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## CHAPTER 7

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# Microaggressions and the Pipeline for Scholars of Color

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**I**NSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER learning are beginning to acknowledge that one of the hallmarks of a great university is a diverse community of scholars, staff, and students dedicated to the preparation of leaders who can live and work in highly pluralistic and complex environments (Bowen & Bok, 1998). As such, institutions of higher learning across the United States continue to expend tremendous resources and efforts to diversify and recruit, retain, and promote more students, staff, and faculty of color into the system of higher education.

In pursuit of campus diversity, one area that has received extra attention over the last several decades is the recruitment and retention of talented scholars of color. For the purpose of this chapter, the term “scholars of color” refers to both doctoral students of color and faculty of color. With respect to faculty of color, research in higher education continues to suggest that the presence of Native American, Latino/a, African American, and Asian American professors exposes students to different perspectives, new and innovative courses, and new and engaging pedagogies (Turner, 2002). Moreover, faculty of color also provide mentoring and role models for both majority and minority students. It is also clear that as majority or White faculty retire, institutions of higher education will increasingly look to recruit faculty of color to replace them (Turner, 2002). The factors just outlined speak loudly about the importance of working toward increasing the presence of faculty of color in the academy.

## THE STATUS OF THE PIPELINE

To obtain a better understanding of why there is a need to increase the number of scholars of color, one merely needs to look at the status of the “educational pipeline” for scholars of color, the standard metaphor for the educational journey and progress of people of color as they achieve academically (Ryu, 2008). The total number of doctoral degrees conferred in 2005 was slightly over 56,000. In examining degrees earned by race and ethnicity, out of the total doctoral degrees awarded, Whites earned 29,144 (51.9%), African Americans earned 2,889 (5.1%), Hispanics earned 1,740 (3.1%), Asian Americans earned 2,996 (5.3%), and American Indians earned 214 (0.4%). Taken as a whole, U.S. domestic graduate students of color earned approximately 14 percent of the total doctoral degrees conferred in 2005.

The data for faculty tells a similar story. According to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* Almanac Issue for 2008 to 2009 (“The Nation,” 2008), there were a total of 675,624 teaching personnel in the academy, including professors, associate professors, assistant professors, instructors, lecturers, and other teaching professionals. In considering race and ethnicity, approximately 109,964 (16.27%) were African American, Hispanic, Asian American, and American Indian. By rank, racial/ethnic professors numbered 20,856 compared to 145,936 White faculty. African American, American Indian, Asian American, and Hispanic associate professors numbered 22,429 compared to 112,507 White associate professors. The data indicate that the majority of racial/ethnic teaching personnel are located at the assistant professor level, with a total of 31,253. In contrast, there were only 11,157 White assistant professors.

Understanding the low number of scholars of color in the pipeline requires an examination of the challenges that this group faces as they pursue their doctoral degrees, apply for academic positions, and work toward tenure (Padilla, 2003). The literature is replete with barriers and obstacles in the perilous journey that people of color encounter on their way to becoming members of the academy (Aronson & Swanson, 1991; Carter, Pearson, & Shavlik, 1996; Turner, 2002; Turner, 2007). Many of these hazards work to discourage scholars of color from entering and persisting in academia. These range from the lack of mentoring to hostile classroom climates to bias in the tenure review process. And while these factors and others are detrimental to the recruitment and retention of faculty of color, one set of barriers impacting scholars of color that has not received much attention from researchers are racial microaggressions.

## RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Over the last several decades, the theories and research on contemporary racism suggest that overt expressions of racism have been replaced by

more subtle behaviors and actions that lead to the degradation and continued marginalization of people of color (Sue et al., 2007; Williams, 2000). It has been found that this type of prejudice and discrimination manifests itself in unconscious ways and beliefs, often by Whites who believe that they are racially sensitive, liberal, and nonracist (Goodman, 2001; Wise, 2008). Microaggressions are defined as subtle verbal, nonverbal, and visual insults and invalidations directed toward people of color from well-intentioned Whites who respond in both an automatic and unconscious fashion (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). More specifically, microaggressions occur in everyday interactions between people who represent different groups and convey powerful yet subtle derogatory messages about the subordinate status of marginalized groups. When directed at people of color, these are known as racial microaggressions.

#### INCLUSIVE EXCELLENCE

Within the context of higher education, racial microaggressions can be theoretically grounded and understood using the inclusive excellence (IE) model, which many U.S. colleges and universities are beginning to utilize to drive their diversity and inclusiveness agendas. The IE concept was developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2002) when it commissioned a set of scholarly papers focusing on the theory and practice of inclusive excellence (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). Inclusive excellence is about the transformation of our institutions of higher learning by embedding inclusiveness into all aspects and processes of a college or university.

Specific to the focus of this chapter, the IE model consists of several dimensions that have implications for contextualizing microaggressions and their impact on scholars of color: history, compositional diversity, campus intergroup relations and climate (e.g., behavioral and psychological), organizational diversity, and social influences. The model posits that these five dimensions impact the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the campus (Milem et al., 2005).

1. The historical dimension of the IE framework suggests that an institution's past regarding to what extent it has included or excluded diverse populations impacts the diversity and inclusiveness of a campus. At many colleges and universities, there are still numerous practices, traditions, artwork, norms, and other institutional aspects that send discriminatory and offensive messages to people of color (e.g., stadiums named after slave owners, race-themed parties, degrading racial mascots/symbols for college sports teams, and discriminatory financial aid policies).

2. Compositional diversity speaks strictly to the practice of conceptualizing and pursuing diversity as a number only. That is, many colleges and universities think of diversity as the pursuit of a certain number of people from specific groups that need to be represented on campus. Thus, diversity is reduced to a number that incidentally, the majority finds problematic, because they believe that it is fueled by affirmative action policies, which in turn leads to the recruitment of undeserving and unqualified people. Consequently, faculty, staff, and students of color are constantly bombarded by microaggressions suggesting that their presence on campus is the direct result of a program that promotes mediocrity and incompetence.
3. The corollary to compositional diversity is campus climate. That is, once compositional diversity (e.g., a critical mass) is achieved on campus, what is the status of the climate for diversity and campus intergroup relations? Are students interacting with each other? Are there acts of insensitivity including microaggressions being committed against members of different racial groups? Is the institution welcoming to people from diverse groups? The research in higher education suggests that colleges and universities continue to struggle with less-than-ideal climates for diversity, filled with negative experiences for individuals from multicultural groups.
4. Organizational diversity involves the structural pieces of an institution that promote or discourage inclusiveness (Milem et al., 2005). Policies, procedure, departments, high-level leadership, marketing, communications, finances, and hiring practices are but a few of the organizational dimensions that influence the inclusiveness of a college or university.
5. Finally, societal factors are incidents or issues that occur outside the institution but spill onto the campus. These include debates about social issues (e.g., affirmative action, immigration, globalization), political events (e.g., elections), tragedies (e.g., September 11), and other phenomena that are discussed, debated, or ignored in classes, residence halls, programs, and offices. How these issues are handled on a college campus can determine whether members of diverse communities feel welcome or alienated on campus.

In considering racial microaggressions and the IE model, it is clear that the former can contribute to exclusive and unwelcoming campus environments and can impact inclusiveness and diversity across each of the five IE domains. Over the last several decades, researchers have produced numerous examples of microaggressions related to the history of institutions, compositional diversity, campus climate, organizational diversity,

and societal factors. With respect to the focus of this chapter, racial microaggressions manifest themselves at different points of the educational pipeline. That is, given that the pipeline is integrally connected to U.S. higher education, it stands to reason that whether one is pursuing a doctoral degree, applying for a faculty position, or working toward tenure, one will encounter microaggressions all along the journey (Sue et al., 2007). These microinsults and invalidations serve to discourage and wear down scholars of color. In the end, it is clear that if we are to increase the number of faculty of color entering the academy, we must gain a greater understanding of the barriers that prevent us from achieving this goal; in particular, racial microaggressions.

### MICROAGGRESSIONS ALONG THE PIPELINE

In this chapter, the authors examine microaggressions that scholars of color experience in relation to three parts of the pipeline: doctoral experiences, applying for faculty positions, and pursuing tenure. Using Sue and colleagues' (2007) model for classifying microaggressions, the focus will be on identifying specific examples of microinsults and microinvalidations that scholars of color experience on their journey to becoming part of the professoriate. In identifying the microaggressions, the authors draw on several resources. First, we draw on the literature examining the experiences of people of color as they move along the pipeline. Much has been written about the challenges that scholars of color confront between the points of pursuing a doctoral degree and achieving tenure. However, while the literature does not specifically label the barriers as microaggressions, many of the documented challenges are in fact and can be defined as such. Second, we also draw on the valuable experiences and insights of the authors.

The lead author (Fernando Guzman) has seven years of experience working as a multicultural talent scout to recruit graduate students of color and faculty of color into the academy, which serves as a critical source for identifying the challenges to and opportunities for diversifying the academy. Moreover, he has extensive experience working with doctoral students and search committees, negotiating contracts, retaining junior faculty, and supporting faculty of color as they undergo the tenure process. We also draw on the 20 years of experiences and knowledge of the second author (Jesus Trevino) as a senior diversity officer with valuable experience in implementing IE at both a large, public, research one institution and a small, private university. From the third author (Fernand Lubuguin), we draw on his experiences as a faculty member of color who is currently working toward tenure and who teaches in the field of counseling psychology. Finally, the

chapter benefits from the contributions of a graduate woman of color (Bushra Aryan) who is pursuing her doctoral degree in higher education and conducting research on the experiences of doctoral students of color; in particular, women of color.

In the following section, we identify specific microaggressions directed at scholars of color along the pipeline. We begin with cataloging the incidents and comments experienced by graduate students of color. Next, we present examples of microaggressions that scholars of color have encountered while beginning to look for academic positions. Here, we identify those insults and invalidations ranging from those encountered while visiting a campus and interviewing for positions to the job offer and contract negotiations. Finally, in the last section, microaggressions that scholars of color experience while working toward tenure are presented.

In approaching this section, the reader should keep several ideas in mind. First, the microaggressions presented (in quotes) are simply examples of some of the microinsults and invalidations that have been reported in the literature. The authors believe that these represent only the tip of the iceberg and that readers can and will probably recount numerous and different microaggressions. Second, some of the microinsults and invalidations identified in the section on search committees would not necessarily be said directly to a candidate of color. Rather, these comments have been expressed to the lead author as a faculty recruiter working with search committees.

## DOCTORAL EXPERIENCES

In addition to the everyday challenges of pursuing a doctoral degree, doctoral students of color experience specific microaggressions. This section focuses on those incidents.

### DISCOURAGEMENT

“You are not cut out for doctoral work. You may want to try some other career. Are you sure you want to go on for a Ph.D.? You can make a good living with a master’s degree.” For many graduate students of color, the journey in pursuit of a doctoral degree begins with words designed to discourage them from beginning the process (Chesler and Crowfoot, 2000). They often report that they were advised early on by faculty and college advisors not to pursue a doctoral degree. Undergirding these statements of discouragement are the beliefs and assumptions that people of color are not talented or skilled enough to make it through a doctoral program.

## QUESTIONING ABILITY AND QUALIFICATIONS

“You speak and write very well, despite being from Mexico.” Graduate students of color often find that their academic skills, abilities, and experiences sometimes come as a surprise to members of the majority or are distorted, highlighted, and used against them. The previous microaggression is one that is directed at Latino/a students; however, plenty of examples can be found of similar comments referring to African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans. The message suggests that a student of color is surprisingly talented, despite not being born or raised in the United States, which is a false assumption, and that the group to which he or she belongs is not capable of producing high quality academic work. One student shares,

*Exacerbating this self-doubt and pressure to represent my entire ethnic group were rumblings among some White students in the program that I was admitted into the program primarily because I was Latino and not for my intellectual capabilities, nor my potential to be an effective counseling psychologist. (Herrera, 2003, p. 117)*

“We are calling to go over your qualifications for the doctoral program. We just want to make sure that you accomplished everything that you wrote down in your application.” Graduate students of color also report that the authenticity of their qualifications and accomplishments are constantly challenged by both faculty and fellow students. These range from follow-up phone calls placed to students of color after they have turned in their doctoral program applications in which the applicant’s accomplishments are scrutinized to responses that suggest disbelief about the academic and professional experiences of students of color.

“If you are going to make it in this doctoral program, let me give you some advice: You need to speak well and write well. You need to act professionally. Come to class on time.” In addition to the microaggressions discussed previously, some graduate students of color have reported being scolded by faculty in their program about their behavior, skills, and talents, the quality of their work, and their overall demeanor. The message to the students is full of demeaning assumptions about the lack of professionalism, abilities, and personal behavior.

“Congratulations on getting accepted to the Ph.D. program. Let me recommend as your advisor that you start with some master’s-level courses to nail down your fundamentals. Also, here is a list of academic support services on campus.” In addition to being lectured on professional behavior, one of the issues that graduate students of color often confront is low expectations from White faculty members regarding their skills and abilities.

Often, these manifest themselves as encouragement to take lower-level courses as a way of improving their abilities. Low expectations are based on false assumptions that leave the students shocked and dismayed.

“When we have class discussions, you are too theoretically aggressive. Lighten up.” On the other hand, being an extremely bright and intelligent graduate student of color sometimes becomes a liability. Many doctoral students of color have reported being sanctioned for engaging in deep theoretical discussions with professors and other students. Often, professors get frustrated and place a pejorative label on the behavior (e.g., “You are too aggressive in your thinking; tone it down”). Instead of using the student’s intelligence as a strength, it is used to remind the student that they are out of line (e.g., intellectually elitist) and need to conform to their role as a student.

“Fellow students are complaining that you appear to be angry, particularly during class discussions. What is going on?” Closely tied to this quote are the perceptions held by Whites that people of color are angry with them. Unfortunately, this stereotype plays out when graduate students of color are passionately engaged in classroom discussions. More specifically, some doctoral students of color are accused of behaving and speaking in an angry manner. To remedy the situation, a faculty member is often recruited to “chat” with the student of color to point out that there is a communication problem and that fellow students are complaining about her or his attitude in class. For the most part, the accusations are false and are specifically related to the misperception of passion as anger by Whites.

#### ASSUMING ETHNIC/RACIAL EXPERTISE

“We need you to explain to us why Asian Americans are quiet and unassuming.” Assumptions about the expertise regarding the groups to which they belong and the dynamics of race and ethnicity in the United States play out in the doctoral experience for graduate students of color.

One assumption that members of the majority often make is that all graduate students of color are experts on every aspect of the groups to which they belong (Chesler and Crowfoot, 2000). Thus, by this assumption, every Native American can comment at any moment about any aspect (e.g., economics, history, psychology, sociology, health) of over 500 tribes that reside in the United States. Three issues arise as a result of the incorrect assumption of ethnic/racial expertise. First, assuming that graduate students of color are experts on anything related to their groups is a direct contradiction of the belief that they are not intelligent, talented, and gifted for doctoral work. Second, graduate students of color often report fatigue from the assumption that they know everything and from constantly being asked to represent their group and educate the majority. Third, members of the majority take no



responsibility for educating themselves and instead opt to rely heavily on people of color to educate them.

"I know that this is the third committee this year that I have asked you to serve on, but I need the student-of-color perspective." Given the assumption of racial/ethnic expertise, graduate students of color often find themselves serving on too many committees and task forces for the department or university (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Faculty and administrators overtax the time and energy of the few students of color that have been recruited and admitted into a doctoral program. Most students of color agree that some service is positive and are willing to serve in order to support their department. However, service becomes a burden when they are asked to serve on too many initiatives while taking classes, writing papers, working, and undertaking many other student responsibilities, especially when their majority peers do not carry these additional duties.

"Can we interview you for our class project on poverty?" Graduate students of color also express frustration over being asked to serve as a "class project." That is, other students will ask a graduate student of color if they are willing to be interviewed for a class assignment examining poverty, race, education, or other sociological phenomena. The students of color often report feeling like exotic subjects to be studied and to have their lives publicly examined and/or problematized.

#### ACADEMIC INVALIDATION

"Your literature review should draw primarily from European writers who have most of the theories in this area." Graduate students of color often report that their academic work is constantly challenged and invalidated by majority faculty and students. They often encounter microaggressions related to their literature reviews, databases, methodology, and sources.

Some graduate students of color report that on occasion, White faculty have suggested to them that most of the literature review for their work should come from European/Western writers and sources. Faculty who push for the use of Western writers possess the worldview that all knowledge and great works have been produced by European or Western philosophers, artists, writers, economists, and other academicians. Moreover, the belief is that people from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world have not contributed to the world knowledge base and therefore are to be excluded from research, papers, theses, and dissertations. In the end, the European worldview is supported, and non-European worldviews are invalidated.

"Don't use the National Chicano Survey for your study. I don't think it is good data." Graduate students of color also report that their advisors sometimes discourage them from using local or national databases that

are specific to people of color. The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research's National Chicano Survey at the University of Michigan or other databases that specialize in people of color are perceived to be flawed; therefore, doctoral students of color are discouraged from using them, feeding back to the narrowly defined and exclusive canon previously described.

"You used a sample of 2,000 African Americans. How generalizable are your results? I have concerns about the validity of your findings." Despite using adequate sample sizes and other appropriate statistical measures, the methodology of graduate students of color sometimes comes under intense scrutiny and suspicion. When used by majority students, the methodology is supported as a sound approach. Yet, when students of color use the same methodology, it somehow becomes flawed and dubious.

"You are primarily using sources written by scholars of color. I think your work will not be as strong. Try to vary your sources." Using too many sources from scholars of color is touted as a deficit, and graduate students of color are discouraged from the practice. The publications, research, and journals of scholars of color all come under suspicion regarding their quality, rigor, and the soundness of the research.

#### SOCIAL NETWORKING AND INVOLVEMENT

"Don't hang out with graduate students of color. Don't segregate yourself." Research on involvement and engagement in college by students suggests that those students who are involved in their collegiate experience tend to have higher levels of persistence, graduation, and a multiplicity of other positive outcomes. However, for some graduate students of color, specific types of involvement such as ethnic/racial student groups and social justice activism are portrayed as detrimental to their experience (Herrera, 2003), whereas other experiences (e.g., volunteering to help the department) are encouraged.

Social support networks such as the African American Graduate Students Association or the Asian Graduate Student Social Workers Organization can contribute to the persistence and graduation of graduate students of color. Despite the research supporting the beneficial effects of social support networks, Latino/a, Asian, Native American, and African American graduate students are sometimes discouraged from participating in ethnic organizations that are negatively portrayed as forms of self-segregation.

"You are wasting time being an activist, addressing issues, and trying to reform the department. Your time would be better spent working on your academic work." Graduate students of color are often discouraged from addressing issues of social justice (Chesler and Crowfoot, 2000). The message

they receive is that “despite the fact that there are issues of inequality and discrimination in our department, you are wasting time being an activist.” In a nutshell, this is the message that graduate students of color receive when they tackle issues of diversity in their department or college. Stated differently, the students are told to stay in the role of being a student and to not “rock the boat.”

“We know that there is a lack of diversity in the department. Can you help us by going out to visit some of the local colleges and recruiting undergraduates to apply to our program?” In contrast to the involvement activities discussed previously, graduate students of color are often asked or encouraged to serve as volunteers for a department or college. This is particularly true in the area of recruitment of students of color. Doctoral students of color are often asked to become volunteer recruiters for what is essentially the responsibility of paid staff or faculty members. Thus, in addition to pursuing a doctoral degree, the students are asked to do extra, unpaid work to assist the department in diversifying the student body.

#### ETHNIC/RACIAL INVALIDATION

“You are different from other minorities. You don’t look ethnic!” Graduate students of color have a multitude of intersecting identities. It is important to recognize the within- and between-diversity of Latinos/as, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans. Nevertheless, despite this fact, White faculty, students, and staff often comment that some graduate students of color do not look like members of their group (Allport, 1954). The message is that people of color look a certain way and that the graduate student of color who is the target of the comment does not look like or belong to an ethnic group (Aguirre, 2000).

#### APPLYING FOR FACULTY POSITIONS

One of the dynamics along the pipeline for scholars of color is applying for faculty positions. In this section, we explore numerous microaggressions directed at individuals pursuing academic positions.

#### RECRUITMENT, SEARCH STRATEGIES, AND JOB DESCRIPTIONS

“We advertised in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and the local newspaper. It’s not our fault that people of color did not apply for the position.” One of the barriers in recruiting faculty of color is the perception of members of search committees that they simply have to advertise academic positions, and by virtue of some advertising, people of color will apply. This is a simplistic

and naive position that history has proved does not lead to diverse hiring pools. Nevertheless, the majority of searches in U.S. higher education operate under these assumptions that lead to minimal or no change in the diversity of faculty. Diversifying the faculty is a complicated, multidimensional, action-oriented, daily, and long-term process that requires resources and full-time staff for success.

“You’re suggesting that we modify the job description to include a statement about diversity. What does a position in finance have to do with diversity? I don’t get it.” Inclusive excellence is about embedding diversity into all aspects of the institution, including job descriptions. It is also about shifting the responsibility for inclusiveness to everyone at the institution (Milem et al., 2005). Nevertheless, the current campus diversity models impact the search process, because some departments and search committees believe that diversity has very little to do with them. To be effective in recruiting faculty of color, search committees will have to embed diversity into all aspects of the process (Smith, Turner, Osei-Kofi, & Richards, 2004; Turner, 2002).

“She is Asian, a graduate of Harvard, and being recruited by a lot of other universities. We will never be able to get her to come to our university. I don’t think we should waste our time trying to recruit her.” Often, departments fail to diversify their hiring pools because they become self-defeating in recruiting candidates of color (Smith, Wolf, & Busenberg, 1996; Turner, 2002). In essence, candidates are eliminated before they are even considered for a position. Stated differently, recruitment decisions are undertaken on behalf of candidates of color that essentially dismiss them from the process.

#### SEARCH COMMITTEES

“Why do we have to have racial diversity on the committee? We have expertise on the committee and are very capable of reviewing applications for this position.” The attitude expressed in this comment is often the sentiment of search committees as they begin the process of identifying candidates for a faculty position. The literature is clear about the importance of having a diverse search committee for the success of attracting and hiring faculty of color (Smith et al., 2004). Turner (2002) strongly recommends that search committees be as diverse as possible. She states that

*by involving people with different points of view or by bringing in a fresh face, the chair can ensure that multiple perspectives and fresh ideas are brought to bear in evaluating candidates. Also, people of color, whether administrators or faculty, should have a presence on the committee. One scholar of color, an endowed professor, emphasizes the importance of a diverse search committee. Be sure that there are*

*respected and highly visible people of color [who are committed to hiring of minorities] on the committee. (p. 13)*

#### CAMPUS VISIT

"I know that the digital projector that we ordered for the colloquium didn't work well. Nevertheless, her presentation was horrible." One of the salient issues that emerges during a candidate's campus visit is the hosts' carelessness in being attentive to the space, technology, and other presentation needs of candidates of color. A digital projector that does not work properly can ruin the presentation of a candidate. Hosting the candidates' colloquium in an old room can also influence the candidates' performance and possibly the impressions of members of the selection committee. First, there is no need for equipment failure when someone can easily check in advance the adequacy of the equipment. Second, inattentiveness to these issues may also send messages to the candidates of color about the value of diversity to the institution. Of course, presentation and space issues affect all candidates. However, it becomes extremely crucial when recruiting candidates of color. Microaggressions are committed when the candidates of color are eliminated from the process by blaming them for a poor presentation rather than the search committees taking responsibility for their failure to be attentive to the details of the campus visit.

#### PROTOCOL

"Hey folks, thank you for coming to this colloquium. This is Tracey, who will speak for about 30 minutes. Then, we will open it up for questions. Take it away, Tracey." It is good professional protocol to introduce all candidates, no matter their racial background or gender, properly and with their titles. However, candidates of color and women often report that protocol is violated when campus hosts do not introduce them using their doctoral title and are flippant about their academic background. The message, whether deliberate or unconscious, is one of disrespect and serves to devalue the accomplishments of these candidates.

#### ETHNIC/RACIAL INSULTS

"It will be great having you as a colleague, because you can tell us where all the great Mexican restaurants are in town." This is one example of racial insults that candidates of color are often subjected to during their visit to campus. Embedded in the message are degrading stereotypes and assumptions about the candidates and the added value that they bring to the

academy. It may also signal to the candidate about what to expect in the way of professional and interpersonal relations if they accept a position with the department and institution.

#### CANDIDATE SELECTION

“Yes, she is a highly qualified Native American scholar and can be successful in our department. But I have serious doubts that she will ever leave her current position and accept the job at our institution. We should go with the second candidate.” Highly qualified candidates of color are often dismissed in the final candidate selection process using superfluous and irrelevant criteria. Thus, instead of extending a job offer to the candidate, they are dismissed in favor of other candidates based on speculation and unfounded assumptions.

#### REVERSE QUOTA

“We hired a South Asian faculty member two years ago. Isn’t that enough? Why do we have to hire another person of color?” Hiring more than one faculty of color into a department is often turned into a problem by search committees that results in not hiring additional faculty of color. In the end, diversity becomes a burden and a liability against hiring additional candidates of color in what essentially amounts to a “reverse quota.” Padilla and Chavez (1995) refer to this phenomenon as the “one-slot-for-minorities hiring rule” (p. 11). Moreover, search committees that impose such quotas fail to realize how difficult it is to recruit people of color and the opportunities squandered when they limit themselves to one faculty of color, which further tokenizes the one person of color in the department.

#### FIT

“I am just not sure that she is a good fit for our department. I didn’t like her attitude and dress.” The concept of “fit,” of who is compatible with faculty in a department, is often used to dismiss and not hire candidates of color. In describing this phenomenon, Turner (2002) suggests that search committees have a penchant for hiring faculty who resemble the faculty who are already in the department. Danowitz-Sagarra (2002) describes the tendency to hire people who look like “us” as an evaluative filter. She writes:

*Candidates were screened for professional behavior, leadership and decision-making style, as well as their fit and image within an administrative unit and/or university. This filter evolved throughout searches as thresholds were established for all candidates*

*or when one candidate exhibited characteristics or behaviors judged desirable by a search chair or committee member. The standards applied were often vague, value-laden, class-, culture-, or ideologically based. (p. 687)*

In sum, fit can often carry a message about the language, appearance, communication style, and other personal attributes that selection committees and hiring authorities find valuable and attractive in a candidate (Chesler & Crowfoot, 2000; Danowitz-Sagaria, 2002). Often, candidates of color are not hired under the guise that they do not fit in the department.

#### JOB OFFER/NEGOTIATING CONTRACT

“We really value diversity and want to diversify our faculty. However, the faculty in the department have low salaries, so we can’t offer you a higher salary than them. It just wouldn’t be fair.” Candidates of color often report that colleges and university representatives often give mixed messages about the value of diversity during contract negotiations. On the one hand, the diversity is touted during the visit as a valuable goal of the institution. On the other hand, the compensation packages that are offered to scholars of color do not reflect this philosophy. Granted, compensation of faculty is a complicated process involving a multiplicity of factors. However, there are plenty of cases where White candidates have received generous packages justified by the perceived value of their contributions to the department. Conversely, there are also cases in which equally qualified candidates of color are offered less because their value and contributions to the institutions are devalued.

#### PURSUING TENURE

The pursuit of tenure is the end goal for some faculty. However, in considering scholars of color, the process can be challenging in different ways than for majority faculty. Some of the challenges are microaggressions, which are explored further in the following section.

#### TEACHING

“Two of your students came to see me as the chair of the department with complaints about your teaching. They are upset about your in-class comments regarding White privilege. What are you doing to these students? How are the other 35 students doing? I am concerned.” Faculty of color often receive complaints by majority students, particularly about their teaching. Research has demonstrated that faculty of color and women

faculty sometimes receive lower teaching evaluations than other faculty, especially when they teach courses on diversity (Davalos, 1999). For the most part, these courses challenge the students' perceptions of racial, ethnic, and gender dynamics and the privileges attached to those social identities. In pushing the students to think critically about these issues, some students become contentious, disagree, become argumentative, and file complaints with the chair of the department. In addressing the issue, faculty of color often report that the chair automatically takes the side of the students instead of listening to the faculty member to learn about the situation. The concern is that these evaluations will be taken into consideration during the tenure review process.

#### ACADEMIC SEGREGATION

"We assigned you to teach three of our diversity courses. I think you will really enjoy teaching them. Good luck." Pre-tenure faculty of color report that they are academically segregated when it comes to diversity in a department (Aguirre, 1995). Teaching courses is a good example. Faculty of color often report that they are assigned to teach all of the multicultural-related courses in a department. The message in this action is that White faculty are not responsible for diversity and that these courses are the domain of faculty of color. Moreover, studies have shown that these are some of the most difficult, contentious, and emotionally draining courses. Teaching about differences, power, privilege, and oppression is extremely challenging work (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). As stated previously, student evaluations for these courses are often negative and can affect tenure for faculty of color.

#### RESEARCH

"You shouldn't publish in ethnic/racial journals, because that is not going to get you tenure. You should publish in mainstream publications that are reputable. Also, don't do research on people of color. It is too narrow and does not really contribute to the field." Scholars of color report that their research on race and ethnicity is often devalued by White faculty colleagues (Gregory, 1999; Turner & Myers, 2000). In addition, journals that are devoted to race and ethnicity are devalued by White faculty colleagues, and junior faculty of color are told not to publish in them (Chesler & Crowfoot, 2000). Specifically, early on, many pre-tenure faculty of color are advised not to publish research in, for example, the *Journal of Chicana/o Studies* or the *Journal of African American History*, because the work will not count or will be valued less toward tenure.



## SERVICE

“Don’t get involved with ethnic/racial campus or community organizations and groups. It will not get you tenure.” Campus and community service has always been controversial in relation to tenure. Faculty in general are told that service is an important part of the tenure process. Nevertheless, there is much research that suggests that research and publications carry an over-preponderance of weight when it comes to tenure. For faculty of color, campus and community service to ethnic/racial communities is often not an option. For reasons ranging from a commitment to social justice to collectivism and care for communities of color, faculty of color are called upon to mentor students of color and majority students, serve on diversity committees, participate and support community agencies, join ethnic/racial campus groups, address issues of discrimination, and many other service activities (Canul, 2003). In addition to all of these volunteer efforts, faculty of color have to teach, undertake research, and publish. Nevertheless, in the end, many of these activities are discounted in the tenure process.

## DIVERSITY TAXATION

“I know that you are serving on the university-wide diversity committee. So, I hate to ask you to set up and run a diversity committee that will examine issues of diversity in the department, but will you do it?” While faculty of color are discouraged from campus and community service involving ethnic/racial constituencies and organizations, administrators are not shy about recruiting them to do service within and outside the department. This is particularly true when it comes to diversity work (e.g., “We need the minority perspective”) but also applies to other activities related to the department (e.g., new-student orientation, search committees, recruiting students of color; Smith et al., 1996; Torres-Guzman, 1995). In the end, service to the department is often not considered in the tenure process (Aguirre, 2000).

## TENURE

“You wrote two books on racism, five articles in refereed journals, and three chapters in edited books. That is all good for possibly getting tenure, but your teaching evaluations are not that great.” The literature on the experiences of faculty of color chronicles a multiplicity of issues that emerge in attempting to achieve tenure. Discrimination, politics, and nebulous tenure standards and guidelines are but a few of the issues that mar the academic career path of many faculty of color (Padilla & Chavez, 1995). Often, faculty of color are held to higher and different standards.

## IMPLICATIONS

The microaggressions presented in this chapter and found all along the educational pipeline have implications in a number of areas. First, inclusive excellence is a process designed to transform colleges and universities into institutions that embrace and value the presence and contributions of all sexual orientations, Latinos/as, African Americans, differently abled people, all genders, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and many other groups found on college campuses. Clearly, microaggressions mitigate against the implementation and fulfillment of IE by contributing to hostile and unwelcoming environments. This in turn contributes to the loss from or the failure to recruit to the pipeline scholars of color, which diminishes the goal of inclusive excellence.

Second, the large number of faculty who are slated to retire in the near future makes the recruitment of faculty of color an opportunity and a timely and pressing issue. Given the changing demographics with more students of color accessing higher education, it is clear that in order to find replacements for those retiring professors, we will have to educate, train, and draw from the population of scholars of color. In turn, this suggests that success in this area will depend on the improvement of the pipeline and movement of scholars of color into the ranks of the faculty. The literature on the recruitment and retention of scholars of color suggests that there are numerous barriers that they confront on the path to becoming tenured faculty members (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Padilla & Chavez, 1995). These challenges include a multiplicity of microaggressions that erode the likelihood of yielding a significant cadre of faculty of color. Thus, we must make an effort to rid the pipeline of microaggressions, improve the journey, and increase the number of scholars of color pursuing academic careers.

Finally, microaggressions are antithetical to our notions of social justice, equality, equity, and a whole host of other democratic values. That is, most institutions of higher learning explicitly espouse values and goals regarding the improvement of and care for human diversity. Yet, racial insults and invalidations contradict these ideals and augment in a variety of ways the distance and inequalities between us and our fellow human beings. Discrimination, oppression, prejudice, and all genres of inequalities are manifestations of processes that expose an inconsistency between our institutions' ideal and actual values. Given that they are part of and support an entire system of oppression and privilege (Adams et al., 1997), the same holds true for microaggressions.

Given that microaggressions in academia are perpetuated by well-intentioned, good people who do so unconsciously—as opposed to bigoted individuals—addressing and eliminating these acts of insensitivity will be

challenging (Adams et al., 1997). Nevertheless, there are a number of action steps and strategies that can be taken, and in the following section, we propose several recommendations.

As is the case with most human problems, awareness is the first step in the process of reducing or eliminating microaggressions. By contributing to the literature and examining microaggressions directed at scholars of color, the authors hope that this is a beginning point for becoming aware of the existence and dynamics of microaggressions in the academy. To address microaggressions in the graduate school experience, discussions and readings about microaggressions should be disseminated at and introduced in graduate-student orientations by faculty and staff. The more that faculty and students know about microinsults and microinvalidations, the more that they will be empowered to think about and address them.

Addressing microaggressions that occur while scholars of color are applying for academic positions will require working with those who play a role in the recruitment of candidates of color and in search committees (Turner & Myers, 2000). Representatives of human resource departments and equal opportunity units need to incorporate information about microaggressions and their negative impact on the recruitment of multicultural talent into their work with search committees. The goal is to disseminate information and educate others who play a role in the recruitment pipeline about the destructive nature of racial insults and invalidations.

Microaggressions and their impact on the tenure process need to be addressed by educating and training tenure committees. Deans and department chairs could host campus workshops for all faculty to understand how microaggressions work against scholars of color in the tenure review process. One area with which tenure committees need to become familiar involves the journals that publish the work of faculty of color. A common grievance (i.e., microaggression) often heard from members of tenure committees involves being unfamiliar with ethnic/racial scholarly publications such as *Atzlan*, the *Journal of Chicano/a Studies*, and the *Journal of the National Association of Black Social Workers*. In the end, this lack of familiarity leads to the disqualification or omission of valuable research conducted by scholars of color who are engaged in the tenure review process. Here, library staff could be enlisted to help faculty become familiar with these important journals as a way to accurately assess the work of scholars of color.

In addition to institutional-level interventions just discussed, addressing microaggressions at the individual level will be required for effective and lasting change. Obviously, the interventions will differ between those who commit microaggressions—White faculty and students—and those who are subjected to them—scholars of color.

Formal diversity trainings are a conventional and acceptable means of promoting awareness and understanding of microaggressions. White faculty and students will have to be educated about and trained in microaggressions, including the concepts of White privilege and modern aversive racism. Since the manifestations of aversive racism are generally subtle and unconscious, improving personal understanding and self-awareness requires more than merely acquiring knowledge. In addition, the person's ability, openness, and willingness to discuss racism and diversity must also be developed.

Building on the heightened awareness and understanding of White faculty, the amelioration of microaggressions can be further advanced by White faculty working toward becoming allies to faculty of color. White faculty who become allies can utilize their privilege to speak out and support their colleagues of color, particularly in circumstances when microaggressions have occurred. Creating cadres of allies can be a powerful means of addressing microaggressions.

Addressing microaggressions in relation to the pipeline will also require specific training of scholars of color designed to improve their understanding of academia and thereby encourage their participation. One particular program that has met with some success is the University of Denver's "Promoting Multicultural Excellence in the Academy," a national summer institute designed to address the underrepresentation of faculty of color and women in academia. The institute assists participants in clarifying their goals with respect to pursuing a faculty career and provides doctoral students of color and women with the necessary information to prepare them for faculty positions in higher education. As a part of the institute, participants are exposed to examples of racial microaggressions that they will encounter on their journey toward becoming faculty and how to successfully address them. In the end, more of these programs will be required if we are to diversify the academy.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter on microaggressions and the challenging journey that scholars of color traverse along the pipeline toward academia initiates the process of exposing specific examples of microinsults and microinvalidations directed at people of color as they complete doctoral degrees, apply for academic positions, and pursue tenure. It is imperative for many compelling reasons that microaggressions be addressed, exposed, and ameliorated. This is especially true if we are to increase the number of scholars of color and diversify the academy. The work presented in this chapter is limited, given that the authors relied heavily on the literature and personal experiences rather than a full-blown study designed to systematically examine racial

microaggressions. Future research must focus on systematic studies, both quantitative and qualitative, that specifically examine the microaggressions that scholars of color experience on their journey into academia. Studies that focus on the perpetrators of microaggressions and the motivations behind the insults and invalidations would be helpful. Moreover, studies attempting to determine how to prevent and educate about microaggressions would contribute greatly to the literature.

This chapter represents a beginning point in exposing and understanding racial microaggressions directed at scholars of color. Addressing microaggressions will improve the pipeline and allow for an increase in the recruitment and retention of faculty of color.

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