


Chapter 6

Silent Struggles: The Emotional Toll of Microaggressions on African American Faculty

Marcella Smith

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8425-1768>

East Texas A&M University, USA

ABSTRACT

Teaching at predominantly white universities presents significant challenges for faculty of color, including microaggressions. This chapter explores the emotional burden these microaggressions place on African American faculty. A systematic review found that microaggressions are common and subtle, with adverse effects on the educational environment. Coping mechanisms and institutional strategies can help mitigate these effects. Interviews with African American faculty revealed microaggressions such as demeaning stereotypes and exclusion during hiring and promotion, affecting their perceptions of academia and increasing their likelihood of leaving. Addressing these experiences and developing supportive interventions can promote retention and professional growth. A case study of African American faculty at a predominantly white campus identified recurring racial microaggressions, highlighting the need for efforts to improve the university climate to better support African American faculty.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-9914-9.ch006

INTRODUCTION

Research on microaggressions is substantial and continues to develop (Sue, 2017; Sue & Spanierman, 2020), even in academic fields (McGee & Kazembe, 2016; Davies et al., 2024). Research indicates that compared to 21% of Caucasians, approximately 90% of African Americans and 77% of other ethnic minorities nationwide reported everyday encounters with racial prejudice (Ogunyemi et al., 2020). Furthermore, African American faculty who work in higher education in the U.S. frequently experience racial microaggressions (Harris et al., 2021). Teaching at predominantly white universities presents significant challenges for faculty of color (Louis et al., 2016; Orelus, 2020; Pittman, 2012). Beyond their professional duties like publishing, teaching, advising, and mentoring, they also face microaggressions (Orelus, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate and deepen our understanding of the effects of ongoing microaggressions on African American faculty and develop strategies to address them. This chapter examines the emotional burden microaggressions place on African American faculty.

UNDERSTANDING MICROAGGRESSIONS

The term “microaggression” was first used in 1970 by Harvard University professor and psychiatrist Dr. Chester M. Pierce to characterize the derogatory remarks and contemptuous actions he saw non-Black Americans making against minority groups, especially African Americans. The definition of microaggression has broadened since then to include “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults that potentially have harmful or unpleasant psychological consequences on the target person or group” (Okorie-Owe et al., 2021, p. 1201). The victims frequently perceive subtle, beautiful, and automatic microaggressions as insulting and invalidating. Microaggression includes four categories:

(1) Micro-assault, which is defined as an overt racial derogation in the form of verbal or nonverbal attacks; (2) Micro-insult, which indicates rudeness, insensitivity, and denigrates the individual’s racial heritage and identity; (3) Micro-invalidation, which signifies exclusion, negates, or nullifies the feelings of reality of a minority; and (4) Micro-inequity, which occurs when someone is singled out, disregarded, or ignored because of their race. (Ogunyemi et al., 2020; Okorie-Owe et al., 2021, p. 1201).

14 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/silent-struggles/385813

Related Content

The Meaning of Hispania in Mediaeval Majorca

Gabriel Ensenyat Pujol (2021). *History of Catalonia and Its Implications for Contemporary Nationalism and Cultural Conflict* (pp. 46-56).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-meaning-of-hispania-in-mediaeval-majorca/264852

Rhetorical Persuasion in Advertisements: Its Psychological Impact on Millennial Consumers

Gilbert Macalanda Talaue (2022). *International Journal of Public Sociology and Socioterapy* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/article/rhetorical-persuasion-in-advertisements/297199

Resilience, Stress, and Mental Health

Muniza Malik (2023). *Societal Transformations and Resilience in Times of Crisis* (pp. 155-168).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/resilience-stress-and-mental-health/313326

Culture and Arts in Pandemic Times: COVID-19, Strategic Communication, and the Case With SALT Initiative

Sahika Dogan (2026). *Conflict and Representation in Online Communication* (pp. 231-252).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/culture-and-arts-in-pandemic-times/383998

From Sickness and Death to Devotion and Festivity: The Plague of 1647 and Its Memory

Alejandro Llinares Planells (2022). *Handbook of Research on Historical Pandemic Analysis and the Social Implications of COVID-19* (pp. 127-141).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/from-sickness-and-death-to-devotion-and-festivity/287714