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To cite this article: Celeste M. Malone (2024) Moving School Psychology Beyond the Clouds of Injustice: A Blue Sky Discussion, School Psychology Review, 53:3, 324-340, DOI: [10.1080/2372966X.2024.2330111](https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2024.2330111)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2024.2330111>



Published online: 26 Mar 2024.



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Moving School Psychology Beyond the Clouds of Injustice: A Blue Sky Discussion

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ABSTRACT

This paper based on the opening address for the 2023–2024 School Psychology Futures Conference, reflects on contemporary inequities in school psychology practice, research, and graduate education. Challenges as the profession reckons with its oppressive past are highlighted. Drawing on concepts from liberation psychology, critical school psychology, and the psychology of radical healing, the author presents a vision for school psychology's reimagined future with steps that can be executed across all levels (e.g., practice, research, graduate education, advocacy and leadership). In order to imagine a new future for school psychology, we must not repeat the mistakes of our past and instead demonstrate cultural humility, center marginalized communities, and embrace anti-oppressive and liberatory approaches. This will allow school psychology to meet its potential and become a profession that effectively serves ALL children and youth.

IMPACT STATEMENT

The 2023–2024 School Psychology Futures Conference had an intentional focus on examining school psychology from a social justice lens. This article critically examines contemporary and historical inequities in school psychology to identify mistakes of the past and applies concepts from liberation psychology, critical school psychology, and the psychology of radical healing to describe a more just future for the profession.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received August 9, 2023
Accepted March 9, 2024

KEYWORDS

professional issues in school psychology, social justice, diversity

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Shane Jimerson

The 2023–2024 School Psychology Futures Conference is intended to be a year-long celebration of school psychology that differed from previous school psychology conferences in two important ways: (1) the deliberate and thoughtful inclusion of the global school psychology community and (2) an intentional focus on examining school psychology from a social justice lens. Many of the issues we face as a profession, such as workforce shortages, constrained professional roles, the research-to-practice gap, and the lack of diversity among school psychologists, are ones that we have been discussing for decades (e.g., Dawson et al., 2004; French, 1984; Sullivan et al., 2022). However, we have approached these topics without considering the influence of identity, power, and oppression and without centering the perspectives of those most impacted by school psychological services (Sullivan et al., 2023). At their core, all of our professional issues are social justice issues. If we want to imagine a new and different future for school psychology, it will be important for all school psychologists to develop a shared understanding of social justice and engage in collective reflection so we can examine how social injustices manifest in school

psychology and how our professional practices contribute to educational inequities.

This article, based on the 2023–2024 Futures Conference opening address (School Psychology Futures, 2023), is titled “Blue Sky” because the clouds of injustice and oppression have long distorted our vision of what school psychology could be. We must clear these clouds for school psychology—and those served by school psychologists—to experience a bright and hopeful future. I start by providing a brief overview of the history and current context for the Futures Conference and reflecting on my positionality to this topic. Using the National Equity Project's model of bias and oppression (Osta & Vasquez, 2019), I provide an analysis of inequities in both PK–12 schools and school psychology professional spaces. I close with a vision of school psychology's reimagined future based on concepts from liberation psychology (Martín-Baró, 1996), critical school psychology (Sabnis & Proctor, 2022), and the psychology of radical healing (French et al., 2020). Finally, I offer a blueprint for school psychology to inspire true social justice transformation in each of the six Futures content pillars.

CONTEXT FOR THE 2023–2024 FUTURES CONFERENCE

For the past 70 years, school psychology has had several professional conferences to explore how practice, research, and professional preparation should evolve in response to changing societal conditions. School psychology's first conference, the Thayer Conference in 1954, was held to define school psychology as a profession and establish training standards (Fagan, 2005). Twenty-six years later, the Spring Hill Symposium and Olympia Conference were convened to identify critical issues impacting school psychology at that time (e.g., changing social, political, and economic conditions; cultural pluralism and discrimination; increased education legislation and litigation), and to develop action plans for the profession (Brown et al., 1982; Ysseldyke, 1982). The 2002 Futures Conference primarily focused on the negative impact of workforce shortages on school psychology practice. A significant outcome of this conference was the creation of the School Psychology Leadership Roundtable, an interorganizational body that plans subsequent futures conferences every 10 years. This group also implements and monitors progress on action plans between conference cycles (Dawson et al., 2004). The 2012 Futures Conference addressed the broad themes of leadership, critical skills, and advocacy by school psychologists to promote children's future academic success and mental health (Jamruz-Smith et al., 2013). Over time, these conferences have evolved to be more inclusive of the broader school psychology community (e.g., practitioners, faculty, graduate students). For instance, attendance in earlier conferences was limited to invited participants from select organizations relevant to school psychology, and the conferences were held at a physical site. The 2012 Futures Conference was fully online with content presented *via* live webinars and action planning workbooks made available to participants (Jamruz-Smith et al., 2013). There has also been greater attention to issues of multiculturalism and diversity. The Thayer Conference had no mention of topics related to identity or diversity (Fagan, 2005); subsequent conferences reflected greater cognizance that an increasingly racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse society would affect school psychology's future (Dawson et al., 2004; Jamruz-Smith et al., 2013; Ysseldyke, 1982).

In the 11 years since the previous futures conference, societal events (e.g., mass shootings in schools and public places; recessions and housing crises; natural and weather-related disasters; the United States [U.S.] involvement in multiple global conflicts) and societal trends (e.g., increasing political polarization, decline in youth mental health, technological advances and increased use of social media) have had a significant

impact on students and families, as well as on education and school psychology (Sullivan et al., 2022). One of these significant events, the COVID-19 pandemic, delayed the start of this iteration of the Futures Conference. The COVID-19 pandemic had an unprecedented impact on children, families, and schools across the globe. Students experienced disruptions in academic learning and student support services (e.g., mental health services) due to schools' closures and challenges transitioning to remote/distance learning. Youth were also affected by social isolation, family financial stress, and trauma and grief (Song et al., 2020, 2021). Due to intersectional systemic oppression, marginalized communities, including racial and ethnic minoritized (REM), LGBTQ+, and economically marginalized, were more vulnerable to COVID-19-related health and education inequities (Song et al., 2020; Sullivan et al., 2021). The pandemic shone a spotlight on longstanding racialized inequities in healthcare, education, income, housing, and employment that made REM communities more vulnerable to the negative impacts of COVID-19. Additionally, misinformation-driven racist and xenophobic attacks against the Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander (AAAPI) community and state-sanctioned violence against Black people, including the extrajudicial killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, led to the public's increased consciousness about structural racism (García-Vázquez et al., 2020; Truong et al., 2021). Amid this "dual pandemic" of COVID-19 and structural racism, there were global protests for racial justice and calls for anti-racist systemic change (Jones, 2021).

It is under this backdrop that the School Psychology Leadership Roundtable began its planning for the 2023–2024 Futures Conference. We were guided by the interorganizational commitments made in the *School Psychology Unified Antiracism Statement and Call to Action* (García-Vázquez et al., 2020) and *School Psychology Unified Call for Deeper Understanding, Solidarity, and Action to Eradicate Anti-AAAPI Racism and Violence* (Truong et al., 2021); anti-racism resolutions from the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2020b) and the Trainers of School Psychologists (2021); and profession-wide calls for school psychology to look inward and explore the ways in which the profession has been complicit in upholding oppressive systems (e.g., McKenney, 2022; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022; Sullivan et al., 2021, 2022, 2023). This critical self-reflection, coupled with broad engagement of the global school psychology community, are necessary for us to dismantle the oppressive structures that limit school psychology's potential and to ensure that school psychology remains a relevant and viable profession in the future.

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

Before offering my analysis of the profession, I want to briefly describe my positionality to acknowledge my worldview and highlight the beliefs and assumptions that inform my interpretations (Arora et al., 2023). I approach this topic as an “insider-outsider” to school psychology. I have a strong professional identity as a school psychologist and hold formal titles that signal my belongingness in the profession. My doctoral degree is in school psychology, and I have taught in a school psychology program for the past nine years. Since graduate school, I have been an active member of national and state school psychology associations, culminating in my election as the 2022–2023 NASP president. However, the more immersed I am in school psychology professional spaces, the more conscious I am of being a minority in a field that is close to 90% White (Goforth et al., 2021). My identity as a Black Caribbean American woman and my experiences growing up in Harlem, NY (a predominantly Black neighborhood in New York City) have significantly influenced my research, leadership, and advocacy interests around social justice and anti-racism in school psychology. Further, through navigating predominantly Black schools and predominantly White schools as both a student and a professional, I know that the intersections of race, gender, and social class significantly influence students’ school experiences, access to educational opportunities, and perceptions of self-worth. School psychology colleagues’ lack of awareness, understanding, or interest in issues affecting REM communities and school psychologists contribute to my feelings of outsider status, along with the limited racial and ethnic diversity in the profession. My experience in school psychology has been sitting in and navigating this often-uncomfortable dialectic. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) describe this space between insider and outsider status as one of “paradox, ambiguity, and ambivalence” (p. 60). To reconcile this tension, I have devoted my professional activities to ensuring that school psychologists are well-prepared to serve marginalized youth and communities and to making school psychology a place where I, and others on the margin, feel welcome and affirmed. As an insider, I understand the structures in school psychology that influence access to the profession, graduate education and training, research, practice, and advocacy. But looking into the profession as a Black woman on the margins, I also see the effects of intersectional racism, sexism, and classism in school psychology as I witness and experience it in society more broadly. With this positionality, embracing a “Blue Sky” school psychology absent systemic barriers is deeply personal.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY’S SOCIAL JUSTICE JOURNEY

Over the past several years, school psychology has made significant strides toward promoting social justice as evidenced by the inclusion of social justice in school psychology professional standards (i.e., NASP, 2020a) and the presence of social justice focused committees in national school psychology professional associations (e.g., NASP, Trainers of School Psychologists). However, long before professional associations’ formal endorsement of social justice, REM school psychologists used their cultural insights and knowledge to promote social justice through school-based practice, research, education and training, advocacy, and professional leadership (Sue, 2009).¹ Albert Sidney Beckham, the first Black person to hold the title school psychologist, engaged in research to challenge the idea of Black inferiority and highlight the influence of social and environmental conditions on behavior and intelligence (Graves, 2009). REM school psychologists have also been vocal in calling on professional associations to be more responsive to issues affecting REM school psychologists and communities. For example, two years after NASP was founded, the advocacy of REM school psychologists and graduate students at the 1971 NASP convention led to the association developing a social issues agenda and issuing a statement on minority group professional issues (NASP, 1971). The ongoing presence, advocacy, and leadership of REM school psychologists and support from White allies led to the creation of multicultural focused committees (e.g., NASP’s Multicultural Affairs Committee and the American Psychological Association [APA] school psychology division’s Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs) and affinity spaces (e.g., NASP Social Justice Interest Group), and to the adoption of position statements on issues affecting minoritized youth (Malone & Proctor, 2019).

In 2017, the NASP Social Justice Task Force developed a definition of social justice that was subsequently adopted by the NASP Board of Directors (Barrett & A’vant, 2017; Malone & Proctor, 2019). This definition calls on school psychologists to adopt a systems perspective, use nondiscriminatory and culturally responsive practices, and advocate on behalf of those with less social power and privilege.

Social justice is both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting nondiscriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities.

School psychologists enact social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth (NASP, 2017).

Three years later, amid the U.S.'s reckoning with racism following the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the U.S.-based national school psychology organizations coauthored the *School Psychology Unified Anti-Racism Statement and Call to Action* and committed to using psychological science to combat systemic racism and foster change at all levels (García-Vázquez et al., 2020). Specifically, the statement calls for school psychologists to confront their own internalized racism and implicit bias; challenge explicit biases in PK-12 schools and university training programs; learn to think and act in ways that affirm REM youth and communities; promise to support and protect REM youth; and call out those in school psychology who act in ways antithetical to the values espoused in the statement (García-Vázquez et al., 2020). That last point highlights our collective responsibility to support and hold each other accountable as we work toward racial justice.

We have an ethical responsibility to use our expertise to address unjust practices that marginalize some students and advocate for school climates conducive to the well-being of all students (NASP, 2020a). Specifically, Guiding Principle I.3 Fairness and Justice states

In their words and actions, school psychologists promote fairness and social justice. They use their expertise to cultivate school climates that are safe, welcoming, and equitable to all persons regardless of actual or perceived characteristics, including race, ethnicity, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, immigration status, socioeconomic status, primary language, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, or any other distinguishing characteristic (National Association of School Psychologists, 2020a, p. 44).

The ethical standards further state that school psychologists “do not engage in or condone actions or policies that discriminate against persons” and “work to correct school practices that are unjustly discriminatory or that deny students or others their legal rights” (NASP, 2020a, p. 44). At a minimum, school psychologists are obligated to speak up when they observe injustice. But we are also ethically obligated to work within our sphere of influence to enact change. Silence and inaction are unethical.

There is a clear and urgent need for social justice action in school psychology. Since NASP adopted a social justice definition, I have often heard colleagues quote the first sentence, “Social justice is both a process and a goal that requires action” (NASP, 2017), with most of the emphasis is on the word “action.” School psychologists become

aware of an injustice and immediately want to do something about it; however, there is less consideration if we know enough about the issue or if we are the right individuals to lead any action. In our rush to act, we may forget that social justice is also about inclusive processes and mutual goals. In other words, it is not just about what we do, we must also consider how we do it and why we are doing it. Our social justice processes should intentionally include the communities most affected by an injustice (Goodman et al., 2004). Affected communities are the experts on their own experiences. We must develop genuine relationships with them, demonstrate cultural humility, and honor the knowledge derived from their lived experiences. Additionally, the desired outcomes of social justice action should be determined by the community. This self-determination is a key component of liberation, the ultimate goal of social justice action (Watts, 2004). In a liberated society, we are all free from the constraints of oppression and everyone's full humanity is recognized. This would result in equitable access to opportunities, resources, and outcomes. Finally, social justice action focuses on empowering affected communities and working as their partners to challenge unjust systems through advocacy (Goodman et al., 2004). Working toward liberation through social justice requires self-reflection. Without understanding who we are, what we believe, and what we value, there is the potential to harm the groups we want to help and replicate oppression in our pursuit of equity.

RECONNECTING SOCIAL JUSTICE WITH ITS ANTI-OPPRESSIVE ROOTS

While equity is one goal of social justice action, social justice goes beyond equity. The aim of this work is to dismantle oppressive systems and open pathways to liberation. We cannot divorce social justice from its anti-oppressive roots. Prilleltensky and Gonick (1996) define oppression as entailing “a state of asymmetric power relations, characterized by domination, subordination, and resistance, where the dominating persons or groups exercise their power by restricting access to material resources and by implanting in the subordinated persons or groups fear or self-deprecating views about themselves” (p. 129–130). This definition highlights the multi-level nature of oppression (i.e., institutional, interpersonal, intrapersonal). People tend to focus on interpersonal forms of oppression such as microaggressions, prejudice, and discriminatory treatment. There is less recognition of how oppression is embedded in institutions through unjust policies or how individuals internalize experiences of oppression (Sullivan et al., 2023). As those

with marginalized sociocultural identities are systematically deprived of opportunities and material resources, they may start to internalize an inferior identity and believe that they and their sociocultural group are less deserving. Conversely, those with privileged sociocultural identities may develop deficit biases toward marginalized groups and believe that their group is superior because they can access opportunities and resources that are denied to others (Pratto & Stewart, 2012; Prilleltensky & Gonick, 1996).

Examining this definition of oppression more closely, we can clearly see how schools have been sites of oppression for many students, especially those with marginalized sociocultural identities. First, consider “asymmetric power relations” with a predominantly White educator workforce working with mostly REM youth (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a). Educators are in positions of power due to their job role but are also granted power through their privileged sociocultural identities. They exert this power over students by either granting or denying them access to educational opportunities and resources (Byrd & Andrews, 2016; Fisher et al., 2000). Further, access to high-quality education is also impacted by school demographics such that schools with high percentages of economically marginalized, Black, and Latine students are less likely to offer academic enrichment opportunities and college preparatory courses (Nowicki, 2016). Deficit beliefs about marginalized youth are reflected in their treatment at school with the ongoing exposure to microaggressions and other discrimination negatively impacting students’ mental health, self-concept, and perceptions of their school’s climate (Steketee et al., 2021; Weeks & Sullivan, 2019).

Issues of race and racism are central to education and school psychology, but we also need to consider how individuals are oppressed due to their ability, age, country of origin, first home language, gender, gender identification, sexual orientation, social class and socioeconomic status, and other sociocultural identities. Each one of these identities are embedded in systems of power and oppression; specifically, ableism, ageism, nationalism, nativism, linguicism, sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, and classism. Moreover, as intersectionality theory asserts, these oppressive systems intersect and build upon each other such that individuals with multiple marginalized sociocultural identities are placed at greater risk for oppression, discrimination, and harm (Crenshaw, 1989; Rosenthal, 2016). For example, compared to students in general education, students in special education have worse outcomes with regard to academic achievement, high school dropout rate, and high school graduation rate (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, 2019). However, when we examine

student outcomes by both disability status and race, we see that REM students in special education experience even more negative outcomes compared to White peers in special education (APA BEA Racial Disparities Task Force, 2023). Within school psychology, and education in general, we have focused on single axis frameworks that ignore the heterogeneity within sociocultural groups and also assume that identity categories like race and ability are standalone in their impact on students. Our failure to take an intersectional approach to understanding students’ culture and associated experiences has led to us overlooking the needs of the most marginalized groups in our schools and communities (Proctor et al., 2017).

UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLE OF OPPRESSION

To engage in social justice practice, school psychologists must first understand how the multiple levels of oppression (i.e., institutional, interpersonal, intrapersonal) operate in society. Osta and Vasquez (2019) developed a model to describe how individuals’ implicit biases contribute to structural oppression and how bias and oppression maintain each other in an ongoing cycle. The model explains how biases about sociocultural groups (e.g., race, gender) are formed through priming and mental associations, but situates the development of these biases in a historical, political, and social context. We start with implicit bias, positive or negative attitudes that affect our actions and decisions on an unconscious level (Greenwald & Krieger, 2006). Through direct and indirect messaging from family, peers, and the media, along with our direct and vicarious experiences, we form mental associations, or stereotypes, about different groups that affect our behavior toward them. When individuals come together in organizations, their bias is replicated through collective decisions and actions leading to the creation of biased institutional policies. Biased policies lead to differential treatment and outcomes. When external causes are not considered, it is assumed that any observed differences are due to characteristics inherent to the group. These outcomes reinforce our biases about the group thus continuing this cycle of oppression.

To illustrate how this cycle functions, consider race and racism. Race is a social construct in which individuals are assigned to racial groups based on phenotypic characteristics (e.g., skin color and hair texture) and assumptions about ancestry (APA, 2021). Descriptions such as “savage,” “lazy,” or “dumb” have been used to present non-white individuals as intellectually inferior and have intertwined race and ability such that REM group membership is considered disabling (Annamma et al., 2013). Although there is no biological basis to race, psychologists (including school psychologists; Harris, 2011) engaged in

pseudoscientific research linking performance on psychological measures (e.g., reaction time, memory, intelligence) to race and skin color (Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, 2021). This and other research suggesting biological racial hierarchies have been used to justify the enslavement of African people, the forced displacement of Indigenous groups, and race-based immigration restrictions (Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, 2021; Winston, 2020). Throughout the U.S.'s history, there have been laws in place to ensure that REM individuals remain second class citizens. For example, it was illegal for enslaved Africans to learn how to read or to congregate in groups. After the Civil War, many states required the use of literacy tests for voter registration. This disadvantaged formerly enslaved Africans and their descendants and limited their ability to fully participate in society (Anderson, 2004). Today, we see attempts to pass voter identification and other laws to make voting less accessible for REM and economically marginalized communities and further restrict these communities' ability to influence local laws and promote policies that address their needs. Another example is redlining and housing segregation that restricted REM individuals' ability to own property and forced them into crowded neighborhoods with limited resources. Given that property taxes fund local school systems, it is not surprising that under-resourced neighborhoods are also likely to have underfunded and under-resourced schools (Baker et al., 2022). Structural influences such as these are often overlooked in discussions about achievement and opportunity gaps.

This cycle of implicit bias and structural oppression is a useful framework to understand racial inequities seen in PK-12 schools. To start, research suggests that educators endorse pro-White/anti-Black racial implicit bias, explicit bias, and symbolic racism (Starck et al., 2020). These biases affect how teachers perceive, interpret, and make decisions about students' behavior (Carter et al., 2017). In the absence of diverse counter-perspectives, educators' unexamined biases are embedded in school policies implicitly targeting Black students. This is evident in school discipline policies focused on policing minor and subjective behaviors (Little & Welsh, 2022) and dress codes banning items and hairstyles commonly worn by Black students (Knipp & Stevenson, 2022). As I mentioned earlier, differential treatment leads to disparate outcomes. Black students are suspended at higher rates than all other racial/ethnic groups and are more likely to be referred to law enforcement and subject to school arrest (Nowicki, 2018). The overrepresentation of Black students in exclusionary discipline then serves to reinforce educators' biases that Black students are more dangerous and deviant. The implicit bias and structural oppression cycle can also

explain AAAP students' school experiences. Due to the "model minority" stereotype, it is assumed that AAAP students are academically high achieving, live in middle-class and college-educated households, and are not affected by racism (Truong et al., 2021). This stereotype erases the diversity among AAAP students, obscures the needs of AAAP students with academic and/or financial challenges, and places undue psychological stress on AAAP students who have internalized the model minority stereotype (Lee et al., 2009; Wing, 2007). Additionally, the model minority stereotype discourages AAAP youth from seeking out mental health support (Lee et al., 2009) and likely contributes to the under-identification of AAAP students who need these services (Gudiño et al., 2009). This perpetuates the invisibility of AAAP students as well as the myth that these students do not need assistance in the school setting.

By examining school psychology with the model of structural oppression and implicit bias, we can better understand the structures that create and maintain racial inequities in the profession and how school psychologists, despite their best intentions, contribute to the perpetuation of these inequities. In my analysis of school psychology, I include quotations from Trevor Sewell (1981), Elizabeth Abramowitz (1981), and John Jackson (2005), three Black school psychologists who held leadership positions in NASP and APA in the 1970s and 1980s. As only the second Black president of NASP, I am inspired by their leadership, vision, and courageous truth-telling. Their words are a reminder that the past is prologue and that we need to elevate the wisdom and creativity of marginalized voices if we wish to liberate ourselves from the chains of our past.

UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLE OF OPPRESSION IN SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY

At the 1981 Spring Hill Symposium, the first professional conference on school psychology since the Thayer Conference of 1954, Trevor Sewell, former dean of Temple University's College of Education and a former vice president for APA's school psychology division, was asked to react to a paper that provided a practitioner's perspective on future directions in school psychology (Grimes, 1981). Sewell's (1981) primary critique of the paper was that the author did not address social issues impacting school psychology practice at that time, such as the assessment of REM youth and disabled youth. He predicted that school psychologists must be prepared to respond to the increasing racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in the U.S. and to answer for practices perceived as promoting discrimination and educational neglect.

The question that increasingly is being brought to our attention is the extent to which theories, instruments, and models conceptualized in the interest of the dominant cultural group and generalized to minorities despite glaring differential cultural experiences can be used to fulfill the goals, aspirations, and quality of life to which minority children strive. (p. 234)

Sewell (1981) cautioned that school psychology's continued relevance will depend on the extent to which the consumers of school psychological services (which were increasingly minoritized communities) believe that school psychologists are committed to an equitable society. In this quote, and throughout his paper, he questioned if school psychology's practices and modes of knowledge construction were relevant for a culturally pluralistic society (Sewell, 1981). The 2023–2024 Futures Conference sought to ask those same questions and critically examine the cultural norms embedded and valued in school psychology.

It is important to revisit the origins of school psychology. Lightner Witmer and G. Stanley Hall, two psychologists attributed with the founding and early development of school psychology, both endorsed eugenicist ideas in their practice and research (Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, 2021; Thomas, 2009). Psychologists who trained under them, such as Lewis Terman and Arnold Gesell, developed cognitive assessments used to identify youth considered too intellectually disabled to benefit from schooling or youth who were considered “socially maladjusted” (Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, 2021; Harris, 2011). Students who were Black, Latine, or immigrants from Southern and Eastern European countries were disproportionately represented in these groups (Thomas, 1986). Although Black and Latine psychologists such as Albert Sidney Beckham, Herman Canady, Howard Hale Long, and George Sanchez published research in the 1930s that found that environmental factors and qualities of the examiner influenced cognitive assessment performance, racial differences on cognitive measures were used to justify racially segregated schools (Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, 2021). School psychologists' ongoing involvement in special education evaluations has contributed to the disenfranchisement and denial of educational opportunities for REM youth, and other marginalized groups overrepresented in special education (e.g., English learners, economically marginalized; NASP, 2020b; Sullivan, 2011; Sullivan & Bal, 2013).

The assumed intellectual inferiority of REM individuals has also served as a barrier to the diversification of school psychology. For example, recruiting from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority serving institutions is a research-supported

strategy for increasing racial diversity in school psychology (Chandler, 2011; Proctor & Romano, 2016). However, HBCU psychology department chairs reported they rarely received recruitment brochures or other communication from school psychology programs (Beeks & Graves, 2017). Further, school psychology students who received their undergraduate degrees from HBCUs described specific microaggressions suggesting that they were less academically capable because they attended a HBCU (Proctor & Truscott, 2012). These microaggressive experiences convey an implicit devaluation of diversity and the knowledge of REM communities.

Relatedly, diversity and multicultural topics have been treated as ancillary, and not core, to school psychology. For example, in the proceedings of the 1954 Thayer Conference, there is no mention of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the landmark Supreme Court decision that led to the desegregation of public schools. There were also no entries for the terms culture, desegregation, discrimination, or minority in the conference index (Fagan, 2005). These are glaring omissions considering that the purpose of the Thayer Conference was to define school psychology as a profession. This clearly suggests that school psychology leaders at that time did not think that the cultural context would (or should) be a key influence on school psychology professional standards. This perspective may still be held by some in the profession. When members of the Society for the Study of School Psychology, an organization whose mission is to promote school psychology research and scholarship, were surveyed about the topic areas likely to guide the future of research in the profession, the topic of cultural and linguistic diversity did not form a major or minor category (McIntosh et al., 2013). This is concerning given the diversity of the school-aged population and relative lack of diversity among school psychologists.

The disregard for REM communities is further reflected in the limited coverage of multicultural and diversity topics in school psychology research and graduate education (Grunewald et al., 2014; Malone & Barclift, 2022), continued use of problematic assessment practices (Aston & Brown, 2021), and lack of intentionality in diversity recruitment and retention efforts (Malone & Ishmail, 2020). The ongoing exclusion of multicultural, diversity, and social justice topics does not make school psychology an attractive profession for REM individuals and is a contributor to the limited growth in REM representation across all levels of school psychology (Beeks & Graves, 2017; Proctor & Truscott, 2012). In the next sections, I describe this bidirectional relationship between multicultural perspectives in school psychology and diversity of the profession in more detail.

Multicultural Research and Training in School Psychology

Like Sewell (1981), Elizabeth Abramowitz, NASP's first executive director and former White House assistant director for education and women's issues, was concerned by school psychology's ahistorical and acontextual approach to professional issues. In the opening address for the Spring Hill Symposium, she presented a historical perspective of school psychology and commented on the profession's social context.

It is almost impossible to tell if there were recessions, riots in the streets, taxpayer revolts, declines in pupil populations, parental distrust of educators and dissatisfaction with public education in general, increased racial polarization, and declining test scores from the reality that is pictured in the school psychology journals. Public concerns, for the most part, are not incorporated into the professional concerns of school psychologists. (Abramowitz, 1981, p. 126)

She posited that this may have been from a desire to present school psychology as an objective and scientific discipline. However, the quest for objectivity led to school psychology research describing educational and societal problems without offering potential solutions for school psychologists to help (Abramowitz, 1981). Given the extent to which school psychology practice is impacted by the social and political context, Abramowitz questioned if we were generating science that would allow school psychology to meaningfully contribute to education policy discussions and influence educational practices.

This question remains relevant. Compared to the related fields of school counseling and special education, school psychology publishes less research related to race and ethnicity (Noltmeyer et al., 2013). And while published multicultural research in school psychology journals showed a steady increase from 1975 to 2003, the number of diversity-focused publications is still inadequate especially considering the diversity of the PK-12 student population (Brown et al., 2007; Miranda & Gutter, 2002; Wiese, 1992). The most recent examination of diversity research found that 15.5% of school psychology articles published from 2004 to 2010 addressed multicultural topics. However, over one-fifth of those articles were published in special issues which suggests that diversity-related research is still not considered mainstream school psychology research (Grunewald et al., 2014). There is also a tendency for multicultural school psychology research to focus on assessment as opposed to intervention and prevention services (Grunewald et al., 2014; Miranda & Gutter, 2002; Wiese, 1992). Similarly, a review of applied social justice research in school psychology found that most articles emphasized the importance of school

psychologists' engaging in advocacy; however, few articles included content on culturally responsive practice, promoting nondiscriminatory practices, and advocating on behalf of marginalized students (Graybill et al., 2018). Given the limited representation of sociodemographic variables in school psychology research, our profession's knowledge base may not adequately represent the needs of the students and communities school psychologists serve (Schanding et al., 2021). Moreover, when minoritized groups are included in school psychology research, there is rarely any acknowledgement of their histories of colonization and oppression (Grant et al., 2022). The omission of this information likely affects how study results are contextualized and can lead to overly simplistic explanations of intergroup differences.

School psychology's limited diversity and social justice research base also affects school psychology multicultural training. Despite recommendations that graduate students complete at least one dedicated multicultural course (e.g., Newell et al., 2010), 14% of doctoral programs and 29% of master's and specialist-level programs do not require such coursework (Gross & Malone, 2019). Programs are more likely to use an integration model and embed multicultural content throughout school psychology coursework (Malone & Ishmail, 2020); however, the quality of multicultural training depends on the amount of time dedicated to multicultural topics in the course and instructors' qualifications to teach that content. Syllabi reviews of school psychology courses in assessment, consultation, and supervision indicate that there is minimal integration of multicultural content in these courses (Barrett et al., 2015; Luh et al., 2023; Miller et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2021). Additionally, in a survey of school psychology program coordinators, less than two-thirds participated in any multicultural training post-degree (Malone & Ishmail, 2020). This is consistent with a larger pattern of school psychologists not seeking out professional development related to diversity or believing that they need additional training in this area (Armistead et al., 2013). In addition to calling into question school psychologists' preparedness to serve diverse populations (e.g., Parker et al., 2021), this research also suggests that, despite professional standards emphasizing multiculturalism and diversity (NASP, 2020), the profession does not view multicultural school psychology as a distinct competency area and does not consider cultural knowledge to be essential for effective school psychology practice.

Demographics of School Psychology in Context

In the absence of a robust multicultural research base and intentional multicultural training, school psychology's ability to develop and provide culturally responsive

services remains limited. This is further exacerbated by the fact that school psychologists' demographics do not reflect the cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the school-aged population. Some may be less concerned by this demographic mismatch because the provision of culturally responsive services is the responsibility of all school psychologists. However, we cannot ignore how school psychologists' sociocultural group memberships lead to experiences of privilege and marginalization that influence their life experiences and perspectives of the world. Those with privileged identities may not recognize how they have benefited from privilege and may have a limited understanding of how marginalized communities experience oppression (Pratto & Stewart, 2012).

With this in mind, consider the demographics of school psychologists. School psychology is a profession of predominantly White, non-disabled, and English monolingual professionals (Goforth et al., 2021). The demographics of school psychologists are most frequently compared to those of the school-aged population, the majority of which are students from REM groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023b). However, school psychology is also less diverse than the general U.S. population with regard to race, language, and ability (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). We should consider how the lack of diversity among school psychologists affects how we address culture and approach cultural differences. In his chapter on multicultural school psychology, John Jackson, former director of psychological services for Milwaukee Public Schools and Spring Hill Symposium planning committee member, commented that,

The functional perspective of psychological services delivery has been (and continues to be) based on the assumption that middle-class Euro-American cultural standards are superior and preferred. Given this perspective, school psychology, along with other behavioral sciences and health services during the last half of the 20th century, described minority youth as culturally deprived, culturally different or distinct, and culturally neutral. (Jackson, 2005, p. 15)

These pejorative views of REM youth also extend to deficit beliefs about REM and other minoritized school psychologists.

From its inception, school psychology has been an overwhelmingly White profession. There has been slow and limited growth in school psychologists' racial and ethnic diversity. Despite higher reports of REM graduate student enrollment, comparable increases have not been seen in the field. In the 1983–1984 academic year, the percentage of REM graduate students was 11.5% (Zins & Halsell, 1986). That percentage has increased to 34% in the 2019–2020 academic year (Rossen et al., 2022). In comparison, the percentage of REM school psychologists has only

increased from 5% in 1976 to 11% in 2020 (Goforth et al., 2021; Ramage, 1979). This suggests that REM school psychologists may leave the profession at a higher rate. Longitudinal data on other demographic characteristics of school psychologists is limited, but research from other psychology subfields suggests that this pattern may also be true for school psychologists with disabilities (Andrews & Lund, 2015; Callahan et al., 2018). The attrition of minoritized school psychologists is concerning because there is value in having a culturally diverse workforce. Increased diversity in training programs exposes graduate students to diverse perspectives and facilitates the development of cultural humility (Kennedy et al., 2014; Rogers & Molina, 2006). There is also societal benefit through improved quality of culturally responsive mental health services (Blake et al., 2016)

The treatment of marginalized individuals in school psychology professional spaces likely contributes to their attrition. Minoritized school psychologists and school psychology graduate students receive microaggressions regarding their race and sexual orientation, as well as their intersectional identities. These microaggressive experiences were associated with feelings of isolation and disrespect, perceptions of a hostile profession, and decreased professional efficacy (Chen et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2022; Proctor et al., 2018; Truscott et al., 2014). Given institutional power dynamics, minoritized school psychologists often have little recourse. They may face retaliation for challenging discriminatory behavior from supervisors or peers, or their concerns may be dismissed altogether (Aguilar et al., 2023; Parker et al., 2022; Sabnis et al., 2023a). The combined experiences of microaggressions and lack of institutional support contributed to burnout with some thinking about leaving the profession altogether (Parker et al., 2022). This further exacerbates workforce shortages and represents a loss of talent to develop innovative interventions and practices for school psychology.

CLEARING THE CLOUDS TO SEE THE BLUE SKY

The charge of the 2023–2024 Futures Conference was to reconceptualize solutions to long-standing professional issues and to do so by using a social justice focus. Our profession's concerns are not new. They have been clearly identified by Sewell (1981), Abramowitz (1981), Jackson (2005), and others. However, our problem analysis has not considered oppression as a root cause and contributing factor. Throughout this paper, I have highlighted the multiple ways that oppression has limited school psychology's potential and contributed to our professional concerns, including workforce shortages, the research-to-practice gap, and constrained professional

roles. School psychologists' unexamined biases and lack of meaningful engagement with marginalized communities have led to professional practices that perpetuate deficit narratives about marginalized communities, maintain educational inequities in PK-12 schools, dismiss the knowledge claims of marginalized communities, and limit minoritized individuals' access to and full participation in the profession.

While this paper focused on the U.S. context, international school psychology research suggests that the effects of intersectional racism and oppression may be a barrier to the internationalization of the profession (Begeny, 2018). Approximately 69% of school psychologists are in countries the United Nations categorizes as Western European and Other States (WEOS; Wang et al., 2020); this includes countries in Western Europe, as well as Australia, Canada, Israel, New Zealand, and the United States (United Nations, n.d.). However, professionals from WEOS countries comprise 80% of editorial board membership of school and educational psychology journals (Wang et al., 2020) and 95% of contributing authors in English-language school psychology journals (Begeny et al., 2018). And although school psychology is represented in over 80 countries (Jimerson et al., 2008), less than 2% of school psychology research included samples from Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Eastern Europe (Begeny et al., 2018). Most school psychology programs outside of the U.S. endorse the scientist-practitioner training model and thus use research to inform their professional practices and graduate training (Oakland & Hatzichristou, 2014). Taken together, this research suggests that school psychology graduate students in international programs are likely not being trained in practices that are relevant to and culturally congruent with their local context. Additionally, given the growing numbers of international migrant youth (UNICEF, 2021), the lack of geographic diversity in school psychology journals leaves the profession with a more limited knowledge base with which to develop culturally appropriate, context-relevant, and evidence-based practices for students from non-WEOS countries and perpetuates school psychology as a Eurocentric profession (Begeny, 2018).

The pervasive impact of oppression on school psychology is disheartening. However, we should find hope in the continued presence of minoritized professionals in school psychology. Not only have they persisted in the profession despite discrimination and obstacles, minoritized school psychologists experience professional success and use their research and practice to resist against oppressive stereotypes directed toward them and the students they serve (Sabnis et al., 2023b; Sowden et al., 2016; Truscott et al., 2014). What can school psychology learn from their persistence, resilience, and resistance?

As we clear the clouds of oppression for school psychology to see the blue sky, we must intentionally draw upon minoritized school psychologists' knowledge, expertise, and wisdom to provide the tools and vision needed to actively resist oppression while building a radically different future.

Liberation psychology (Martín-Baró, 1996), critical school psychology (Sabnis & Proctor, 2022), and the psychology of radical healing (French et al., 2020) are three frameworks that elevate knowledge by and about marginalized communities. Integration of these perspectives into professional identity can help school psychology move toward anti-oppressive practice. Liberation psychology is the use of psychological approaches to understand and address oppression by drawing upon the experiences and knowledge of marginalized groups (Martín-Baró, 1996). Liberation psychologists view oppression as the interaction between psychological and systemic factors. As marginalized people develop their critical consciousness to understand how oppression functions in their lives, they become empowered to engage in transformative action to change their social conditions (Martín-Baró, 1996). Critical consciousness is also a key component of critical school psychology. The goals of critical school psychology are to explore the ways school psychology has been complicit in oppression, create new spaces in school psychology that are accessible to and representative of marginalized groups, and foreground the experiences of marginalized people by strengthening school psychology's connections to other social movements (Sabnis & Proctor, 2022). Lastly, the psychology of radical healing acknowledges oppression as a root cause of psychological distress and offers a framework to move away from individualistic coping to community thriving (French et al., 2020). Radical healing requires the balance of both resisting oppression and envisioning justice and liberation. Using strategies based in five anchors—critical consciousness, radical hope and envisioning possibilities, strength and resistance, cultural authenticity and self-knowledge, and collectivism—individuals develop the agency and capacity to act on their environment in ways that contribute to the common good. (French et al., 2020).

Taken together, liberation psychology, critical school psychology, and the psychology of radical healing can help school psychologists develop the critical consciousness to understand how oppression operates in their lives and in the profession; demonstrate cultural humility to learn from marginalized communities and those impacted by school psychological services (e.g., students and families); and engage in social justice advocacy to create the changes needed for our collective thriving. Below, I describe what a liberated and anti-oppressive school psychology could look like based on each Futures Conference pillar.

- **Leadership:** School psychologists demonstrate leadership by (a) owning the power that they have to influence students' educational trajectories and responsibly leveraging their power to guide organizations toward decisions in the best interests of students, families, and communities (Martín-Baró, 1996; McKenney, 2022); (b) being self-aware and recognizing how their and others' sociocultural identities influence access to and use of power (McKenney, 2022; Pham et al., 2022); (c) possessing the critical consciousness to understand how oppressive processes and structures operate within organizations (Martín-Baró, 1996; McKenney, 2022; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022); (d) demonstrating civil courage to amplify the voices of marginalized communities and stand in allyship with them despite potential repercussions (Parker et al., 2022; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022; Williams et al., 2023); (e) enacting policies that promote equity, inclusion, accessibility, and justice and developing accountability systems to monitor effectiveness (Parker et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2022); and (f) working within organizations to ensure diversity across all ranks of leadership and equitable distribution of power (McKenney, 2022; Rosenthal, 2016).
- **Science and Scholarship:** School psychologists produce socially relevant research that is responsive to student, family, community, and societal needs by (a) using decolonizing and liberatory research methodologies that center participants' voices (e.g., qualitative methods, participatory action research, community-based participatory research; Grant et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2022; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022); (b) applying a critical lens to the analysis and interpretation of quantitative data (e.g., QuantCrit; Grant et al., 2022; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022); (c) measuring structural variables such as neighborhood or school segregation when studying racism and oppression (French et al., 2020; Rosenthal, 2016); (d) promoting epistemic diversity through interdisciplinary research (Sabnis & Proctor, 2022; Sullivan et al., 2022, 2023); (e) elevating the knowledge of marginalized scholars by citing their work (Grant et al., 2022); (f) conducting research on the experiences of marginalized communities and centering their perspectives throughout the process (French et al., 2020); and (g) examining the extent to which school psychologists' professional practices influence educational inequities and student outcomes (Noltemeyer et al., 2013; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022; Truscott et al., 2014). Additionally, school psychologists advocate to address the structural barriers that disincentivize research on marginalized communities or by marginalized scholars, and to promote equity in the research funding and publication process (Begeny et al., 2018; Grant et al., 2022; Pham et al., 2022).
- **Practice:** School psychologists incorporate healing-centered approaches in their assessment, intervention, and consultation practices by (a) acknowledging that oppression affects students' school experiences, access to educational opportunities, and psychological wellbeing (French et al., 2020; Martín-Baró, 1996; Singh & Gudiño, 2023); (b) using an ecological approach to case conceptualization and intervention development to contextualize students' experiences and develop interventions that are culturally tailored and ecologically relevant (Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2019; Sullivan et al., 2021); (c) adopting an equity-centered multi-tier systems of support framework to coordinate prevention and intervention services (Sullivan et al., 2021); (d) collecting multiple forms of data when conducting an assessment (e.g., observations, interviews) and not placing undue weight on scores from psychometric measures (Sabnis & Proctor, 2022); (e) promoting students' positive identity development by using interventions that amplify students', families', and communities' cultural strengths (French et al., 2020; Singh & Gudiño, 2023); (f) co-constructing interventions with students that develop their critical consciousness and empower them with self-advocacy skills (French et al., 2020; Singh & Gudiño, 2023); (g) fostering community spaces for marginalized students that allow them to give voice to oppressive experiences and be affirmed and validated by their peers (French et al., 2020; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022; Singh & Gudiño, 2023); and (h) describing students and families with language that emphasizes their cultural strengths and avoids deficit narratives (Pham et al., 2022).
- **Education and Lifelong Learning:** School psychologists participate in graduate education and professional development opportunities that (a) promote the development of cultural reflexivity, cultural humility, and critical consciousness (Malone & Barclift, 2023; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022; Sullivan et al., 2021); (b) cultivate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to engage in culturally responsive and socially just practice and research (Malone & Barclift, 2023; Newell et al., 2010); (c) provide explicit instruction in social justice advocacy models (French et al., 2020; Sullivan et al., 2021); and (d) include topics related to the experiences of marginalized communities using research and other content (e.g., podcasts, books) created by members of those communities (French et al., 2020). Additionally, professional learning experiences are based on

relevant training models with an explicit focus on social justice advocacy and liberation such as the scientist-practitioner-advocate model (Mallinckrodt et al., 2014) and the public psychology for liberation training model (Neville et al., 2021).

- **Workforce Development:** School psychologists work to increase the cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the profession by (a) intentionally using research-based recruitment and retention strategies (e.g., inclusive climate, financial support, access to other minoritized professionals, opportunities for multicultural training, mentorship; Malone & Ishmail, 2020; Proctor & Owens, 2019; Proctor & Romano, 2016); (b) addressing issues of workplace discrimination by advocating for safe, supportive, and inclusive environments and systems-level accountability policies (Chen et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2022; Truscott et al., 2014); (c) providing access to affinity spaces where school psychologists from marginalized and/or underrepresented groups can receive support and develop strategies for collective empowerment (Chen et al., 2020; French et al., 2020; Parker et al., 2022); and (d) engaging in equity audits to evaluate the extent to which hiring and admission policies impede or promote diversity (French et al., 2020; Pham et al., 2022).
- **Advocacy:** School psychologists advocate for just and equitable policies and practices at the school, district, local, state, and national levels by (a) using their power and privilege to increase public awareness of social injustices in schools and community concerns (Malone & Proctor, 2019; McKenney, 2022); (b) empowering students, families, and communities with self-advocacy skills (Malone & Proctor, 2019; Singh & Gudiño, 2023); (c) developing alliances with student, family, and community groups to address local issues (French et al., 2020; Rosenthal, 2016; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022); (d) broadening their advocacy focus to address issues that contribute to and/or exacerbate educational and mental health inequities (Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2019; French et al., 2020; Sullivan et al., 2021); and (e) using their expertise to contribute to the development of public policies and legislation that address social inequities (French et al., 2020; Rosenthal, 2016). Additionally, school psychologists engage in professional advocacy to promote the profession and remove any barriers affecting their ability to provide comprehensive school psychological services and address the needs of children, families, and communities (Oyen et al., 2020).

This radical change across all six pillars would transform school psychology into a profession that promotes

thriving for all those served by school psychologists, as well as for school psychologists themselves. And amid the challenges of our current sociopolitical context, a vision of a reimagined school psychology can give us the strength and motivation to resist the oppressive forces constraining us. These shifts are within our grasp and the zeitgeist of our larger cultural context is supportive of our movement in this direction.

CONCLUSION

The vision presented in this paper is ambitious. It is also attainable. As a profession, we must be willing to engage in critical self-examination, acknowledge and take accountability for the ways in which we have been complicit in maintaining oppressive systems, and challenge ourselves to do better. The overarching questions for us to consider are, “As school psychologists, how have we been complicit in maintaining oppressive systems? And how do we move beyond our complicity to action?” I also offer additional questions for us to consider the social justice implications for each Futures Conference pillar (Table 1). By incorporating this anti-oppressive and liberatory

Table 1. Social Justice Questions for Futures Conference Pillars

Futures pillar	Social justice questions
Leadership: Exploring, expanding, and facilitating leadership skills in providing local, state, national, and international services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who can access formal leadership positions in the profession? • How can school psychologists engage in socially just leadership?
Science and Scholarship: Maintaining the breadth and depth of school psychology knowledge base and expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What knowledge and forms of knowledge production are valued in school psychology? • How do we produce research that addresses social issues and informs social policy development?
Practice: Engaging in culturally responsive and socially just practices to promote equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do school psychological services harm or help marginalized communities? • How can culturally responsive practices be developed and promoted in school psychology?
Education and Lifelong Learning: Providing educational experiences at the graduate and continuing professional development level to develop and advance the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively serve diverse youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we prepare school psychologists with cultural humility and dispositions toward social justice?
Workforce Development: Increasing, maintaining, and advocating for a well-trained and diverse school psychology workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the structural barriers that limit access to the profession? • What are the structural influences that push individuals out of the profession?
Advocacy: Maintaining the relevance of school psychology as a profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What causes do school psychologists consider important? • How can school psychologists advocate alongside marginalized communities?

approach to the Futures Conference, we are able to explore root causes, engage in radical transformation, and create a brighter future not only for the profession but for the children and families we serve.

NOTE

1. To learn more about the contributions of school psychology leaders from racial and ethnic minoritized groups, readers are encouraged to view the Trainers of School Psychologists' Honoring Diverse Leaders in School Psychology Project (<https://tsp.wildapricot.org/Race-&Diversity>).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Tara C. Raines, PhD, for her review of the paper and useful comments.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The present article was adapted from a presentation given for the opening session of the 2023–2024 School Psychology Futures Conference. A recording of the opening session is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3usjpXEh7I8&t=416s>.

DISCLOSURE

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Celeste M. Malone (she/her) is an associate professor of school psychology at Howard University and past president of the National Association of School Psychologists. Her primary research interest relates to multicultural and diversity issues embedded in the training and practice of school psychology. Specifically, her work addresses the development of multicultural competence through education and training, diversification of the profession of school psychology, and the relationship between culturally responsive practice and pre-K–12 student outcomes.

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