


Chapter 2

Intersectional Microaggressions: Understanding the Diverse Experiences of Black Academics

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ABSTRACT

Black academics in higher education navigate systemic biases, often experiencing harmful microaggressions. When these biases intersect with multiple marginalized identities such as gender, class, or sexual orientation, they become intersectional microaggressions, compounding the burdens faced by Black faculty. This chapter explores the manifestations of intersectional microaggressions in academia, highlighting their impact on well-being, career trajectories, and institutional inclusion. Using an intersectional framework, the discussion examines how race, gender, and other identity markers influence these experiences. The chapter also addresses coping strategies, institutional responsibilities, and recommendations for fostering inclusive academic spaces. By shedding light on the overlooked experiences of Black faculty, this work contributes to conversations on dismantling systemic discrimination and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of higher education, Black faculty members frequently navigate distinct challenges shaped by deeply embedded systemic biases. While overt discrimination has become less socially acceptable, more subtle and insidious forms

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of bias, commonly known as microaggressions, persist. These everyday slights and dismissive behaviors, whether intentional or unintentional, communicate demeaning or exclusionary messages to individuals based on their marginalized identities, creating a hostile and unwelcoming academic environment. According to Sue et al. (2007), microaggressions manifest in three primary forms: microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations, all of which significantly impact the professional and personal experiences of Black academics. Research indicates that Black faculty members are disproportionately affected by microaggressions in academic settings. For example, the 2021 Duke Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Climate Survey revealed that 74% of Black faculty and 44% of Black staff reported experiencing microaggressions in the past year (Frederick, 2022). Moreover, the impact of microaggressions is magnified when they intersect with other marginalized identities such as gender, class, sexual orientation, etc., leading to what is known as intersectional microaggressions (Singh, 2021). While much of the existing literature has examined microaggressions through the lens of singular identities, there has been relatively little focus on how multiple marginalized identities compound these experiences (Nadal, 2015). Black faculty who also identify as women, LGBTQ+, or members of other historically excluded groups often face layered and compounded forms of discrimination, making their experiences in academia even more complex and challenging. Addressing these intersectional microaggressions is crucial to fostering a more equitable and inclusive academic environment where Black faculty can thrive rather than merely persist.

This chapter explores the concept of intersectional microaggressions and how they uniquely affect Black academics. By examining the nuanced experiences of those who navigate multiple marginalized identities, this chapter sheds light on the often-overlooked emotional, professional, and psychological consequences faced by Black faculty in higher education. Addressing these challenges is critical for fostering a more inclusive and equitable academic environment. This chapter will begin by defining intersectional microaggressions and discussing their manifestations in academic spaces. It will then delve into the psychological and professional impacts on Black faculty, providing context that illustrates the profound stress, burnout, and lower job satisfaction that arise from these experiences. Subsequently, we will explore strategies for navigating these experiences, drawing on resilience and support systems within both personal and institutional frameworks. Finally, the chapter will examine institutional responsibilities and provide recommendations for meaningful change, emphasizing the need for diversity training and policy reforms to mitigate intersectional microaggressions. A real-world case study will conclude the chapter, offering readers an opportunity to engage with the material and reflect on practical applications. Understanding the intersectional experiences of Black academics is essential for creating supportive and empowering academic spaces. By highlighting

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