


Chapter 8

Microaggressions, Misogynoir, and Liberation for Black Women in Higher Education Leadership

Shanika Lavi Wilson

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5712-6312>

North Carolina Central University, USA

Lorraine M. Graves

North Carolina Central University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter delves into the duality of oppression and freedom experienced by Black women in higher education leadership, focusing on the pervasive challenge of microaggressions. It explores the paradoxical visibility and invisibility of Black women in academic spaces, framed through resilience and liberation. The analysis begins with the historical and structural context of microaggressions, emphasizing their role as contemporary manifestations of systemic racism and sexism. The emotional and physical toll these microaggressions impose is examined, highlighting issues like racial battle fatigue, gaslighting, and the psychological burden of constant bias. The concept of misogynoir within academia is scrutinized, revealing how Black women face unique challenges due to the intersection of racism and sexism. This includes exclusion from decision-making, disproportionate disciplinary actions, and workplace hostility.

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

“Black women in leadership positions face hyper-surveillance, which results in double standards that enforce strict professional behavior and appearance expectations.” — Dr. Angela Davis, Scholar and Activist

This chapter is designed for administrators, faculty, students, and allies who are committed to understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by Black women in higher education leadership. Whether you are a university president seeking to create more inclusive policies, a faculty member wanting to better support colleagues, a student preparing for academic leadership, or an ally looking for ways to contribute meaningfully to change, this chapter provides both theoretical understanding and practical tools for action.

As you read, you will gain insight into the complex web of microaggressions that Black women navigate daily, understand the profound costs of these experiences, and discover evidence-based strategies for creating transformative change. This chapter builds upon the book's central theme of advancing equity in higher education by focusing specifically on the intersection of race and gender in leadership contexts.

Through this exploration, you will learn about the nature and impact of microaggressions on Black women leaders, understand how intersectional identities compound leadership challenges, examine real-world examples from Black women's leadership experiences, discover multi-level strategies for addressing systemic barriers, and identify concrete steps you can take in your role to support meaningful change.

THE REALITY OF BLACK WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Dr. Sarah Johnson steps into the boardroom for her first meeting as the newly appointed Dean of Academic Affairs. As the only Black woman among twelve senior administrators, she notices the subtle shift in energy—conversations pause, eyes assess, and she feels the weight of representation settling on her shoulders. Before she even speaks, she knows her words will be scrutinized differently, her authority questioned more readily, and her achievements attributed to diversity initiatives rather than merit. This scenario represents the daily reality for countless Black women in higher education leadership who navigate a complex landscape where their race and gender intersect to create unique challenges that their white and male colleagues rarely encounter.

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