

# Educational research should pinpoint anti-Black aggressions to build better policy, scholar writes

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Educational research has long lumped all people of color together when examining microaggressions perpetrated against them. A University of

Kansas scholar has published an article that argues educational research should instead study anti-Black aggressions as scholars originally intended and use the approach to build more equitable policy at the individual and institutional levels.

In 1974, Harvard psychiatrist Chester Pierce coined the term "microaggressions" to examine how African Americans experienced subtle and everyday acts of discrimination. Several decades later, the term "racial microaggressions" became the more common term for how all people of color experienced such matters.

Dorothy Hines, associate professor of curriculum & teaching and associate professor of African & African-American studies at KU, argues in a new article that researchers should instead focus on anti-Black aggressions, as it is both true to Pierce's original intent and does not dilute the very different experiences people of color have in their education.

Published in *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education*, the [article](#) proposes examining anti-Black aggressions on three levels: micro, institutional and macro.

The micro level includes experiences individuals commonly experience, such as a Black student being told they are inherently incapable of learning, which comes from societal beliefs about race and culture.

Institutional-level aggressions include policies and programs based on racism, such as school discipline policies that routinely result in disproportionate action taken against Black students. Macro-level aggressions include ideologies and beliefs that result in policies such as state-level bans on teaching Black history.

In arguing for studying anti-Black aggressions instead of racial

microaggressions against all people of color, Hines said the approach is truer to the original idea of microaggressions and more fully delves into the experiences different groups have.

"We cannot dilute the unique experiences African Americans have had. The article discusses what happens when we take an idea and expand it beyond what was originally intended," Hines said. "What was at the heart of what Dr. Pierce was trying to get at? What it means to be Black in America is different than what it means to be Black in France, which is different than what it means to be Latino in America."

Hines further wrote that including all racial microaggressions in one research frame moves away from the history of the theory and changes how and why researchers examine such questions. She, therefore, calls for a Black epistemological future in [educational research](#).

Scholar Patricia Hill Collins described epistemology as "the way in which power relations shape who is believed and why." To that end, research centered on Black epistemology would more adequately understand the Black experience in American education and better empower more just policies and approaches on all levels, according to Hines.

"Overall, I argue it's not just thinking about racial microaggressions. We need to look at how certain people experience things in education and in life every day, and we need to be intersectional," Hines said. "We have a responsibility to do morally right things. For me, it's having a welcoming experience for Black students, staff, faculty and being supportive and doing research that addresses their lived experiences."

That research would allow scholars to honor the original spirit of microaggression theory and ask more direct questions about the Black experience in American education, Hines said.

"Like Pierce's work on anti-Black aggressions, Black epistemological futures are a call to researchers to see African Americans rather than disregard them in theory," Hines wrote in the article's conclusion.

"Moreover, this model explores the impact of knowledge construction with the Black body while reshaping the types of questions that are asked, avoided, and necessary to hearing the African American narrative, wherever it may be."

**More information:** Dorothy E. Hines, *Toward Black Epistemological Futures: Centering Antiracist Aggressions in Educational Research*, *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/01614681241238886](https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681241238886)

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