategy used by people of African descent to manage and cope with stressors in their lives, including challenges they faced in dealing with a myriad of health-related issues. Many participants in this study told a similar story. One participant, Jemar, stated, "For us in the Black community [we go to church and the] Lord." Another participant, Roxanne, mentioned, "[the] church [and] the spiritual part that was a great support … that foundation and [direction to] stay on that path—that positive path." Other participants spoke about their experiences of finding critical support within their faith and through prayer, similar to the women in the Began et al. (2012) study:

> I had to use the Word [the word of God] … [be]cause the Word is more powerful than any of that stuff … when I had a problem, I had Deacon come pray with me and I felt so much better afterward and so much stronger. (Martin)

> All the work programs are great and all that was God's way of showing me the line of where I should be going. (Dre)

At least one participant expressed concern that the church and spirituality declined as an alternative and/or concurrent source of support. They noted that it left ANS community members with fewer resources and supports for their health and well-being: One participant, Tyrell, stated, "Unfortunately, … there's a decline in the participation … in the faith and so the African Nova Scotian—people of African

descent, [are] losing that form of support." Participants also acknowledged occasions when faith and spirituality contributed to the stigma associated with mental illness:

> In the Black community, like growing up in the church, it was shameful if you admitted that you were depressed … because you shouldn't be because you have the Lord, right? (Junior)

> I have been a faithful person in God and Jesus. I would even wonder if I was being punished for being the way I was and acting the way I was. (Martin)

For many in the community, church and faith have been a double-edged sword. Some participants acknowledged that the message delivered from the pulpit has, at times, discouraged individuals from seeking services and treatments for (dis)Ability, mental illness, and/or addiction. Others have noted such complexities regarding the relationship between the African community and the church (Maddalena et al., 2013; James et al., 2010). Once again, citing delay as a concern, participants described situations where religious or spiritual explanations may have delayed more appropriate and effective interventions:

> [I]n our community, there have been times [when] a person [has been] under so much … distress [and] anxiety … [but] people [have] misinterpret[ed] all together, they [have seen] it as … a religious thing. … They have [had] a complete misunderstanding of it altogether … interpret[ed] it entirely wrong and … maybe someone could have, perhaps, found help … [but] that misinterpretation [lead] to more devastation because nobody step[ped] in. (Jemar)

Conversely, several participants recognized that well informed and supportive church leaders can play a critical role in the provision of culturally appropriate and accessible resources within the ANS community:

> [The] more informed … pastors or … ministers … will know how to approach it in a way that's going to be effective, and sometimes the Lord will say … go to the doctor … I provided means for you [to access help]. (Tyrell)

> [W]e have a minister now that is really working and encouraging people to deal with the pain, and creating opportunities for people in small groups, and support groups and so on … to address whatever issues that are going on in their lives … she's creating many, many opportunities for those things to happen. (Antione)

In terms of trust, cultural safety, and physical accessibility, local ANS churches are among the most obvious locations to engage community members, provide information, strengthen awareness, and offer support.

Some participants spoke about the interventions both within the ANS community and in the broader health care system which have worked well. Several participants pointed to the benefits of receiving care which was culturally relevant. Able noted, "if [the practitioners] are their culture, it's easier to relate and it makes you feel more comfortable … talking to them." Another participant described his experience with an African Nova Scotian counsellor:

> [An ANS counsellor] was the only person [I really connected with], because you know why, he was there before me, what he went through [mirrored my

> experience] … so when I had him as a counsellor, I felt comfortable … I was fortunate to have [an ANS counsellor] … that helped me tremendously. (Dre)

In addition to the powerfully positive experiences of dealing with practitioners who share a cultural identity and connection with their clients, participants discussed the value of connecting with peers who are of African descent and are living with similar experiences. Several participants with experiences related to a specific genetic condition described the positive experience of meeting and talking to other individuals of African descent or family members who share the same condition, if not always the same experience.

While the profound benefits of shared identity cannot be replaced, some participants found some White professionals who demonstrated the ability to listen to and appreciate the experience of ANS clients. One participant described her experience:

> I told my counsellor [about] my situation … the generation I grew up with, the fact that I am a woman, and that I am Black … I explained to him some [of] the racial things I went through as I was growing up and he was very receptive and open to that. I don't know if he [had] any training in cultural competency … but I really felt that he listened to me. (Roxanne)

It is possible for health care practitioners to reach beyond their own gendered and racialized experiences and to listen to and learn from the experiences of their clients. However, it appears from the discussions with participants, this skill is not commonly demonstrated among the health care practitioners encountered by many African Nova Scotians. Nevertheless, it is a critical component in strengthening the quality of care offered to everyone in the province.

A Path to Empowerment

In addition to their comments on strategies and practices that have worked well, participants identified a number of areas which need improvement in order to ensure that ANS have access to better care, sooner. To address the issues of physical accessibility of services, participants called for improved transportation and better integration of the ANS community with the available supports and services. Most significantly, ANS participants recognized that the path forward must address barriers related to the physical location of supports and services:

> I would love to see, more than anything, is a way for us to get around the community more and not feel isolated from town … I want to see … the community not being treated so much [like] a shadow. (Martin)

> … [J]ust having a safe place that they can come and just being able to come and just talk [and] also to get support … it would be good for that support to be … in the Black community. (Marlene)

Not surprisingly, many participants identified "breaking the silence" as a critical component of effective interventions and key to strengthening well-being within the ANS community. Mindful of what often prompts silence, some participants called for individuals to overcome the fear of judgement and better inform themselves in order to help others.

Indeed, many participants indicated that breaking the silence must be the first step toward overcoming the isolation and harms

associated with (dis)Abilities, mental illness, and addiction and how they intersect with race and racism for people of African descent:

> Once it's on the outside [out in the open], there's people out there that know people … know places … [and know] other people [who] have gone through the same thing. (Jemar)

> … [E]ducate families, so that they will be able to come out and then let people know exactly what is wrong with them, [then] we would really be able to understand them better. (Zhuri)

> … [There is] trauma that the communities have faced [that] haven't been dealt with … we really need to have healing in our communities. (Mabel)

Participants recognized that more open communication and education about these issues are essential to the elimination of stigma. As Roxanne stated, "Just being able to talk about it relieves some of the stigma." Stigma not only prevents individuals from seeking help, but does damage in and of itself. Stigma harms self-esteem and undermines well-being. One participant described the importance of communication and education:

> Information sharing … is one of the most powerful tools for social inclusion … through workshops, community talks, radio talk shows, [this is the] first step in addressing this issue … people need to be empowered with information. (Mohammad)

Several participants also wished to enhance their own knowledge of these issues to more effectively offer support and assistance to others in their community:

> I'd like to learn more [and have] training in the [area of] mental health. (Hanna)

> … [A] lot of people don't know how to approach it, and that's the thing that we need to be educated. (Krys)

> … [I]f we had more specifics around the types of (dis)Abilities within the Black community and how we should be addressing them. (Marlene)

In addition to kitchen table talks, support groups, and other opportunities for increased education, participants raised the need to identify helpers and supports within the community. As one participant, Dee, stated, "Set something up … something within the community, so that people would know who to contact if they ran into some kind of problem. Like a 'go-to' person."

Another element which participants identified as critical in creating effective solutions was a shared cultural connection between those who seek support and those who provide it:

> Getting more professionals in the field would help for sure as far as the stigma within the community itself. It's been proven that people are a little more forthcoming when the individuals understand them or look like them. Getting more minorities interfacing with the mental health system … that would be great. (Shauna)

A shared cultural connection was sometimes tied to the issue of trust. As another participant, Tyrell, stated, "I would like to see … more Black [practitioners] … being a Black male, [I] can relate to [others] of our own culture and our own people. It's really a trust issue."

Participants identified trust in health care practitioners and treatment as critical to improving access to effective interventions. Dee noted, "African Nova Scotians … need to know that they can trust [the health care practitioner] because some people they just don't trust." Several participants recognized the value of building trust and establishing relationships with health care professionals before a crisis arises:

> … [T]hey're trying to [bridge] gaps with police officers. They're trying to show that police officers are their friends—[they're] not just here to arrest you. So, it should be the same kind of approach [with mental health professionals]. (Junior)

> … [W]e are relationship people … we require to know someone whether it is a professional or paraprofessional or someone in the helping field—we require to know them a little bit before we will trust them. (Dre)

At least one participant identified the importance of having practitioners who are deeply committed to finding solutions:

> We need the right people out there working … not just for that forty-hour week [attitude]—'I'm here to punch in and punch out' … [we need] people like [my African Nova Scotian counsellor] that actually care. That's what we need … more hands-on people like that. (Antione)

Certainly, issues related to (dis)Abilities including mental illness and addiction do not affect people's lives strictly within the limits of regular business hours. Similarly, the challenges of overcoming a long history of oppression and discrimination surely warrant a degree of commitment which is not neatly contained within regular business hours. Without a doubt, the observations and experiences of the participants indicate that practitioners who demonstrate a deeper degree of connection and commitment might also warrant the trust of ANS who seek their support.

Perhaps the other side of the same coin was identified by participants who called for better engagement among African Nova Scotians with the many services and resources which are currently available.

Participants described the benefits of support received within the ANS community, from friends and family, and from programs and organizations connected to the community such as TYP at Dalhousie, NSABSW, or the Church. Given the value and importance placed on cultural identity, the degree of trust which already exists among one's friends and family, and the immediate accessibility of these supports, it should come as no surprise that these supports have been effectively employed for the benefit of many individuals. However, participants identified critical limitations within these supports. Stigma, judgement, shame, and silence have undermined even these culturally connected and trusted supports. Limitations related to the knowledge and understanding of the issues, their proper diagnosis, and effective treatment were also problems within many community-based support systems. These limitations included ill-informed and often hurtful comments from others and the message that the only intervention necessary to address (dis)Abilities, mental illness, or addiction is faith in God.

In addition to community-based support, participants identified a variety of therapeutic interventions and support programs which have benefited individuals

and their loved ones. Again, many participants described the benefits of engaging with service providers and peer supporters who share the same racialized identity.

In summary, participants identified several critical elements to strengthen the well-being of African Nova Scotians living with (dis)Abilities, mental illness, and/or addictions. Most notably was the need for increased and permanent presence of programs and services located within ANS communities. Breaking the silence which shrouds these issues was raised as key to improving access to support, and the first step in eliminating the associated stigma. Many participants suggested community-based support groups as an effective method to break the silence, eliminate stigma, and help enhance awareness and understanding about these issues within the ANS community. Trust was highlighted as an integral part of the relationship with health care providers; the presence of ANS practitioners was specified as vital to building this trust. Of course, participants also recognized the value of culturally competent non-ANS practitioners and called for measures which would increase the quality and quantity of truly culturally competent care providers. Finally, there was recognition that commitment and engagement on the part of both health care providers and members of the ANS community are vital to the improvement of well-being among community members who live with (dis)Abilities, mental illness, and/or addictions.

Discussion and Conclusion

In 2013, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2015 to 2024 the International Decade for People of African Descent (UNIDPAD) with the theme: "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development". That same year, NSABSW launched its *Out of the Shadows* project; a study that advances our understanding of intersectionality through the examination of the convergence of racism and ableism. Not coincidentally, the findings of this study align precisely with the objectives and key activities laid out by the UNIDPAD.

The voices of African Nova Scotians reaffirm Frederick and Shifrer's (2019) assertion that racism and ableism are powerful interacting forces that impact the everyday lives of persons caught at their intersection. They recount a litany of barriers to accessible, respectful, and culturally appropriate health care. From their description of these obstacles, two central themes emerged: stigma and access. Participants indicate that stigma triggers fear and prompts defenses of silence and denial. These elements—stigma, fear, silence, and denial—are either rooted in or connected to racism and ableism and construct significant barriers to care. These observations favor those of Anglin et al. (2006) who found racialized differences in stigmatizing attitudes toward individuals with mental illness.

Related to stigma, and similar to silence, is invisibility. African Nova Scotians do not see themselves meaningfully represented within the health care system, either as providers or as recipients of care. Study participants identified additional impediments including location of services, hours of operation, spaces and systems that are difficult to navigate, and service providers who are discriminatory and dismissive. They described how these barriers, as well as gaps in cultural values and practices, conspire to render access to care at best challenging and at worst

impossible. Moreover, they indicated that once they are connected to health care institutions and practitioners, their experiences too often range from uncomfortable to harmful. The negative experiences of African Nova Scotians in the health care system echo the findings of MacDonald and Friars (2009), Danzer (2012), and Halloran (2018) asserting that the lack of knowledge about the intersection of race and (dis)Ability within the health care system and among its practitioners causes harm.

The voices of African Nova Scotians have joined a chorus of others calling out the physical and mental health harms of racism. The list includes, but is not limited to, James, Este, Bernard, Benjamin, Lloyd, and Turner (2010); Warner and Brown (2011); Beagan, Etowa, and Bernard (2012); Lo, Cheng and Howell (2014); Grills, Aird, and Rowe (2016); Sule, Sutton, Jones, Moore, and Igbo (2017); and Carlson, Endlsey, Motley, Shawahin, and Williams (2018). Like Danzer (2012), the voices in this study are calling-in clinicians to “deeply and objectively” examine how their understanding of race, ableism, and Africentric values manifest in their practice.

Despite the barriers and challenges, participants identified important protective factors and pathways to change. When the first voices in this study describe protective factors in their lives, such as Church, religious faith, and community-driven support, they echo the findings of James et al. (2010), Beagan et al. (2012), and Maddalena et al. (2013). Closer to home, Boudreau (2015) found that culturally specific community driven (CSCD) programs offered an abundance of support to members of the ANS community over their life journeys in a variety of ways, including coping with racism, and provided a positive impact on their health and well-being. In fact, CSCD programs were identified as necessary supports that contributed to the health and well-being of all study participants (p.149). An excellent example of how community-driven programs can offer prompt, equitable, community-based support is found in the NSABSW emergency response to ANS communities caught in colliding pandemics of racism and COVID-19 (Bernard, 2020).

This study identifies critical changes necessary for effective intervention and treatment to reduce the harms of (dis)Ability, racism, mental illness, and addiction in the ANS community. While key steps include the need to break the silence, increase discussion, and reduce stigma; there are also critical changes needed at the institutional and state level. In accordance with the UNIDPAD objectives and activities, this study finds that the state and health care institutions must implement policies to combat racism and take action to remove the obstacles that prevent equitable access to appropriate health care (General Assembly, 2014). This requires the collection, compilation, analysis, dissemination, and publication of reliable statistical data to measure the success of action taken to redress racism, discrimination, and intolerance in the health care system (General Assembly, 2014). This study also points to the need for a national plan of action to promote equitable access to health care and create conditions for all people of African descent to effectively participate as both recipients and providers of effective and appropriate, culturally responsive health care.

This study brings the reality of African Nova Scotians with (dis)Abilities out of the shadows. It signals the need for changes to ensure the inclusion and empowerment of

all African Nova Scotians. It is imperative to both recognize and redress barriers constructed from historic and ongoing racism and ableism. In essence, these can be developed as strategic actions under the three pillars of the UNIDPAD: recognition, justice, and development. Such pathways could also be considered as forms of reparations that are implemented by health care systems to help repair the multigenerational harms caused by those systems. The path toward timely, effective, and equitable health care requires more ANS practitioners at all levels of care, community-driven support and services, more effective training to strengthen cultural humility among non-ANS service providers, more Africentric models of practice, and critical policy changes that both recognize and redress historic and ongoing harms.

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Understanding & Dismantling Privilege

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Dismantling: A Narrative Analysis of the Evolution of and Factors that Influence White Anti-Racist Action

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Abstract

Dismantling White privilege requires anti-racist action of some sort. However, there is little research about the factors that influence White people to engage in anti-racist work or what can be done to promote White anti-racist action. We conducted an exploratory qualitative study to address this question where we interviewed White individuals, we had reason to believe were engaged in an anti-racist activity ($N = 6$). The research question was as follows: *To what extent, if any, are the participants aware of their White privilege, and how do they describe their journey to anti-racist action?* Findings suggest that dismantling White privilege is a complex journey. Participants engaged in dismantling work described an evolution of the understanding of their White privilege that included influential people that encouraged critical thinking or empathy and some combination of small and large revelatory moments. Participants also spoke to experiences of backtracking or resisting and a constant balancing act related to managing privilege. Scholarly and practical implications of this study are discussed.

Keywords: White privilege, White identity management, anti-racist action, social justice

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The concept of "white privilege" was first introduced in 1935 by WEB Du Bois (1935) in his essay "Black Reconstruction in America." Later, Theodore Allen wrote about white-skin privileges in an essay titled "Can White Radicals be Radicalized?" (Allen, 1967). While the term White privilege had been used for almost 100 years, White people, in general, started paying attention to the term when Peggy McIntosh, a White scholar, released her article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" in 1988 (McIntosh, 1990). Her article identifies the many privileges associated with white skin, including not having to counteract race-based biases around violence and financial responsibility and having people of your race featured in school history classes (McIntosh, 1990). This article is regarded as one of the first times White privilege was given some weight in terms of its legitimacy (Crowley & Smith, 2015; Phillips & Lowery, 2015). It is important to note that this concept was coined in 1935, but it was not brought to the forefront of the conversations for White individuals until roughly fifty years later when it was written about by a White person (McIntosh, 1990).

While the concept of White privilege has been around for a long time, there has been minimal research about White identity management; that is, research on how or why White people engage in dismantling White privilege (i.e., engage in anti-racist activity). Understanding how White people interact with their own privilege and what factors might influence them to dismantle it is critical to developing a theory of the White identity movement relevant to social justice.

This exploratory qualitative study analyzed the experiences of six White people identified as engaged in anti-racist activity. Through semi-structured interviews, participants identified both an evolving understanding of privilege and a series of factors participants believed influenced their anti-racist action. The findings have both theoretical and practical implications.

Literature Review

Many models and theories explore how people who hold power connected to their identity can become advocates of those they have power over. First, we discuss three of these theories that relate to or appear formative in the development of the model for this study—the 3D White identity management model. Second, we review the literature on what formative experience might lead a White individual to engage in anti-racism (i.e., dismantling behavior).

White Identity Management

Hardiman's *White identity management model* is one of the first models explaining how White people are shaped and changed in their views and actions regarding race. Positioned in a counseling framework, Hardiman created her model of White identity management in the early 80s by analyzing the autobiographies of White people who had been identified as having a "high level of racial consciousness" (Hardiman, 1982). Through this analysis, she identified five stages of White development: naïveté, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization (Hardiman, 1982). This stage-based process is similar to the evolutionary experienced we observed in our participants.

While Hardiman and others focus on the individual-level experience, other scholars have focused on the individual identity related to group affiliation. This

group-level consideration paved the way for the development of the 3D model. For example, *social identity theory* focuses on the interaction of social groups as they connect to the individual (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Onorato, 1999) and explains that individuals act in groups in different contexts. It has three constructs: centrality (access to the group-identity), in-group affect (feelings about the group), and in-group ties (sense of attachment to the group) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Using this theory, we see that White identity management could be done on behalf of group advancement or protection, even if the individual would not consider themselves a White supremacist. This theory paved the way for many theories coming out of social psychology and could be particularly useful in understanding group-image threat related to the 3D model.

The *self-categorization theory* evolved from social identity theory, but it differs by focusing on how individuals categorize themselves in reference to whatever group they belong to (Turner & Onorato, 1999). These categories begin at the interpersonal level (self-defined as an individual) and can move through the intergroup level (self-defined by what group they are in) to the subordinate level (self-defined by the groups they are not in). Of course, these identities are fluid and not linear, and one person can experience all three depending on the group context they are in (Turner & Onorato, 1999). It is important to understand identity as fluid and contextual, and looking at the 3D model through this theory could help determine if movement occurs in a linear fashion and if the stages are static rather than fluid.

The *3D model of White identity management*—the model used in this study—suggests that White people use three strategies to manage their White identity and privilege: deny, distance, and dismantle (Knowles et al., 2014). The underlying assumption is that individuals are aware of White privilege. Indeed, the 3D model actively rejects the *invisibility perspective*, suggesting that White people are generally unaware of their privilege unless an external force has pushed them to confront it (Knowles et al., 2014, p. 3). Instead, the authors argue that White people are aware of privilege but manage their responses to protect themselves and their group in one of those three ways. Individuals using the denial strategy reject the existence of White privilege. Individuals using the distancing strategy push back against the idea of White privilege or find some way of demonstrating it does not apply to them. However, White individuals utilizing the dismantling strategy actively take down systems of oppression (Knowles et al., 2014). This study is interested in White individuals in the dismantling stage and the formative influences on that experience.

Formative Influences

We identified in the literature four formative influences that might play a role in moving White individuals into the dismantling stage: level of education, interaction with diverse groups, intersectionality, and travel experience.

There are logical and theoretical reasons to believe education might be related to dismantling behavior. For decades, it has been known that college-educated individuals are more accepting and tolerant of target political groups (Bobo & Licari, 1989), likely because of the exposure to courses and individuals they would not have encountered otherwise. In fact, exposure to a diverse student population during collegiate years directly or indirectly impacts the

cultural competencies of White individuals later on in the workforce (Jayakumar, 2008). This is not to say that a White individual who did not complete higher education could not be in the dismantling stage but, rather, that engagement in higher education can open this door.

Significant exposure and interaction with groups different from oneself could also possibly contribute to entrance into the dismantling stage. Bohmert and DeMaris (2015) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the impact of both interracial friendships and racially diverse neighborhoods on views of affirmative action and feelings of connection with minorities for undergraduate students. The results indicated that those with more interracial friendships and who lived in interracial neighborhoods had more positive attitudes towards race.

Intersectionality refers to the ways in which multiple marginalized identities inform the lived experiences of individuals (Crenshaw, 2017). Its roots rest on the experience of Black women for whom there is a convergence of two marginalized identities that leads to a unique experience, one that is markedly different from the experiences of White women and Black men (Collins, 1998). However, intersectionality can also help us identify where White people with minoritized identities may or may not be more likely to engage in dismantling behavior. Kleiman, Spanierman, and Smith's (2015) study examined the perceptions of White, straight men, and White men who identified as gay, bisexual, or queer. Those participants who did not identify as heterosexual were less colorblind and had higher levels of racial empathy. The results support the idea that, for White people, differing identities, such as sexual identity, can lead to a deeper understanding of marginalized people.

Similar to exposure to diverse groups, experience with traveling, particularly international travel, could possibly be a motivator to engage in anti-racist activism. This influence has been documented in studies on students who study abroad. Salisbury, An, and Pascarella (2013) found that studying abroad had positive and significant impacts on cultural competency. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2006) documented improvements in scores on the intercultural development inventory following a study abroad experience. The results were not as great of a change as the researchers hoped, which the authors attribute to a small sample size. These studies were only focused on college students and specific to study abroad trips; however, there are logical reasons to test this on a more general population, and certainly, more research is needed.

Methodology

Research Design

In this exploratory qualitative study, we used narrative analysis to examine the lived experience of White individuals engaged in anti-racist action. Exploratory studies are particularly appropriate for identifying and exploring complex social phenomena (Luker, 2008), such as formative influences on White-identifying individuals' understanding of White privilege. We selected *narrative analysis*, a form of qualitative analysis which examines the stories or accounts of individuals' experiences (Smith, 2000), because it offered the opportunity to identify the factors associated with anti-racist action from the participants' perspective. We expected that the participants' perspective

would yield insights to inform the future study and practice examining White privilege. The study ($N = 6$) included six in-depth case studies. We analyzed these cases individually and then conducted a cross-case analysis (Yin, 2009). The study took place in North Florida, which is part of what is known as the "Deep South" and has a long history of racism. As we point out in the discussion, the limited number of participants is a point of data in and of itself.

Sampling

The sampling goal was to identify White individuals engaged in anti-racist activism in what Knowles et al. (2014) would call the *dismantling stage*. Three waves of referral sampling (Gorard, 2013) were conducted. The first wave of referral sampling began by asking seven local activists of Color to identify White individuals who were actively engaged in anti-racist activism of any kind. It was expected that activists of Color would have a more accurate assessment of White individuals' anti-racist work than White people, and we had hoped this would be the only sampling method needed. The seven activists of Color collectively produced only one referral for one participant (see Discussion).

In our second wave of referral sampling (Gorard, 2013), we contacted leaders of local activist "hotspots" or what Luker (2008) describes as *data outcroppings*—places where we would logically expect to find examples of the phenomena we are studying. These so-called hotspots were identified by their public and recent racial justice and anti-racist work, and they included a feminist bookstore, a local community organizing hub, and two progressive churches known for strong activism. Three participants were identified through this method of sampling. We engaged in referral sampling concurrent with the first two sampling waves (Gorard, 2013). Specifically, study participants were asked at the end of each interview if they knew of another person who would fit the criteria for the study. Two additional participants were identified through this method of sampling.

The final sample was composed of six White-identifying North Florida residents, all of whom identified as cisgender, straight women. Each participant came from a middle to upper-class background, and the minimum level of education attained was a bachelor's degree. Participants' ages ranged in years from 30 to 80 ($M = 57$), and careers included K-12 teachers, higher education faculty members, and librarians. Half of the sample was retired.

Data Collection

A one-time, recorded in-depth interview of approximately 90 minutes was conducted with each participant. The interview was administered in three sections: a formative influences timeline (FIT), a semi-structured interview, and a demographic questionnaire. First, we began the interview with a formative influences timeline (Jones & Donmoyer, 2020). In the FIT, participants were given a blank sheet of paper with a line drawn horizontally across it. Participants were told to imagine this line was a timeline of their life and to identify the specific events and memories they believed contributed to their anti-racist work. The participants spent 5–10 minutes completing the timeline.

Then, we used a semi-structured interview guide to (a) invite participants to explain their FIT and (b) ask additional questions related to the research questions (Appendix A). The researchers developed

the interview guide and pilot tested before the study. It contained questions such as "How would you describe the evolution of your understanding of White privilege?" and "What motivates you to do this work?" The interview guide allowed for probing and emergent conversation.

Finally, we administered a brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). The questionnaire included questions on race, income, family of origin, and politics. Participants were advised they did not have to answer any questions with which they were uncomfortable.

Data Analysis

Phase I: Individual Case Analysis

A case summary was created for each participant—or what Polkinghorne (1995) would describe as narrative analysis. This one to two-page analysis ordered and summarized interview data chronologically and in a way that mirrored how the participant described the story themselves. This process allowed the researcher to identify the various contextual elements important to each case.

Interview and demographic questionnaire data were coded at the individual level in three phases. The first wave of coding deductively identified the presence (or absence) of the factors identified in the literature as relevant to the research questions (e.g., interaction with diverse groups). The second wave of coding identified the specific nuances of these factors and experiences (nuances that were later used to identify group-level patterns). This phase of coding included, for example, the nature of specific critical instances related to the participants' understanding of White privilege. Finally, the researcher coded inductively for emergent themes not identified from the literature.

Phase II: Cross Case Analysis.

Next, we conducted a cross-case analysis. Specifically, we identified patterns and variations across interviews (Patton, 2002). This process included creating a high-level description of factors and a drilled-down description of patterns and variations identified for each variable. While the sample size was small, the patterns identified can be considered post hoc groups that may inform future studies.

Trustworthiness

We engaged in two specific activities to establish what qualitative researchers describe as the *trustworthiness* of data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, we included the formative influences timeline in the study protocol. In addition to collecting valuable data, the FIT was originally developed as a tool to minimize researcher bias in interview-based studies (Jones & Donmoyer, 2020). During the FIT, participants are asked to provide their perceptions before the researcher asks any questions. Thus, participants are less likely to say what they believe the researcher wants to hear. This strategy increases the opportunity for emergent themes that can often contradict what the researcher might have hypothesized.

Second, we engaged in member checking. Specifically, we sent the narrative analysis to the interviewees and asked them to comment on (a) the accuracy of the summary and (b) their comfort level with how their story had been de-identified. Four out of the six participants responded, and only one requested minor edit to her story.

Findings

Three key themes emerged from the data. First, White-identifying participants who engaged in anti-racist work described an evolution of awareness. Second, these participants also described experiences of resistance or backtracking, suggesting that progress is not always steady. Third, their progress was influenced by a specific individual who encouraged their growth and direct experiences with people different from them.

Evolution of Awareness

In general, the sample was highly aware of their own privilege. Specifically, five out of six described an evolution to their understanding of their White privilege. These participants described a period of unawareness prior to being exposed to and, eventually, accepting and integrating the concept of White privilege. They also experienced a *"continuous reckoning"* regarding their own privilege. This played out in some painful moments where some participants had to step back from leadership roles to make room for Black people to lead. When asked why to do this work, one participant stated, "it doesn't feel like I have a choice; the only other option would be denial."

Two groups seemed to form: those who experienced this evolution slowly over time (n = 2) and those who had a pivotal experience where they accepted the concept (n = 3). Regardless of the evolution style, these realizations were typically tied to the participants' interests (teaching, education, volunteer work) rather than formal diversity education or training. In other words, awareness dawned organically as they moved through various life experiences.

For those that had a pivotal experience, it was usually tied to seeing racial disparities in their work in education (n = 2) or moving to a new location, in this case, from a Northern state to a Southern state (n = 1). These participants noted an abrupt shift in their understanding of their Whiteness. Interestingly, these participants do not note any negative emotions surrounding this awareness; rather, the participants described an almost empowered feeling of love, with one participant noting "we are all cousins" and another stating she had a strong need to "make the world a better place for her children." These statements potentially suggest a shift of denial into some form of distancing, where the participant wants to act based on a meritocratic threat but is also still tied to a colorblind, positive narrative.

For those participants who had a slow evolution (n = 2), it was usually deeply tied to their interests. One participant who studied education was presented with opportunities to take classes in women's studies, which helped normalize the "*dissecting of power structures*." Another participant also had their slow evolution rooted in education. She majored in history and became interested in the Civil Rights Movement and other social movements; this opened the door to more classes and experiences focused on racial inequities.

There was one outlier. This participant did not describe a nuanced evolution of awareness. Instead, she stated she had been aware of her privilege since learning about slavery in grade school. However, the rest of the interview data did not support her suggestion that she was aware of her privilege or the sampling assumption that she was in the dismantling stage. For example, when asked about her past experiences with anti-racist activism, she described working with the National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and stated she took an annual event and "made it better" than it had been when a person of Color had organized this event previously. She appeared to take pride in her superior ability to organize the event, and she did not acknowledge the racial power dynamics at play.

Additionally, this participant did not describe the anti-racist work she participated in. Rather, her sole contribution was that she was a church committee member that addressed social justice. Overall, her lack of awareness of her role in systems of oppression and her lack of action led us to categorize this participant as not in the dismantling stage.

Resistance and Backtracking

Four out of the five participants who described an evolution stated they experienced some resistance or backtracking. This resistance was experienced at two stages of the aforementioned evolution. First, participants reported resistance occurred prior to awareness. For example, one participant stated that "none of us wants to feel the blame" and "most [White] people resist" learning about this until there is no longer a way to deny it. Second, participants reported resistance during critical incidents of engaging in anti-racist work. One participant said she felt "halted by others' racism" to the point that she could not act. This suggests that she does not yet have the skills to address racism with other White people and, thus, feels unable to make progress. Rather than doing the hard work of engaging with White individuals, this person dis-engaged temporarily (a form of backtracking).

Another participant described a time when she was actively engaged in racial justice activism but was told to step back by the people of Color involved. This participant stated that this request caught her by surprise, and she paused to process and, feeling hurt, stepped back almost completely. She eventually expanded her awareness and recognized that the people of Color indicated her behavior had been perpetrating rather than dismantling White supremacy. Still, the experience was initially very hurtful and caused her to resist engaging in anti-racist work temporarily.

Noteworthy Formative Influences

Influential Person

Multiple participants (n = 5) described having an influential person, typically a caregiver, in their early childhood or adolescent years. The caregivers either pushed them to think critically about the world around them or deeply valued empathy and kindness.

The emphasis on critical thinking (n = 2) was not race-specific but, rather, a general encouragement to think for oneself, question the world around them, and make choices based on logic. One participant noted how her father "always encouraged me to question everything." Her father valued "standing up for what you believe in, despite possible social repercussions," and while this was never used to dissect race with the participant, it led her to have a critical view of the world and not necessarily to take everything at face value. Another participant spoke about a similar relationship with her father. The participants indicated that the early push to think critically gave them the skills to approach the tough issue of White privilege with a logical and critical perspective.

For multiple participants ($n = 3$), empathy was the primary takeaway from their influential person. This was exclusively taught using religion, as the influential adult encouraged the participant to think about others through the lens of Christianity. One participant noted that her parents' religious practices "helped to inspire a need to be kind to others and that all humans are equal." Another participant spoke about how her parents taught her to "be kind to all people, and never see the poor as less than." All three participants directly connected their future activism to childhoods where kindness and empathy were not just preached but expressly practiced.

Interaction with Diverse Groups

Interaction with diverse groups also emerged as an influential factor. Five out of the six participants stated that interaction with diverse groups was the most important factor contributing to their current anti-racist work. Specifically, participants made a direct connection between their understanding of White privilege, including their current anti-racist work, to past experiences with people who were different from them.

In discussing interactions with diverse individuals, participants were grouped into one of two categories: those who moved from the North to the South and were confronted with stark segregation and racism, and those who taught in K-12 schools and, in that capacity, witnessed stark segregation and racism. Two participants, both in their 70s, told similar stories of moving from Northern towns to North Central Florida when segregation was still legal. One participant spoke about small acts of resistance, such as letting her children drink from the "Colored" water fountain or going through the "Colored" entrance in the bakery. The other participant noted that her move to the South was one of the first times they had interacted with people of Color, and this direct interaction dispelled stereotypes she had previously held.

Two other participants spoke of their experiences as teachers and described segregation (past and present) in schools. Both participants had experiences where they were in charge of teaching two classes, one of which was a form of remedial education (e.g., low-readers), the other, a more prestigious class (e.g., an honors class). The remedial class for both participants was mainly lower-income, non-White students, while the more prestigious class was almost completely White. This stark separation in students by the color of their skin impacted both participants to the point where they decided to understand why (i.e., this was their pivotal experience). One of these participants noted that even though she had been presented with the concept of White privilege earlier, this teaching experience gave her the "oh, I get it moment."

Discussion

The goal of this exploratory qualitative study was to address the research question: *To what extent, if any, are the participants aware of their White privilege?* Six people participated in this study. This small sample size is important to note because it prevents generalizability past the study; however, the research implications are still important.

We expected participants in the dismantling stage to be aware of White privilege and how they benefited from it. The data supported this expectation. Five of the six participants communicated their evolution of understanding their White

privilege, with four describing experiences of backtracking and resisting this evolution. Two emerging themes were found; interaction with diverse groups and an influential person who encourages critical thinking or empathy.

Implications

Theoretical: A Dynamic Evolution

The 3D model suggests that an individual cannot be in multiple stages at once—that the individual responds to threats either through denial, distancing, or dismantling (Knowles et al., 2014). This model also does not indicate whether evolution is progressive, linear and if backtracking can happen. However, the findings of this study indicate that evolution to the dismantling stage may occur but does not necessarily happen in a linear process and, additionally, that traits of multiple stages may occur simultaneously.

Specifically, five participants articulated an evolution of awareness of privilege. Four out of five of these participants reported experiences of backtracking or resisting this evolution, which suggests a presence of distancing-type behavior, even despite their movement toward and, in some cases, even while demonstrating what could be described as dismantling-type behavior. This fluidity was also evident by the number of participants who felt compelled to make sacrifices for people of Color to benefit and the painful admission they sometimes chose not to make those sacrifices. These sacrifices revolved around managing White privilege, typically in an activist setting (stepping up or, at times, stepping back) or were connected to speaking out when something racist was said or done. In either situation, the participants' sacrifice was connected to how they were perceived, either by giving up power by allowing others to speak or creating conflict when confronting someone behaving in a racist manner.

In both scenarios, participants felt there were times when they did not share power in how they would have liked and experienced different levels of guilt regarding these moments. Based on these data, future iterations of the model should explore multiple pathways to evolution and the dynamic movement at each stage. This model may not necessarily be linear and could instead be comprised of acute "critical incident growth," slow and gradual growth, as well as resistance and possible backtracking.

Another important addition, not just to the 3D model but all models of White identity management, would incorporate the potential foundational precursors for movement through the model. Notable potential precursors for participants in this study were the presence of a caregiver who encourages critical thinking or empathy and interaction with people different from the participant. Further research is needed to explore these and other potential triggers to establish what movement looks like and how it happens.

Critical thinking, specifically, and the ability to accept information that may shift one's worldview is a potentially necessary characteristic to overcome both the meritocratic threat and the group-image threat and allow someone to move from denial and distancing into dismantling behavior. Empathy potentially accomplishes this as well. Having a deep empathy for others may be a necessary foundational trait for White people who truly are in the dismantling stage, as it perhaps moves people to question their actions and the

impact they have on the people around them.

Practical: Individual Growth

Participants in this study described a constant balancing act of deciding when to step up and utilize their privilege to help make change happen or when to step back to allow marginalized voices to be heard. Similarly, participants noted that it is not always possible to say something or do something when another individual says or does something racist. These experiences can be very painful and can become a roadblock to progress if one is not open to growth. Helping White individuals manage the feelings they experience in these situations could help White people understand White privilege without engendering resistance. When we take an evolutionary perspective, the goal changes from being perfect to making progress on a long-term anti-racist journey.

Applied: Leadership and Training

Future trainings and workshops focused on cultural competency should incorporate the concept of evolution and provide a meaningful connection with the voices of diverse peoples. Trainings might incorporate significant practices in self-reflection, particularly regarding possible setbacks, which should be understood as part of a larger growth process. Because the most influential factor for participants was interactions with diverse individuals, leaders should encourage connection through activities such as: building authentic relationships with people of Color doing activist work, utilizing technology and history to share stories from people of Color, or paying speakers of Color to come in and discuss their experiences with systems of oppression.

Another aspect that may need to be incorporated into formal training is critical thinking. Training in and examples of critical thinking can help White individuals be open to changing their worldview based on information, and this could be an important step towards moving into the dismantling stage. Trainers may want to move away from traditional trainings and provide instead immersive experiences that may be more impactful. Of course, concern must be taken not to burden people of Color. There is a fine line between cultivating authentic connection and asking the "other" to bear the burden of education.

Limitations

The sample for this study was comprised of White, straight, cisgender women, all with a bachelor's degree or higher, and all with a middle or upper-class background. While some of the participants came from different religious backgrounds and some had disabilities, it was largely homogeneous. Qualitative researchers do not expect to generalize from a study with a total sample of six persons, and so, the goal is to generate insights and understandings that frame future studies (Donmoyer, 1990). This study has accomplished this goal.

One limitation of our referral sampling process was the dearth of responses from people of Color. There could be many reasons for this. First, the data collection for this study began after a politically tumultuous federal election cycle in 2016, which could have left activists of Color frustrated, disheartened, and discouraged by White individuals. Second, the people of Color in this study may not have responded because they did not know any White individuals they truly believed were doing dismantling work. Anti-racist work is hard.

White individuals can engage in distancing work that looks like and which they perceive to be dismantling work; however, we believe people of Color are more likely than White people to see the fine line that separates dismantling and distancing. It is entirely possible that White individuals in the dismantling stage do not exist in large numbers.

We continue to believe in the importance of listening to people of Color when identifying White individuals engaged in anti-racist work, and we recommend that prior to future sampling, researchers build relationships with individuals of Color doing activism work.

Conclusion

White individuals must take on the responsibility of dismantling systems of racial oppression. The findings from the study suggest White individuals move through an evolution of understanding their White privilege. Understanding this evolution is key to promoting White involvement in anti-racist work. We call for future research on this experience as well as more effective dissemination of this knowledge through new ways of providing trainings and workshops. Models and theories need to capture the complex experience of managing White privilege and White identity while still being simple enough to frame research. Collaborative research approaches should be pursued in the future, focusing on both White identity management and what people of Color feel are the necessary motivations, attitudes, and actions of White individuals involved in effective and impactful anti-racist activism. Bridging the gap between academia and activism could also help to elucidate these complex issues. This conversation on race is ongoing within academia and in the public sphere, and it will evolve as more research is conducted.

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APPENDIX A
Interview Guide

Before we start on some of the activities, I want to give you some information about what you will be doing today and why. I also want to give you time to ask me any questions and for me to ask you some opening questions to get you started on thinking about today's topics.

As you read in the informed consent, I am studying how White people become motivated to work in anti-racist activism. My hope is, with this study, and your participation, that that motivation will be better understood in order to help motivate more White people to engage in anti-racist activism.

Before we begin with opening questions, do you have any questions or concerns for me? Remember, you can refuse to answer or participate at any time.

Also, remember that after our meeting today, I am going to type up a summary of our time together and send you a copy to verify that I have understood what you have said and to also make sure you are being presented in an anonymous way.

OQ1. What can you tell me about the type of work you do that involves activism?
Probing: Is that a formal or informal position?
Probing: Why have you chosen this work?

Now that we have talked about your work, I want you to think about how you got to where you are today, particularly in reference to your engagement in anti-racist work. I have in front of you a sheet that you can use to place your life history on. You can start from your birth or from a particular moment and end in the present. Any events or factors that you felt contributed to or hindered you in getting from where you were in your understanding of race, Whiteness, White identity, and White privilege can be placed, as best you can, in chronological order.

Feel free to ask any questions or discuss out loud your thought process at any time. You will have five to ten minutes to complete this.

IQ1. Great! Tell me about what you wrote?
Possible probing questions:

1. You mentioned (some variation of…) ______________, could you tell me more about that?
    a. Education
    b. Intersectionality
    c. Interacting with diverse groups
    d. Travel experience
2. It sounds like you are saying……. (verify)
3. When you look at this, how would you describe your evolution of your understanding of White privilege?
4. Do you think there were times when you backtracked or resisted this evolution?
5. Who was influencing you during that time? (person, group of people, organization)

IQ3. Do you feel you have more left to learn? If so, what?

IQ4. Are you surprised that this is the work you are in presently, looking at the beginning and the present?

IQ5. What motivates you to do this work?

IQ6. Do you feel, in this work, that you (as a White person) must choose to make sacrifices in order for People of Color to benefit?

Probing: Are there times when you don't do this?

APPENDIX B
Questionnaire

We are going to move on now to a questionnaire. The questionnaire covers some variables that I am interested in, as well as demographic questions. I am going to give you time to finish it while we are together today, and if you have any questions during this part, please feel free to ask. After you are finished, I am going to glance over the questionnaire to see if there is anything relating to the topic of our interview that I might want to ask about. Remember, if you do not want to talk about or answer any questions, you completely have the right to do so.

1. What is your highest level of education? Check one.

    ____Some high school
    ____High school diploma or GED
    ____Associate's degree
    ____Technical degree
    ____Bachelor's degree
    ____Master's degree
    ____Professional degree
    ____Doctoral degree

2. Thinking back to when you were a child, how would you classify your family's income level? Check the best estimate.

    ____Low income (i.e., your family struggled to make ends meet)
    ____Middle income (i.e., your family was generally able to make ends meet but may not have had enough for many "extras")
    ____Upper income (i.e., your family did not have to worry about money and had plenty for "extras")

3. Thinking about your current financial situation, how would you classify your income level?

    ____Low income (i.e., you struggle to make ends meet)
    ____Middle income (i.e., you are generally able to make ends meet but may not have enough for many "extras")
    ____Upper income (i.e., you do not have to worry about money and have plenty for "extras")

4. How would you describe your political affiliation? Use this tool to place yourself

RIGHT (conservative) ____LEFT (liberal)

5. Do you believe you have other identities that are marginalized? Check all that apply.

    ____Gender (non-male, non-binary, non-cisgender)
    ____Religion (non-Christian)
    ____Sexuality (non-straight)
    ____Ability (physical, cognitive, emotional/mental)
    ____Nationality (non-American)
    ____Citizenship (non-U.S. citizen)

____Class (non-middle class or higher)
____Other: _____________

6. How much have you interacted with racial or ethnic groups different from your race or ethnicity?
____Not at all
____Moderate degree
____High degree
____Very high degree

7. How much do you interact currently with racial or ethnic groups different from your race or ethnicity?
____Not at all
____Moderate degree
____High degree
____Very high degree

8. Have you traveled abroad (out of the United States)?
___If yes, where:____
___No

Debrief:

DQ1. First, is there anything that struck you in the questionnaire that you want to discuss?

DQ2. I see you marked (see list) but did not mention that as something that motivated you to start your work in the earlier part; could you explain that?

a. Education

b. Socioeconomic status

c. Political affiliation

d. Intersectionality

e. Interacting with diverse groups

f. Travel experience

DQ3. Is there anything you want to discuss?

Thank you so much for not only participating in today's study but for doing the work that you do. I know these topics can be tricky to discuss, and so appreciate you taking the time to meet with me and answer my questions. I will be sending you a copy of the summary of today's meeting within the next week for your approval. And I will gladly keep you informed on the status of my study so that you can see the final project. Thank you again!

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Eat, Pray, Love: The "White Imagination" of Sanctuary

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Abstract

The stretched-out Oprah-endorsed *Eat, Pray, Love* (2007) cultural model—what I call the "'white imagination' of sanctuary"—is a troublesome one as we continue to struggle over neoliberal empire-inspired border racialization projects. In this "white imagination" (hooks 1992/2015) of sanctuary, the travels to find oneself often include falling in love—and perhaps even finding an orgasmic cup of coffee—as a confirmation of enlightenment. The *Eat, Pray, Love* peace and sanctuary model effaces the specificities of how the travel between the "Global North" and "Global South" is constructed through guarded nation-state borders and citizenship. In this model, the search for sanctuary à la spiritual awakening is tethered to the discourse of "finding oneself" through transatlantic travels—which requires freedom of mobility across nation-state boundaries—between the "West," e.g., America, to the "East," e.g., India. The discourse of sanctuary bracketed with travel (while drinking sweetened coffee/tea in quaint cafés) is based on "western" (e.g., American) citizenship (and class and race privileges), and it is the legacy of the White traveler on vacation—luxury, leisure, and privilege.

Keywords: travel; sanctuary, White imagination, Orientalism, privilege

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The stretched-out Oprah-endorsed *Eat, Pray, Love* (2007) cultural model—what I call the "'white imagination' of sanctuary"—is a troublesome one as we continue to struggle over neoliberal empire-inspired border racialization projects. As a critical race feminist, I have immersed myself in the stories of detained children separated from their parents and as a cross-cultural and inter-faith urban shamanic practitioner, I have been energetically tending to the traumas of over 2000 separated families under the Trump administration's actively taking away sanctuaries policy. Here, the *Eat, Pray, Love* peace and sanctuary model effaces the specificities of how travel between the "Global North" and "Global South" is constructed through guarded nation-state borders and citizenship. In this model, the search for sanctuary à la spiritual awakening is tethered to the discourse of "finding oneself" through transatlantic travels—which requires freedom of mobility across nation-state boundaries—between the "West", e.g., America, England, and Canada, to the "East", e.g., India, Tibet and Nepal. In this "white imagination" (hooks 1992/2015) of sanctuary, the travels to find oneself often include falling in love—and perhaps even finding an orgasmic cup of coffee—as a confirmation of enlightenment. The model clearly perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes. Edward Said (1979) writes,

> *[Orientalism is] not only a positive doctrine about the Orient that exists at any one time in the West; it is also an influential academic tradition, as well as an area of concern defined by travelers, commercial enterprises, governments, military expeditions, readers of novels and accounts of exotic adventure, natural historians, and pilgrims to whom the Orient is a specific kind of knowledge about specific places, people, and civilizations.* (p. 203)

In "Contemplations at the Virgin de la Caridad Cafetería, Inc.", poet Richard Blanco (1998) inserts the colonial history of sugar in this legacy:

> *…assembled for a standing breakfast of nostalgia,*
> *of tastes that swirl with the delicacy of memories*
> *in these forty-cent cups of brown sugar histories,*
> *in the swirling froth of* café-con-leche, que será

The discourse of sanctuary bracketed with travel (while drinking sweetened coffee/tea in quaint cafés) is based on "western" (e.g., American) citizenship (and class and race privileges); it is the legacy of the white traveler on vacation—luxury, leisure, and privilege. Border-control and population protection policies profoundly impact the privilege of travel—i.e., lack thereof—for American immigrants. Immigrants possess a range of immigration statuses from undocumented immigrants, dependents, temporary workers on visas, refugees and asylum-seekers and permanent residents to citizens. Here, the rights and welfare—quality of life and access to livable wages—of immigrants in this country are not top priority, making it prohibitive (e.g., undocumented immigrants) or difficult (e.g., the 2002 National Security Entry-Exit Registration System, NSEERS, for non-citizens) for many to travel back and forth between national borders. The historic xenophobic tenor of contemporary American immigration policies subjects many to profiling and make it difficult to access the rights to which we are entitled.

While the discourse of citizenship affects the privilege of travel—the production of class-based transatlantic travel (Badruddoja 2006)—for (American)

immigrants, their children and subsequent generations, the colonial imaginary American immigration laws are rooted in impact the experiences of travel as luxury, leisure, and privilege. Puar (1994b) reflects, "I clutched on to [my passport] as proof of my right to movement, seeing the American eagle on its front as a sign of democracy, the freedom to move…" (87). The conceptualization of "travel" for many of us diasporic people is neither a "natural" space nor is it nation friendly. Furthermore, travel "functions as a threat to certain homes while becoming the construct of home for certain Others" (Puar 1994a, 76-77). A second generation South Asian-American informant suggests dissatisfaction with the fixed and immobile conceptualizations of "travel" (and "home") (Badruddoja In Press):

I currently embody everything that the majority of, at least eligible, voters hate. I am queer, Muslim, and brown. What else is there? I was born here [the United States], but there is part of me that feels like I don't belong here. I don't have that draw; that pull it is not the same. Of course, I come back to my senses. ... The last time I went to Bangladesh was seven years ago ... There is an air about the way I walk or the way I talk, even when I am speaking Bengali. Someone even said eye contact marks me a little different, so I am Othered in that way [too]. (p. 5)

The respondent describes her travels to Dhaka by evoking sexual imagery that accompanies what it means to be a Bangladeshi wo/man (and an American wo/man), beauty standards the she is far from,

I remember on Eid I was decked out ... in a sari and my cousin put her wedding jewelry all over me ... We took rickshaws to another khala's [maternal aunt] house ... and on the way all the men in the street were coming up to the rickshaw and leering in my face, [asking], "Cheley na mey?" [Boy or girl?] and they were mean ... (p. 160)

Certainly, my second-generation South Asian American respondent's—a WOC—traveling is not about freedom and mobility. Blanco (1998) sings,

…with the palms of this exotic confusion;
que será*, that I too should be a question,*
que será*, what have I seen, what do I know—*
culture of café *and loss, this place I call home.*

We diasporic subjects struggle with travel as a method to "find 'home'" or the Self.

Influenced by Anzaldúa (1999), I use my citizenship, class, and academic privileges to call out classist, sexist, racist, ableist, ageist, etc. and nationalist rhetoric, policies and imaginations and affirm my loyalty to issues that impact the lives of the marginalized. The contemporary identity "American" as a subject of citizenship is predicated on conquest, the erasure of indigenous history and culture and the desecration and pirating of indigenous lands known as Turtle, Serpent and Heart Island Islands (the Aboriginal Creation Story of the lands that are now known as North America). We identify as Americans by rendering indigenous communities as non-existent as if nothing existed before the arrival of conquest. How many of us "lean in[2]" to ask, were we always known as the Americas? The legacy of the white traveling subject is deeply embedded in a bounded and guarded colonial national identity, (re-) produced.

I name the interest that whites take in traveling to my ancestral motherlands and immersing in my ancestral mother cultures for the advancement of their spiritual awakening as cultural appropriation, the epitome of racialized sexual violence of land, culture and people. The neoliberal white traveler lives in ashrams, studies with gurus, and serves in Mother Teresa Anbu Illam (orphanage) and the immersion in my ancestral cultures and teachings will not be used to unlearn racism in their everyday lives by evaluating their own racial experiences as whites. Rather, the nourishing chai graciously offered at sunrise by sherpas in the hills of Kathmandu is trademarked—®—as *Bulletproof* and the energy concoction conceived by tuk-tuk drivers to be able stay up all night in Bangkok as *Red Bull*. We are quick to take in Other cultures via the Orientalist gaze as part of our neoliberal capitalistic "ethnic chic" consumption, but we do not use our interest to unlearn racism. In *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, hooks (1992/2015) writes, "While it has become 'cool' for white folks to hang out with black people and express pleasure in black culture, most white people do not feel that this pleasure should be linked to unlearning racism" (p. 17). Before adorning ourselves with jewelry embossed with the sacred OM, how many of us invest ourselves in Hindu Vedic literature to learn the OM sound resonates at a wavelength of 7.23 centimeters, which is the average sound of all objects in the universe? The purchase itself is perhaps not problematic as is the lack of imaginative interrogation of our intents.

Consequently, might I argue the platform of spiritual awakening for whites is to take responsibility for interrogating their own racism as part of their racial experiences as whites? In the vocabulary of intersectionality, I ask, what might it mean to be white as a "white folk" (à la hooks)? What are the racial experiences as a white? What world views/belief systems inform your racial experiences as a white? And, when passports are stamped with "exotic" places as a hallmark of spiritual awakening, how does class travel through whiteness and how does whiteness travel through class? Finally, what is the relationship between a white racial experience and the journey with Spirit? These questions help us to develop a more complicated understanding of whiteness as a racial experience in the journey of spiritual awakening and hopefully will allow whites to use intersectionality more successfully.

In the end, I impart the Self is not something to be discovered, i.e., "self-discovery" (seeking peace and finding it), because the Self is not discoverable. The Self already is (here). The Self is never lost. The Self, like Love, is ubiquitous. The notion of "finding myself" is an old paradigm that must fall away. The question is never "Who am I?" Rather, the question is, "What stories do I/we want to tell about myself/ourselves? The *Tubman House*, a community farming project in West Baltimore addressing food apartheid, makes this evident. Residents in Freddie Gray's Neighborhood of Sandtown demonstrate to us how to build community wealth as they transform a vacant, rundown lot to a thriving urban farm. Then, by logic, being in "search of love" is another misguided paradigm. In our "quest" for love, we Human Earth Walkers have forgotten that there is no need to be on such a quest for love is abundant and continuously present (within us). Love is infinite and omnipotent. The question is never whether we will find love or not. The question is whether we will choose to *allow* love to permeate our contractual Human Earth Walks. In other words, there is no

need for us to search for and find love. Rather, during our sojourn, we simply need to accept and allow love into our lives. The discovery of the Self through travel is part and parcel of Orientalist conquest. The intersection between Self and Love—enlightenment—is the constant and continual (re-)invention of oneself while taking complete joy in the lessons learned and the process of (re-)invention versus the destination and outcome. There is no need to travel anywhere to find ourselves! All that is required is continual Shifts in Perspectives.

Notes

[1] I borrow Elizabeth Gilbert's 2007 book title *Eat, Pray, Love*.

[2] I prod Sheryl Sandberg's (2013) brand of feminism.

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A Philosophy on Discrimination

Maximilian Hawkins

Abstract

In response to the ongoing discussions of anti-Black racism, I thought about what I can do to help further discussions on Black Lives Matter. I've already seen many discussions about policy, and I've seen people discuss their own experiences, but I haven't seen much discussion on how an individual has actually dealt with discrimination. I'm not talking about responding to say microaggressions but psychologically how to understand discrimination in a conceptual framework. That's what my following reflection discusses: an individual mindset on how to deal with discrimination, since I wish I had learned more about that when I was younger. I don't have a particularly unique mindset, but I do think this is an important aspect of discrimination that warrants critical thought. I want to preface my comments by saying that I would not change anything about my own experiences. I was very lucky to have great people around me my entire life and would not be where I am without those people or those experiences.

Keywords: discrimination, mindset

In response to the ongoing discussions of anti-Black racism, I thought about what I can do to help further discussions on Black Lives Matter. I've already seen many discussions about policy, and I've seen people discuss their own experiences, but I haven't seen much discussion on how an individual has actually dealt with discrimination. I'm not talking about responding to say microaggressions but psychologically how to understand discrimination in a conceptual framework. That is what my following reflection discusses: an individual mindset on how to deal with discrimination, since I wish I had learned more about that when I was younger. I don't have a particularly unique mindset, but I do think this is an important aspect of discrimination that warrants critical thought. I want to preface my comments by saying that I would not change anything about my own experiences. I was very lucky to have great people around me my entire life and would not be where I am without those people or those experiences.

To start, I'm from Rolling Hills Estates in southwest Los Angeles County. My father is African-American from the city of Los Angeles while my mother is from South America. If you Google the demographics of Rolling Hills Estates from the Census in 2000 (I was born in 1995), you'll find that it was 74% White, 20.1% Asian, 4.8% Latino, 1.2% Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Needless to say, I'm not sure where the other 1.2% was at. A question I've often received (only from White and Asian people) is how I identify. Over the years I've come to understand what people mean when they ask me this, but in reality, this is a silly question in my view. How I identify doesn't really matter. Growing up, I played a lot of tennis (outside), so I was actually darker than my father. When people looked at me, they thought I was 100% Black, so that's how I was treated. Regardless of how I identified, I was treated like a Black man, so that was the experience I had. But of course, I'm not seeing myself for the first time…So I was puzzled…Why would someone ask me how I identify if they know how I'm treated, since they know what I look like and how others see me? My mother's family is from South America and my father is Black, so why would I identify as anything other than what I am…since that's what I am? Why did that matter anyways?

But this is how things were growing up. I remember during the party scene in the movie *Get Out,* Chris talks to the different members of Rose's family. I couldn't stop laughing during this scene because of how realistic this scene felt. In the movie people say the following things:

> "Hey I play golf…You know I don't have the hips that I used to, but I do know Tiger. Gordon loves Tiger"
>
> "So, is it true…Is it (sex) better?"
>
> "Fair skin has been in favor for the last couple hundred years but now the pendulum has swung back…Black is in fashion[2]."

I heard countless comments similar to the above on a regular basis. It was as if me being Black made others uncomfortable, so to reduce the discomfort they needed to point it out somehow, but they weren't sure how to. I heard the following comments:

> "Hey man I'm so pumped we have a Black president!"

> "You're the best Black tennis player I've ever seen!"
>
> "Wow I'm surprised how smart you are!"
>
> "You're a lot different than what I expected."
>
> "Affirmative action is so stupid, but you definitely deserve to be here."

I could go on and on with these comments. Now I know, this doesn't seem like a big deal, and in an isolated setting it isn't. But remember, where I grew up there were no Black people. When I went to school there were some, but not many. Many of them lived in other neighborhoods and many of them in high school were not in class with me. I played tennis growing up where I was one of three Black kids in my general age group who consistently played tournaments in Southern California (which from San Diego to Santa Barbara spans four hours driving), and the other two both lived over an hour away from me. Much of my dad's family passed away or moved away, so I didn't spend much time with them, though my dad's family had many mixed couples… I did spend a lot of time with my mom's family since they were around, and I was again the only Black person there other than my dad.

I've heard other Black students who lived in Black areas refer to school as the "sunken place," but for me that was kind of my entire life experience. I didn't have anyone who had a similar experience taking everything into consideration, and I didn't have a place I could go where I felt comfortable or "home" so to speak. I admit, it's a strange thing to say growing up in such a nice place…But it gets old when you go for a run outside and everyone closes their garages or stares at you the same way they stared at Chris as he went upstairs to check his phone (K. Michael, 2017). It's a nice area…But who is it supposed to be nice for?

After a while, I just kind of got used to it. I'd go for runs and people would look at me. I'd look at them and wave. They'd close their garage one day, and I'd run by their house the next day. I remember once a school crossing guard asked me to run on the other side of the street since kids were walking there…Hmm, well I suppose you do need to protect the children! Really, it felt like that scene in SpongeBob where even Squidward's house wanted to know Patrick's secret (AreaEightyNine, 2018). In general, I always felt like I was being watched. That's why I found that scene where Chris goes upstairs to check his phone so frightening[2]…It was all too real.

At the same time, it was hard to know what exactly was real…Was I actually being watched? That's what makes the area and time period I grew up in somewhat unique. Was it all in my head or were people actually looking at me treating me on average differently than my white counterparts? Now of course there were instances where things were pretty clear…Here are some:

> A group of white students were rapping to a song and said the N word on multiple occasions. They turn around and see me standing there. They said, "Well that's not a big deal, right? You're cool with it, yeah, it's just a song?" After saying I wasn't ok with it, they said, "Why are you so sensitive?"
>
> "What do mixed kids look like? Is it Black skin with white spots?"

"I bet slavery wasn't that bad."

"Black people should be in jail more. They're statistically more likely to commit crimes."

In reference to playing capture the flag in the Call of Duty video game…Said to my face was the following: "Let's play cap the nig."

"I can't let my parents see me with you."

After comparing multiple tests: "Wow we wrote the same thing and I got way more points than you."

"Your dad's a doctor? Wait, he's full Black?"

When I would bring up my point of view on any of this with my peers they would devalue or ignore my opinion since of course racism didn't really exist anymore. Looking back at these comments I can see them for what they are, but when you're the only person thinking the way, you do in a group of others who don't think like you it's easy to question your own thoughts, especially at a young age. I knew everything wasn't in my head because I could predict many of these comments with regularity and some of it was so blatant like what I posed above. However, it was still difficult to explain to people who for the most part didn't care. I didn't have the vocabulary or experience to explain myself and respond in a satisfactory manner. Additionally, when you hear something over and over you start to believe it. And I understood what people kept telling me…That I was pretty smart *for a Black kid*. I worked pretty hard…*for a Black kid*. I got into a good school *because I was Black*. I was good at sports *because I was Black*. No matter what I did the messaging was clear: *You are inferior to me because you are Black, and you don't deserve to be on the tennis court with me…You don't deserve to be in school with me…You don't deserve to date my daughter/sister…And you don't deserve to live where I do.*

On top of this messaging, was a bit of an identity crisis that was almost counter to the above messaging. You see I'm half Black, and my dad is a physician. I can't tell you the number of times I've heard comments (only from White and Asian people) that revolved around this concept: That I'm not actually Black because:

1. I don't talk like other Black people
2. I'm not poor enough
3. I'm "only half" and
4. I was not stereotypically "Black enough" which relates to the first two.

Whenever I did something athletic or did well in sports it was because I was Black. Whenever I did well in school it was because I wasn't really Black. Whenever I was well mannered people were surprised but seemed to understand once they found out I was "only half." This was confusing to me because I was factually African-American and Latino. It wasn't something I chose or decided to be. My dad is Black…my grandparents are Black…and my great-grandparents are Black. My mom is Argentine…my grandparents are Argentine…and my great-grandparents are Argentine. It's not like I have a Latino card or an African-American card I pick up for processing when I feel like being Black or Latino. It's factually what I am. And yet it seemed like in the eyes of others my identity would kind of come and go as they saw fit in terms of what made sense with the stereotypes in their head. I did find comfort in that I never heard any of this from other

Black people. However, what made all this difficult was that I felt like I was constantly dealing with questions of my identity and race at a young age where I didn't really understand half of what was happening anyways. I figured eventually I'll figure some of this out, but for the time being I took the older generation's attitude of grinding away. The following were stories I heard from my father's family:

> Similar stories happened to family members who were in the military and worked in professional fields: "I got pulled over by a police officer. I didn't do anything wrong I was just on my way to work. The first officer walked over to me and pointed what looked like a shotgun to my face. Like he was right next to my face. He said they were going to check my car and that was it. The second officer checked my car. To be honest I thought that was going to be it for me…But after what felt like an eternity later, they left and didn't say anything else to me…It was the 5th time I had been pulled over that week."
>
> "The sign said the apartments were for sale, so I wanted to check some of them out. The owner told me he wasn't going to sell to my kind."
>
> "I was in class and everybody was watching the Olympics. My classmates were openly rooting for the Russian sprinter because they didn't want to see a Black guy win the race…I was sitting with them…"
>
> "One of my classmates called me the N word and that I didn't deserve to be here (I was the second person to attend this place). So, I punched him he had it coming…They kicked me out after that because of course…It was my fault."

There are plenty more, but again I don't want to belabor the point. The general attitude the older generation endorsed was the following: to ignore forms of discrimination (for the most part). As messed up as people and the system can be, there are opportunities, especially in comparison to the past. And not everyone is intolerant. You can end up in the place you want to be and try to change things along the way…Especially when you get to a position of power. Things are much better now than they used to be. You should be thankful you get a shot at all. It may be difficult, but who are you helping by complaining about it and subsequently not trying? You can legitimately be angry every single day at something that happens, but how healthy is that for you? My mom's family had a similar mindset, so that's what I did.

If you talk to anyone who has known me from any time point, they will likely immediately mention my work ethic. I often got up at 5 in the morning to go run before school started in high school. I played tennis tournaments almost every weekend and would study in between matches etc. Friends at school told me I needed to party more…Have fun. R-E-L-A-X Aaron Rodgers style. They thought that I wanted to do what I was doing, but they didn't get it. I didn't really expect them to base on comments and reactions I'd heard in regards to when I did speak on race. I didn't drink in high school because I was scared of what might happen if I was at a party and the cops showed up. I did my best to follow the rules and maximize my abilities in everything I did, but it wasn't just for me or those who came before me. I didn't want to mess things up and decrease the chances of an African-American behind me from getting an opportunity. I imagined my ancestors around me like a Star Wars hologram Jedi

Council meeting supporting me. I knew what they went through was much worse than my experience, so I thanked them and looked to them for support. My classmates, my neighbors, and sports mates may not have understood what was going through my head, but I had my ancestors that did. And of course, I had God. That was enough for me. In fact, it helped me look back at all the people who were constantly looking at me.

But that was just it…No matter what I did I always felt that I was one misstep away from tearing down everything I had worked for. The previous generation told me to put the blinders on, but it was hard to ignore the feeling I was constantly being watched and judged. Even when partaking in life decisions where discrimination may be an issue, my father and I often stayed behind…Just in case. It was hard to simply ignore this because being Black affected so much of what my family and I did and more importantly…What we *didn't* do. My goal was to show people that their messaging of me being inferior…More importantly of my people being inferior was incorrect. I wanted to show them they were wrong so that they would change what they thought. I knew I was the only Black person or one of a few Black people that a lot of my neighbors and classmates actually knew. I felt like that gave me a responsibility and an opportunity to make an imprint on them. When they thought of Black people, they would certainly think of what they saw on TV, but they would also think of me.

At the same time, I embraced what I saw as an opportunity, I also felt a lot of pressure. I was well aware that most African-Americans (including many in my family) did not grow up in such a wealthy community and did not have the opportunity to attend such well-resourced schools and become connected to so many well-off people. I was also well aware that my parents were happily married while their seven siblings were all divorced. I could go on and on about how I would not choose anyone else over my parents. My point in bringing that up is that I had as clear of a path as I could possibly have to be successful in whatever meaning you can think of. All I had to do was work hard. Many people would do anything to be in the position I was in…I felt like I had no excuses. I had to succeed not just for myself and my parents but for "my people" in general. My ancestors had fought for this exact opportunity, and I couldn't let them down. At the very least, I had to try.

And try I did. However, as I progressed through schooling I at times became more confused. I wanted to help others (both other African-Americans and non-African-Americans), but I wasn't sure how to. I also wanted to help myself and do well but minimize the pressure I felt. I felt like there had to be a healthy way to both be upset and…Not be upset? I remember when I saw Avengers, I was like wait how did the Hulk do that he's always angry (The_Juice_Goose_Plays, 2012)!? He gets it! In all seriousness, one passage in the Bible that has stuck with me is the following: "But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you Matthew 5:44" (Carroll, R., Carroll, R. P., and Prickett, S, 1998). I found that message so beautiful, and that is essentially the type of attitude I tried to have.

I remember driving with my dad to a tennis tournament and since it was Sunday we listened to a sermon on the radio. The preacher said something along the lines of the following:

"And so there I was driving on the freeway. I'm sure many of you have had this same experience of driving on the freeway. And suddenly, someone cut me off. I couldn't believe we almost got in an accident. What on Earth happened? My sister wanted me to honk and said the driver was a jerk. To be honest, I kind of felt the same way. How many times have you gotten mad when someone cuts you off while driving? And then I thought to myself…One of the worst days of my life was actually when my mom passed away. I was on the freeway at the time trying to make it to the hospital, but I didn't make it. I immediately pulled over and cried and cried. Now, it's kind of a blur for me, but I was driving awfully fast to get to the hospital, and I pulled over awfully quickly since I could barely control myself. I'm not saying that's what I should have done…But what if that driver just found out the worst news of his or her life? I'd hardly call someone a jerk if he or she just found out mom passed and had to quickly pull over. What does that say about me if I'm so quick to judge and accuse someone that I don't even know?"

When I decided that I wanted to learn how to love my enemies, so to speak…It was clear to me that I had to learn more about myself, as Dr. King talks about in his speech *Loving Enemies* (The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, 2017). I had to accept who I was and embrace the situation I was in. I needed to acknowledge my flaws and continue to work on them. It's actually acknowledging and understanding my own fears and insecurities that has allowed me to be kinder to others…To truly understand what they may be feeling. Nowadays, these experiences of vulnerability and suffering are more prominent in the forms of books, movies and tv shows, which I think can be helpful in figuring out what's going on with yourself.

An example of a show I wished I saw earlier is *Dear White People* on Netflix. These resources are important to note because at least for me, it was easy to think that I was the only person who was going through what I was going through when I was growing up. That may have been true, but I could've probably made a similar argument for lots of other people at my school who had their own difficulties; I wasn't homosexual. I wasn't a woman. I wasn't a Muslim. I was healthy. My parents weren't divorced, etc. My point in saying all this is that at least for me, suffering has been an inevitable part of my life. Moreover, it's been an important part of my life, and I'm guessing that the inevitability and importance of suffering is true for most people. Suffering has forced me to look within myself and actually have a greater level of empathy and understanding for others. Knowing that others suffer similarly has helped me connect with them better and figure out better ways of communicating and ultimately changing them. It's also made me more open to and actually change myself while also feeling more secure about myself. When King talks about the redemptive power of love that's what I think he means…Taking the time and effort to see others where they are and offering a chance to help them and be helped by them.

I remember, in high school one of my classmates went on about how I was going to get into whatever college I wanted because I was African-American. I frequently heard these comments in my schooling. In fact, many people told me I was very lucky to be African-American…And oh how great life would be as an African-American female. My senior year in high school I heard this argument

from an angry classmate again and decided to speak up. I looked at my classmate, but instead of seeing her with anger or resentment as I would have in my younger years, I saw her where she was. I said the following: “You know when you go to your college (private school in the Northeast), I want you to look around your first day of class. I’m not going to your school so I don’t know…But I’m going to take a wild guess and say in your first big lecture class you’ll maybe see a few people of color there. Then you’ll see the other half of the class. Now you may not know it at first, but you’re going to see a lot of kids whose parents paid a lot of money to be there. You’re going to see a lot of kids whose parents went to that school or who knew the right people. Now I’m sure some of them will take advantage of the opportunity…Well, I’ll reserve my opinion for when I see it myself... But you tell me…What or who are you upset at?”

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