

Special Section



GUEST EDITORIAL

Microconnections

Healing Our Macrodisconnection and Macrodisassociation



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Microconnections are small moments of intentional attunement to demonstrate respectful empathy and strengthen an emotional bond. Microconnections have been found to improve neurological functioning, boost immunity, support people in acute grief, and improve relational functioning (Fredrickson, 2013; Martino et al., 2015; Murphy, 2019). Oxytocin generation plays a pivotal role in the perception of connection and responsiveness, as well as bonding behaviors, and appears to be a byproduct of microconnections (Algoe et al., 2017; Ellis et al., 2021; Scatliffe et al., 2019). Secure attachment is rooted in successful facilitation of microconnections specific to the relationship.

Clinicians trained in systems theory may consider that the research base of couples, family, and group therapy is rooted in the study of microconnections framed in modality-specific terminology. Socioculturally-attuned systems-trained clinicians also name and intervene where possible on the nested systems whose oppressive patterns (e.g., patriarchy/misogyny, racism, classism, nationalism) play out in personal relationships, and aim to heal those patterns of discord through facilitative microconnections that attend to the oppressive habits relationships must break to be healthy (McDowell et al., 2022).

Whether a partner, parent, teacher, boss, beloved friend, or coworker really beholds you, really steps into your visceral frame of reference and stays with you there, that sensory experience of sharing honest intimacy can wash over and feel empowering, nourishing, uplifting, encouraging, liberating. For a moment, existential isolation and the busyness

of the evaluative mind are suspended; perception can expand to take in a greater portion of the Whole through the co-regulating nervous systems. Satir and Hardy have been lauded for their masterful facilitation of socioculturally-attuned microconnections in families; both are fearless about palpating the deep wound, and turning relationship members toward each other to connect fully through it, rather than turn away (Hardy, 2016; Wretman, 2016).

In our relatively recent evolutionary history, the viruses of racist colonialism and capitalism have fomented what I will call *macrodisconnection*. The seed of this global trauma sprouted in the medieval European abuse of feudal power, and radiated out through colonizers' traumatized bodyminds, perpetrating what they escaped; what white people do to Brown and Black people, they did to themselves first (Menakem, 2017). In that white domination disorder (Hardy, 2016), we see white people striving to reach the summit in the "pigmentocracy of a white body supremacist structure" (Menakem, 2022) to minimize one's own oppression. We see the widespread messaging and behavior of the most privileged people feeling entitled to take up more space, be more heard, have their narrative define discourse. At the slightest challenge to this destructive entitlement, we see reactive white fragility (DiAngelo, 2018); this defensive reactivity is also evident in cis and heteronormativity, male privilege, and able-bodiedness. Collectively, we have traumatized ourselves as a species, and we must collectively re-associate. This is white people's responsibility to heal, because white people continue to benefit from the trauma history the most (Hardy, n.d.; Menakem, 2022). Such a statement matters here because the mental health industrial complex is a predominantly white institution (Roller et al., 2023).

This trauma history is not taught accurately through the public education system, so that white children grow up to be adults who can see it explicitly and make reparations. For instance, the attempted genocide of First Nation members of the Americas and the brutality of white feral chattel slavery (Menakem, 2022) are not honestly acknowledged in history textbooks (Zinn, 1980–2003). This *macrodisassociation*, in its implicitness, allows the insidious tendrils of white body supremacy to grab hold again and again. This implicitness is pregnant with rules about how to behave when white domination and other patriarchal behavior asserts itself, when microaggressions occur, when somebody with more protection takes what somebody with less protection has. While many feel righteous rage at the indignity and injustice of these macrodisconnections, we do not have a shared understanding of how this trauma passes down transgenerationally in our DNA, of stories of loss, and of rigid structures that uphold power for the palest, malest few over the many.

Somatically, the lack of a shared understanding of our collective trauma history leads to macrodisassociation from our collective human body. This makes it possible to not act from

our feeling hearts to ensure that those who have always had more (freedom, power, access, protection, choice, wealth) “take a step down and back” (Menakem, 2022), while making sure those who have systematically had their human embodied rights constrained and abused instead get to breathe freely and take up space, be seen, felt, and heard, and lead with communal best interest at heart. There is actually room enough for everybody.



In this special Social Justice issue, we hope you will resonate with practitioner-scholars who are facilitating socio-culturally attuned microconnections for the underserved and multiple marginalized in structured individual sessions; domestic and transnational advocacy for family cohesion, identity, and wellness; and via global mental health outreach in post-disaster settings. You will read of various approaches that center culturally-affirming microconnections to heal macrodisconnections rooted in historical, persistent, and recent shared trauma, including disproportionate exposure to the climate disaster that is a byproduct of our macrodisconnection from Nature. You will read of the emotional labor necessary when macrodisconnections are left untended, how much effort is required to flush out the survival neurochemistry of patriarchal dominance, stay associated with oneself, and how necessary microconnections are to have moments of safety in relationship. We hope this moves you to become Somatic Abolitionists (Menakem, 2022), committed to anti-racist post-trauma growth.

Many groups of marginalized people are not represented here. We must increasingly make space for them in our practice and scholarship. May this be the only time Social Justice is a “special issue” for the *IBPJ*. For us to heal the macrodisconnections caused by colonialism and the extractive industry of capitalism, and all the many ways their ills have broken hearts, bodies, families, and communal ways of life, we must collectively awaken from our shared macrodisassociation that interrupts our connections with each other and our planet. Breath by breath, we do this through microconnections to ourselves, each other, and the Earth.



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