


Chapter 8

From Classroom to Conference Room: Microaggressions in Scholarly Interactions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines Black women scholars' experiences of microaggressions in, and beyond, the classroom. The chapter follows the narrative of one Black woman scholar at a historically White institution whose story was captured in a phenomenological study that convened a professional counterspace (West, 2017,2019) for Black women faculty and administrators mid-COVID-19 pandemic. The study employed Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 1986, 1990) to position the Black women scholars as the authors, subjects, and chief analyzers of their own stories. The study found that microaggressions dominate the workplace experiences of the Black women faculty and administrators in the professional counterspace. This chapter highlights the ways microinvalidations are employed by students and controlling images are invoked by a colleague, in the experiences of the Black woman scholar. The narrative illustrates the multiplicity and multidirectionality of microaggressions navigated by Black women scholars.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout Black women's professional journeys in historically White institutions (HWIs), the persistent presence and burden of microaggressive workplaces that reinforce gendered racism is well-documented (e.g., Collins, 1986; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Moorosi et al., 2018; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; West, 2015). This reality raises renewed alarm in the sociopolitical climate within which we find ourselves, wherein universities face the rescission of critical resources amidst federal pressure to divest from diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts on campus articulated most explicitly by a 2025 "Dear Colleague" letter from the United States Department of Education to all U.S. education entities (U.S. Department of Education, professional memo, February 14, 2025). The current sociopolitical context underscores the urgent need to examine the question: What conditions are present in academia that foster the persistence of microaggressions toward Black women scholars? Absent grounded and equally persistent efforts to dismantle the gendered racism embedded in the fabric of higher education institutions, universities risk increasing the precarity of their already limited number of Black women faculty (less than 6% of all faculty are Black women, U.S. Department of Education, 2023) and ultimately, risk regressing to their exclusionary histories. Research that exposes and explains the experiences of Black women scholars, including their navigation of microaggressive work environments, remains critical and timely as legislative protections for Black women rescind.

LITERATURE REVIEW: MICROAGGRESSIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS IN ACADEMIA

The experiences of Black women professionals in higher education illuminate the pervasive nature of gendered racial oppression in higher education, much of which is preserved in microaggressive work environments (see e.g., Henderson et al., 2010). Sue et al. (2007), building on the work of Pierce et al. (1978), explain that microaggressions are not just interpersonal exchanges but also environmental practices that favor White Americans and disadvantage people of color. Sue et al. (2007) contend that microaggressions encompass patterns in which a person is "overlooked, underrespected, and devalued" due to their race or gender (p. 273). Microaggressive environments maintain social structures that prove oppressive by embedding power within the confines of social structures (Baez, 2000). Symbols that mark a microaggressive work environment or culture may include but are not limited to, practices that promote second-class citizenship, color blindness, meritocracy, and standardization of White communication styles or cultural values. Microaggressive

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