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Listening to Our Voices: Experiences of Black Faculty at Predominantly White Research Universities With Microaggression

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Abstract

This article focuses on the experiences of four Black faculty members at predominantly White research universities with microaggression in the workplace. Utilizing scholarly personal narratives (SPN), this article explores the inhibitive nature of microaggressions, the resilient nature of Black faculty enduring these social attacks, and possible avenues for addressing the issue at an institutional level. The narratives shed light on the invisible social ill that occurs daily in the American academy, and those same voices call for serious introspection and administrative action in the field of higher education.

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Introduction

It is easy for the public to witness large-scale societal injustices and public acts of aggression. Recent incidents such as those in Ferguson, Missouri; New York; Baltimore, Maryland; Madison, Wisconsin; McKinney, Texas; and Charleston, South Carolina are newsworthy, and understandably, claim quite a bit of the airtime in the news media. These incidents also cause us to ponder the social structure in which we exist while concurrently spurring us to develop activities to create positive change within our society. Although not as apparent as the aforementioned incidents, faculty of color across the United States experience daily acts of aggression aimed in their work environments called microaggressions. The veneer of safety within hallowed halls of higher education, which many in the public deem an enlightened environment, is rife with microaggressions. This narrative analysis explores the experiences of four African American faculty members at large public research universities and their struggles and survival with microaggressions.

Pérez Huber and Solórzano (2015) defined racial microaggression as "a form of systemic, everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place" (p. 298). Specifically directed to individuals of color, microaggressions take the form of "verbal and non-verbal assaults in subtle, automatic or unconscious forms . . . layered assaults, based on race and its intersections with gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname" (p. 298). Although frequently unintended forms of discrimination, acts of microaggression convey intimidating, derogatory, and/or hostile racial insults that negatively affect the environments, psyche, and productivity of individuals of color (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2012). Hence, it is imperative to explore and garner a greater understanding of the impact of persistent microaggression on faculty of color and formulate ways in which it could be addressed.

To address this topic, it is important to acknowledge that microaggressions are commonplace at the university level and is a pertinent issue to faculty of color and their existence in the academy. This narrative study (a) explored Black faculty members' experiences with microaggression through sharing their stories with microaggression at predominantly White institutions (PWIs), (b) examined the faculty members' responses, both personally and professionally, to the microaggression in the workplace, and (c) shared their suggestions for initiating the development of solutions at the institutional level. These voices are critical because it validates their experiences as Black faculty members in the modern public university while shedding light on the need for institutions to consider microaggression as a serious and vile element in the campus ecology.

Review of the Literature

Landscape for African Americans in Higher Education

Research has demonstrated that Black faculty members are highly underrepresented in U.S. colleges and universities. According to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2014), 6% of full-time instructional faculty members were Black compared with 79% of full-time faculty who were White. Although there has been a slight increase in the representation of Black faculty members within postsecondary institutions, the progression has been extremely slow: "More than a quarter century ago, in 1981, Blacks were 4.2% of all full-time faculty in American higher education" (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education Foundation, 2008, p. 25). This slow progression continues to be a problem for Black faculty members within higher education, especially PWIs, as those who hold positions are subjected to patterns of systematic racial inequities and discrimination.

Racial inequities play a major role in the "persistent problem of underrepresentation and low academic status among Black faculty members of the U.S. higher education" (Allen, Epps, Guillory, Suh, & Bonous-Hammarth, 2000, p. 112). Allen et al. (2000) conducted a study that examined the status of Black faculty members in relation to access and success. Due to racial inequities, Black faculty members face many challenges with success, promotion, and retention. According to the authors, it is less common for Black faculty members to advance in the academic hierarchy, to work at prestigious institutions, and to have a higher salary compared with White faculty members. Two obstacles were identified that hinder Black faculty members' ability to advance in academia: (a) being "overburdened with teaching and service responsibilities" and (b) "the inflexible expectations of universities and colleges about research and publications" (Allen et al., 2000, p. 114). Research has shown that Black faculty members tend to take on more advising, mentoring, and service-oriented roles for underrepresented students as well as serve on committees that address minority issues and diversity initiatives on their respective campuses (Allen et al., 2000; Cartwright, Washington, & McConnell, 2009; Constantine, Smith, Redington, & Owens, 2008). Due to the low representation of Black faculty members, students of color are more likely to seek guidance from them. Black faculty members recognize their position of sociocultural responsibility and take on this role, given the ethnic and racial inequities within higher education and society (Allen et al., 2000). In addition, administrators within the institution and department expect Black faculty members to take on these roles: "The expectation is that

they [Black faculty members] will act as liaisons to campus groups of color, as multicultural educators for mainstream individuals and as problem solvers for sociocultural controversies that arise in addition to their other professional responsibilities" (Constantine et al., 2008, p. 349). According to Padilla (1994), these expectations or burdens of service are referred as *cultural taxation*. Black faculty members receive additional responsibility within higher education due to their racial background; however, the same expectations are not placed on their White faculty counterparts. It is important to note that regardless of the high expectation for Black faculty members to take on these roles, these roles are less valued by administrators or other faculty members (Constantine et al., 2008). Because of the increased responsibility, Black faculty members have limited time to focus on scholarship productivity. This poses a major threat to advancement opportunities for Black faculty members as colleges and universities push for research and publications (Allen et al., 2000; Constantine et al., 2008). Thus, these barriers prove to be professionally detrimental and negatively affect the success and retention of Black faculty members.

Racial microaggressions. In addition to the structural racial inequities, Black faculty members are subjected to interpersonal racial oppression within higher education (Pittman, 2012). A number of scholars have explored the interpersonal racial oppression experienced by Black faculty members; however, literature has demonstrated there is still a need to examine these experiences and the negative impact they have on Black faculty members. Constantine et al.'s (2008) research has been referred as one of the first studies to examine racial microaggressions against Black faculty members within higher education and how microaggressions affect the lives of the faculty members. More specifically, the study explored perceived experiences of tenure-track or tenured Black faculty members in the counseling and psychology program. The authors defined racial microaggressions as "brief, commonplace, and subtle indignities (whether verbal, behavioral, or environmental) that communicate negative or denigrating messages to people of color" (Constantine et al., 2008, p. 349). In the higher education setting, these racial microaggressions result from White administrators, faculty, staff, and students who do not "consciously recognize the racist origins or implications of their actions" (Constantine et al., 2008, p. 349). Consequently, the White individual does not realize the harmful impact that racial microaggression has on the Black faculty member.

    The results from Constantine et al.'s (2008) qualitative study identified seven primary themes that emerged from the Black faculty members' accounts of microaggressions. These themes included the following: alternating

feelings of invisibility or marginalization and hypervisibility; qualifications or credentials questioned or challenged by other faculty colleagues, staff members, or students; receiving inadequate mentoring in the workplace; organizational expectations to serve in service-oriented roles with low-perceived value by administrators or other faculty colleagues; difficulties determining whether subtle discrimination was race or gender based; self-consciousness regarding choice of clothing, hairstyle, or manner of speech; and coping strategies to address racial microaggressions.

Black faculty members reported feeling invisible and marginalized when their existence on campus was often ignored by White colleagues. The presence of Black faculty members became important during times of need (i.e., when expertise was needed). Black faculty members felt "overexposed" when they were needed to recruit students of color (Constantine et al., 2008, p. 351). Other research and personal narratives have also supported Black faculty members' credentials being challenged by White colleagues and students (Cartwright et al., 2009; Flowers, Wilson, Gonzalez, & Banks, 2008; Hendrix, 1995; Lewis-Giggetts, 2015; Pittman, 2010, 2012). In Pittman's (2010) study on women faculty of color, it was demonstrated that White, male students challenged their authority, teaching competency, and scholarly expertise. Black faculty members receiving inadequate mentoring in the workplace is twofold. On one hand, it was demonstrated that White faculty wanted to support Black faculty members; however, on the other hand, Black faculty members would not receive much support if he or she was perceived successful (Constantine et al., 2008). Research has also demonstrated that women faculty members of color have difficulty determining whether discrimination against them is based on race or gender or a combination of both attributes (Pittman, 2010).

In response to microaggressions, Black faculty members have reported being conscious of the way he or she projects herself in academia. A Black, male faculty member reported not wanting to appear intimidating to his peers. In addition, a Black, female faculty member stated feeling self-conscious when growing dreadlocks and appearing "too Black." The participant reported deliberately not wearing African-style clothing too many times in a row because of how she would be received within the environment. She also distinguished that White faculty members or colleagues do not have to have this heightened awareness (Constantine et al., 2008).

Cartwright et al. (2009) extended Constantine et al.'s (2008) study to examine the effect of racial microaggressions on experiences of Black faculty members in a Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) program. The article supported six of the seven themes that emerged in Constantine et al.'s (2008) study. The major difference reported was that participants in the more

recent study did not express feelings of self-consciousness regarding dress or manners of speech. However, a new theme of "Unequal/Different Treatment" emerged during this study: Black faculty members reported being treated differently than their White counterparts. This included having to meet different or higher standards or sets of rules that were not formally set in place; White faculty members did not have to meet these standards. For example, one participant described his or her role as chair of the department: "In my role . . . I have to go through so many more steps in the negotiation process" (Cartwright et al., 2009, p. 177). Another example included submitting a formal complaint to a colleague and that the colleague did not handle the complaint properly; the colleague went beyond his or her role and did not follow protocol of the university.

The theme of "Unequal/Different Treatment" also emerged during Stanley's (2006) qualitative study that examined faculty of color teaching experiences at predominately White institutions. Faculty members in the study described their relationships with colleagues and the unwritten rules and standards that dictated collegiality. These unwritten rules included working harder to gain the respect and trust of colleagues, speaking more during faculty meetings, or attending social gatherings to appear interested and friendly. According to Stanley (2006), "Regardless of the situation, faculty of color perceive that they are held to higher expectations and that they are not acknowledged when they make an effort to respond to the requirements in place" (p. 715).

Lewis-Giggetts (2015) suggested that microaggressions and other forms of racism have become a daily part of life in academia. To cope with these constant incidents, Constantine et al. (2008) reported that faculty of color use different strategies. These strategies included seeking support from colleagues, family, and friends; choosing when it is appropriate to confront racial microaggressions; prayer; disconnecting from faculty members who exhibit racial microaggressions; or "resignation that subtle racist treatment will always exist to some degree in academia" (p. 353). Whether Black faculty members are developing ways to cope with microaggressions, these negative experiences affect Black faculty members both physically and psychologically. It also greatly affects the retention of Black faculty members. According to Smith (2011), "Alienation, cultural taxation, marginalization, discrimination, microaggressions, and lack of mentoring" are common reasons for faculty of color to leave an institution (p. 143). Whether subtle or not, racist treatment should not be a norm within higher education, and the lived experiences of Black faculty members in predominately White institutions should not be overlooked.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory (CRT) provides a vehicle by which the narratives in this study were contextualized. The first tenet of CRT addresses the ideology of racism. According to CRT, racism is ordinary, commonplace, and is an aspect of the everyday experience of most people of color in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). The second tenet of CRT states that racism involves issues like "interest convergence" and "material determination." Thus, a racialized system is defined by promulgating the dominant group with certain advantages both materially, such as better standards of living and access to higher financial resources or wealth, and psychologically, such as the belief that hard work not privilege accounts for success (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Furthermore, the system of racism becomes difficult, if not impossible, to eradicate because of the rewards and benefits sanctioned to the dominant group. The third tenet of CRT involves the belief that race is a social construction, and the fourth tenet underscores how racial groups experience differential racialization (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Differential racialization means that the dominant group may view or treat certain minority groups differently at various points in time based on external factors like the labor market (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). A fifth component to CRT involves the idea that "everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 9). Finally, the final tenet of CRT is rooted in the belief that people of color need to give voice to their experiences so that they might communicate to the dominant group about the oppression they face. Authors of CRT postulate that people of color are uniquely qualified to speak from their experiences with oppression and encouraged to engage in expressive activities like storytelling as a means of giving voice to their plight (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Utilizing the last tenet of CRT, this study adopts counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) as a vehicle to share the experiences of the Black faculty members with microaggressions in their workplace.

Method

The overall design of the study was qualitative. The researchers used scholarly personal narrative (SPN) as the method for collecting, analyzing, disaggregating, and deriving meaning of the data from the experiences. Although SPN is a unique approach, the researchers believed that it is the individuals who have had specific experiences can most accurately generate knowledge and derive meaning from their interactions between their experiences and ideas. Heildleberger and Uecker (2009) posited that SPN is "a constructivist

research methodology that recognizes the researcher's personal experience as a valid object of study" (para. 1). As such, the development, execution, and analysis of the study were conducted by the researcher-participants. Because the participants were also the researchers in this study, they are sometimes referred to as researcher-participants.

This narrative research focused on studying the lived experiences of four Black tenure-track and tenured faculty members at three large public research universities that are PWIs. By gathering the data through a collection of their various stories, the researchers constructed narratives about their experiences and explored their meanings. Foucault (1977, 1991) posited that humans as cognitive social creatures can possess the knowledge and understanding of things only if the things inherently have meaning. More importantly, it is via discourse, and not the actual things themselves, that knowledge is produced. Hence, it is the meaning of the researcher-participants' experiences that is focused on in this current study, rather than all the examples which were shared.

Pérez Huber and Solórzano (2015) suggested that microaggression is one mechanism of research that validly delves into the lives of subdominant groups. They stated,

> [T]he concept of racial microaggressions is a useful "tool" for research on race, racism and the everyday experiences of People of Color. It allows us to identify the often subtle acts of racism that can emerge in schools, college campuses, classrooms and in everyday conversations and interactions. (p. 298)

The researchers believe that utilizing SPN and CRT to explore microaggression as a research approach "accounts for the role of race and racism in education and works toward identifying and challenging racism as a larger goal of identifying and challenging all forms of subordination" (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015, p. 300). Thus, this emic exploration of the researcher-participants' experiences can shed light on the microaggressions enacted toward faculty of color in the academy.

Nash (2004) outlined guidelines for conducting an SPN exploration and the writing of narratives. The guidelines are as follows: (a) establish clear constructs, hooks, and questions; (b) move from the particular to the general and back again; (c) try to draw larger implications from your personal stories; (d) draw from your formal background knowledge; (e) always try to tell a good story; (f) show some passion; (g) tell your story in an open-minded way; (h) remember that writing is both a craft and an art; (i) use citations whenever appropriate; and (j) love and respect eloquent/clear language. When developing the instrument questions as well as writing and reviewing the narratives,

the researchers consistently revisited the 10 guidelines to ensure that each piece aligned with Nash's (2004) guidelines.

Participants

The participants in this study were four faculty members self-identified as Black. All participants were employed at large research universities that were also PWIs. The participants were faculty members who had earned tenured or currently on the tenure track. Two participants were male and two were female. All participants were faculty members in social sciences colleges. Identifiers such as name, rank, institution affiliation, region of employment, and other elements were removed for a level of anonymity.

Positionality

Understanding the impact of the researcher's connectivity with the research is critical in qualitative research. Denzin (1986) stated that "interpretive research begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher" (p. 12). Kezar (2002) further explained, "Within positionality theory, it is acknowledged that people have multiple overlapping identities. Thus, people make meaning from various aspects of their identity" (p. 96). As such, the positionalities of the researcher-participants are extremely important, because their experience and interpretation of the meaningfulness is core to the development of knowledge.

Vincent is a Black, heterosexual male and has lived in the northeastern, Midwest, and the southern regions of the United States. Prior to conducting the research study on which this reflective work is based, he worked in university administration for several years. He earned degrees from both a historically Black college and from predominantly White research institutions. After years of working in university administration, he entered the faculty ranks. He is currently a professor and has always been a faculty member at a predominantly White research university. Through his experiences in administration and faculty life, he fostered a penchant for exploring the experiences of individuals of color at the university level. After hearing multiple stories of prejudice and racism against individuals of color, he wanted to have their stories understood on a larger forum so to be aptly addressed.

Courtney is a Black, heterosexual female and has lived in the south and Midwest regions of the United States. She worked in several areas of student affairs and student services prior to accepting a faculty position focusing on intersecting tenants of research, which are representative of the research in this study. She grew up in an urban community, and she is a graduate of a

historically Black college/university. In addition, she earned both of her graduate degrees from a PWI. She is currently in her fifth year as a faculty at a predominately White institution. Given her upbringing and her years as both a doctoral student and faculty member at predominately White institutions, she has developed a passion for understanding the experiences of students of color in educational environments, particularly postsecondary environments.

Alvin is a Black, heterosexual male, originally from the southern United States who has lived in the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, and Midwest regions of the United States. He received one of his degrees from a PWI in the South and a historically Black college. Prior to attending graduate school, Alvin worked in corporate America. He entered the faculty ranks as a pre-doctoral fellow at a predominantly White private liberal arts college in the Midwest. He has subsequently worked at two research extensive universities, one in the South and one in the Midwest, where he has published extensively and earned tenure. Through his experiences as a faculty member, Alvin has encountered numerous situations in which prejudice and racism were present, mostly in subtle ways by individuals and colleagues who saw themselves as liberals and progressive thinkers. When presented with the opportunity to share his experiences, this project seemed like a constructive way to have his story understood on a larger forum in order to instruct others on how to genuinely foster equitable, diverse, and productive faculty and student relations.

Shelby is Black female who identifies as heterosexual. She was raised in the northeast and southern parts of the United States but completed most of her undergraduate and graduate work in the Midwest. After spending 15 years in higher education, she began to reflect on her experiences, which propelled her to engage in studies that capture the lived experiences of African Americans in the academy. Her experiences have been quite unique in that she began her career in student affairs working in such areas like academic advising, residence life, and multicultural affairs. During the middle part of her career journey, she worked as a college counselor in a university counseling center. She now holds a faculty position at a public Midwestern university. Throughout her career, she has been a strong advocate of diversity issues.

Procedure and Analysis

This study was spawned because faculty members through various conversations began to hear similar stories of microaggressions against them as they executed their duties. One faculty member decided after listening to many stories of these shared experiences which became apparent in the academy that he or she would ask fellow colleagues to participate in a research project that would explore the meaningfulness of their experience.

The researchers developed questions and prompts to be utilized as a guiding instrument which would be used to build the individual narratives on microaggression. Once the initial instrument was developed, it was shared with other faculty colleagues, not related to the study, who critiqued and gave feedback on the clarity, construction, and wording of the items. On completion of the instrument (see the appendix), the researcher-participants individually constructed their narratives focusing on their experiences with microaggression. The researcher-participants were asked to be conscious of the themes that may emerge during the writing process. Nonetheless, they were urged to write in a free-flowing manner. They were also asked to add any information beyond the instrument items that they found to be important in gaining a full comprehension of their experiences.

The overarching purpose of the data analysis process of this study was intended to discern "patterns, coherent themes, meaningful categories, and new ideas and in general uncover a better understanding of a phenomenon or process" (Suter, 2006, p. 327). The four narratives were collected and coded by hand. This study used an open coding system to analyze participants' narrative responses line-by-line, phrase-by-phrase, and word-by-word (Creswell, 2008). Words, sentences, and passages of data with assigned codes were utilized to decipher their core meaning. The coding process enabled the researchers to thoroughly organize, sort, and label the data. The common themes that emerged were discussed to ensure their importance and meaning.

Limitations

The study involved only four participants from four large public predominantly White research universities. As an SPN, the author-participants shared their background and positionality; therefore, the audience can consider the level of transferability of the findings to similar contexts. Also, prior to the study being conducted, the conversations and interactions between the author-participants may have aided in establishing collegial trust and openness when responding to the narrative prompts.

Results

This narrative study yielded four emergent themes. The first theme was the common occurrences of microaggression. The participants reported that microaggression was a very frequent occurrence in their professional life. All the participants shared that they experienced microaggressions almost on a daily basis and it took numerous forms. They reported actions ranging from snide remarks, to condescending comments meant as jokes, to mixed messages

pertaining to job performance, and to surreptitious action to inhibit job progression. The second theme that emerged was the futility of the Black faculty members to address the microaggression with the perpetrator. Participants expressed futility to address the issues and the assumption that little change would occur with discussion. Within this theme, feelings of powerlessness were expressed with respect to addressing the aggressor's actions. The third theme was the high levels of stress. Participants explained how their experiences with microaggression caused extreme stress that resulted in isolation and avoidance of the office environment. The fourth theme was that of resiliency in a White-dominated field. All participants reported that the negative actions toward them fueled their drive to perform at higher levels. These higher levels of performance were attempts to dissuade the dominant culture at their institutions that they were capable of being productive members in their department and to ensure appropriate recognition.

Theme 1: Common Occurrence

All four participants stated that the microaggressions were a very common part of their existence as a faculty of color. Vincent stated,

> It is so very common . . . It's almost a daily thing and after a while it makes you have to question yourself and wonder if you are being overly sensitive. But then someone comes around with a snide remark and a smile and negates the self-questioning. Yeah! Everyday . . . I'm not kidding. Everyday!

Alvin also commented, "I think that microaggression is a common occurrence. In my own experience as a faculty member, I have encountered a wide range of interactions that I would consider to be microaggressive behavior."

Furthermore, the actions came from various people from various segments of the university population. Shelby stated, "As an African American, female professor at a doctoral research intensive institution, I often experience racial microaggressions . . . from students, faculty and administration. At the start of every semester, I always have to brace myself." Thus, not only was microaggression a common occurrence, but also it originated from various sources within the environment.

Theme 2: Futile to Approach Aggressors

When the faculty members encountered microaggression, they unanimously expressed the idea of not wanting to approach the aggressors claiming the futility of the interaction. They believed that no positive outcome ensues.

Courtney mentioned, "Maybe I take more of a passive approach but when deciding whether or not to comment on microaggressive behavior, I ask myself what good is it going to do? . . . [As a result] I disengage myself." Alvin expressed, "I have learned over the years to speak my mind, but pick my battles. If someone says something offensive in passing during a meeting or a hallway conversation, I may let it *go*." The futility of a further discussion was expressed by Vincent:

> I find it useless. Many times I have approached individuals a day or two after and ask "What do you mean by that?" referring to something they did or said previously. There is usually some recoiling by the individual and fumbling through an explanation. Many times it culminates into that person in laughing it off again. It's a huge waste of time and there is no recourse in the big picture.

The idea of futility was coupled with the idea of powerlessness or lack of an actionable outcome. Vincent spoke of no recourse to action, and Shelby addressed personal powerlessness:

> When I experience microaggressions especially from senior administrators and faculty at the university it engenders a sense of powerlessness and the impact of the experience sometimes leaves me with feeling like it would be challenging to address or approach given the differential in power dynamics. Therefore, I am less encouraged to approach the instigator of the aggression.

This sense that the environment will not support a faculty member with uncomfortable and offensive situations is further echoed by Vincent: "Eventually I say what's the use? Who's really going to have my back in the end? The administration? The department chair? They are oblivious and sometimes they are the ones enacting the microaggression. It's a lose-lose situation."

Theme 3: Stress

All participants expressed the heightened level of stress that results from microaggressive behavior and environments. Shelby stated,

> I feel I have higher levels of stress than my White colleagues . . . I not only have to be concerned about teaching and scholarship, but also the pressures of having to address the emotional and cognitive toll that microaggressions cause.

According to the participants, the stress affected the manner in which they existed and performed within their workplace. Courtney explained,

Unconsciously, these types of behaviors used to affect my job performance because I would always feel on edge or like all eyes were on me. I have found myself sort of isolating myself from certain activities in the program and focusing more on activities that allow me to work independently.

Vincent shared how he reacted to the negative environment and dealt with the high stress:

It got to a point where I did not even want to be in the office, because any comment could come at any time. I was stressed out about a simple thing like going to work. I actively tried to avoid that [stressful environment]. I decided to go in after hours; I'd go to my office at 9: 00 p.m. after class and stay till midnight or 1[o'clock] doing work in a quiet, serene and not hostile environment. I was productive then . . . I was at peace.

Theme 4: Resiliency in a White-dominated field

Although the participants shared their experiences to microaggression in their workplace, the theme of resilience as a reaction to the negative situations was also very evident in their narratives. Increasing productivity to compensate or cope with microaggressive acts was a common thread. Alvin shared,

As a person of color in a predominantly White academy, I must be prepared to fight for my position. As a result, I have never let instances of microaggressive behavior curtail my career. . . . [Plus] most of the publications and national recognition brought to the department came from within our ranks [faculty of color].

Courtney echoed her resilience in an environment that she believes is not receptive to her concerns as a faculty of color:

The truth of the matter is, for the most part, the profession of being a faculty member, is still a White profession and I have to find my place in it. My way of handling or dealing with microaggression is to make the separation between the two and redouble my focus on what is going to make me successful professionally.

The idea of resiliency via harder work was also stated by Vincent:

I just put my head down and get to grinding. I realize in the end that my work is what has to speak for me and I have to have a high volume to ensure that my

> work is understood and recognized. Sometimes it is the *work* that keeps me sane . . . plus I refuse to be moved from my dreams and aspirations by a field that does not readily respect people of color.

Thus, faculty channeled their discomfort from microaggression to fuel their productivity. Compounding on the microaggression was the belief that the academy was dominated by Whites and that greater production was necessary to counteract the negative bias in their departments and fields.

Discussion

Racism is an insidious occurrence in the United States, and it continues to adversely affect millions of people of color and specifically Black people according to Feagin and Sikes (1994) as cited by Constantine et al. (2008). As such, "College and university campuses, although dedicated to the pursuit of greater knowledge and awareness, are not immune to the influences of racism" (Constantine et al., 2008, p. 49). Given the "chilly" climate of academic colonialism (Hurtado, 1992), it is not surprising that Black faculty members are underrepresented, and their numbers at most higher education institutions are declining (Samuel & Wane, 2005).

In this current narrative study, the four Black faculty members experienced routine exposure to racial microaggressions as common occurrences that is consistent with other narratives of Black faculty within the academy and Pérez Huber and Solórzano's (2015) definition. Research reveals that Black faculty members and other faculty members of color frequently felt isolated, discouraged, and diminished by their colleagues (Turner, 2002). Black faculty in this study had similar reactions to experiencing microaggressions. In addition, they experienced stress that caused them to avoid the office environment or interactions with their colleagues. Black faculty in other studies reported experiencing different types of stress particularly in feeling pressure to conform to Eurocentric models of dress, hairstyle, or speech (Constantine et al., 2008). Black faculty also reported in other studies feelings of isolation, loneliness, and betrayal within the higher education institutions they were employed (Burden, Harrison, & Hodge, 2005; Vasquez et al., 2006). Such experiences not only contribute to Black faculty distrusting or distancing themselves from their departmental peers and environment, but also they expedite their departure from university positions (Lee & Leonard, 2001). Black faculty in this study also recounted experiences whereby their faith in their departmental peers, supervisors, university administration, and the general academy was diminished. Concurrently, they felt disempowered and futile to approach their aggressors.

As the effects and different manifestations of racism accumulate in the academic experiences of Black faculty, the impact of racism on professional performance can be significant (Constantine et al., 2008). Thus, department chairs, deans, provost, and all involved in the welfare and success of their faculty members should view microaggression as important an issue as start-up research packages, teaching loads, research time, productivity, tenure, and promotion.

Clark, Adams, and Clark (2001) stated that "*John Henryism* is an active style of coping characterized by a belief that environmental events can be negotiated successfully via hard work and determination" (p. 270). In this current narrative study, all participants expressed that they worked harder knowing the environment was a hostile and unaccepting environment to faculty of color and their areas of research. Thus, *John Henryism* was displayed by the participants as a result of the microaggression present in their environments. Unfortunately *John Henryism* is associated with higher levels of stress and increased blood pressure.

Recommendations

The faculty members in this study shared suggestions rather than simply recounting their experiences. Unanimously, the participants spoke of the recognition of microaggression as an issue in the academy to be addressed by upper administration. This recognition should be acknowledged through addressing the issue publicly, development of campus awareness via faculty training, and also developing consequences for individuals who are found to be engaged in microaggressive behavior. The participants all discussed the notion that the issue must be addressed from an institutional level with individual rewards and consequences.

Three of the participants suggested that microaggression as a topic needed to be infused into the curriculum. Courses that are focused on diversity and multiculturalism should also include a section on microaggression and its impacts on the work environment and the psyche of the people affected. This infusion would be in core diversity courses that are offered through different departments on campus. Thus, the diversity course in the business school as well as the one in the biology department will address the issue as it pertains to their specific field and the workplace. The result is the heightened awareness of microaggression in multiple fields in higher education.

The creation and/or fortification of minority faculty organizations to assist faculty members cope, commiserate, and formulate solutions to address and minimize microaggression in the workplace was also suggested by the participants. These organizations can also play a pivotal role in collecting information

and informing upper administration, deans, and department chairs of the extent and widespread nature of microaggression. In essence, they can assist the university gauge the ecology of university and be partners in formulating training and developing policy to address microaggression. These organizations could also provide a source of support through peer-mentoring. Senior faculty members can share their experiences and their approaches to dealing with, overcoming, and succeeding in an environment where microaggression is present.

Conclusion

Black faculty experiences with microaggression at White research universities should be a major concern to department chairs, dean, and provosts since these experiences can negatively affect the recruitment and retention of faculty of color. Also, it must be realized that microaggression is not solely an issue pertaining to Black faculty members. It is as much of a concern for Latina/o, Asian, Native American, women, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer (LGBTQ) populations, and individuals with disabilities.

However, acknowledgment that microaggression is a systemic issue should be the first step in the process. As Courtney exclaimed, "Once colleges and universities have bought into the idea that racism is real and does exist, only then they can begin to address issues." Subsequently, taking action in terms of educating the university population, continual support of minority populations, re-education of White populations, and providing outlets for recipients of microaggression to report and address the issue are key. The development of faculty support organizations and formulating faculty peer-mentoring dyads is also critically important. Administrators must seek to address microaggression through the establishment of policy to actively address instances of microaggression with both consequences for violators and rewards for advocates of non-aggressive environments.

Changes in the university ecology cannot occur by itself; the support of administrators at all levels, faculty peers, faculty development offices, department chairs, deans, and provosts are essential. Each institution needs to address microaggression based on an assessment of the campus climate, its unique history, and the infrastructure in place with respect to diversity issues so that change becomes meaningful for the participating faculty members.

Simply, if faculty of color can collaborate with a supportive department and university administration, issues of microaggression can be dealt with and can begin to foster a more inclusive environment. This will result in more satisfied, motivated, and productive faculty members who can offer better educational experiences for their students and actively contribute to their institutions.

Appendix

Prompts for Personal Narrative on Experiences With Microaggressions

1. Have you ever experienced microaggression in your place of work?
2. Describe your experiences with microaggression, specifically toward you, in the workplace as a faculty member?
3. What are your feelings when you become the recipient of microaggressions?
4. How do you perceive microaggression affecting your job performance?
5. How do you perceive microaggression affecting your job satisfaction?
6. Do you usually approach the instigator of the aggression?
7. Have you ever shared your experiences with microaggression with your White colleagues?
8. Have you shared your experiences with microaggression with your Black colleagues?
9. What are some ways in which you cope with the incidences of microaggression?
10. What are some ways your department, college, and/or university can support you when you experience an act of microaggression?
11. What other suggestions do you have to address the issue of microaggression?

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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