Racial Battle Fatigue. Strategies for Recovery and Resiliency in Academic Advisors

Doris Wright Carroll, Kansas State University
Mark Nelson, Oklahoma State University
Sonia Esquivel, U.S. Air Force Academy
What is Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF)?

Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) is described as “social-psychological stress responses associated with being a person of color and the repeated target of racism (e.g., frustration, anger, exhaustion, physical avoidance, psychological or emotional withdrawal, escapism, acceptance of racist attributions)”

(Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007, p. 552)

The accumulative encumbrance and consequences of racism, which can result in “public health and mental illness,” are racial microaggressions.

(Pierce, 1970, p. 266)
Conceptual Racial Battle Fatigue Model
Microaggressions are **brief, everyday exchanges** that send **denigrating messages** to a target group (Sue & Sue, 2008).

They are extremely damaging because they can impair classroom performance and work productivity by creating emotional turmoil and depleting psychological resources for multicultural and multiracial persons and other groups (Sue, 2005).
Racial microaggressions and subtle racial discrimination are prevalent in educational settings (Harwood et al., 2015; Sue, 2010), workplace (Deitch et al., 2003), clinical settings (Sue et al., 2007). They negatively impact individuals’ emotional and physical health, and performance and productivity (Flores et al., 2010; Lambert et al., 2009; Pieterse et al., 2010; Wei et al., 2010).
A survey conducted by Alleyne (2004) found that Black professionals experience co-workers’ a) failure to notice their presence; b) refusal to make eye contact; c) repeated instances of exclusion; d) overuse of adjectives such as aggressive, scary, angry frightening, threatening, problem, difficulty, when referring to them; e) offensive language and inappropriate jokes.
What does RBF look like for Advisors of Color?

- Racial microaggressions lead to advisors having these responses:
  - Physiological responses
  - Psychological stress responses
  - Cultural /environmental responses – disengagement, withdrawing from activities, job transfer – examples?
Psychological:

As an advisor I build trusting relationships with my students and when they come to me with issues, I feel like a mom, I want to go and take care of the issue for them. I had a student of color who was being pushed around in the dorms and at football games, he was soft spoken and just tolerating it until he was tripped and was injured.

He told me about it and when I shared this with the Residential Life/Student Affairs, I came off as the angry Latina with an attitude and defensive, of course I get angry and frustrated when what they are doing is affecting the sense of belonging of my student.

A Latina Advisor of 15 years in a liberal arts college
Physiological

Honestly, sometimes I just want to give up the fight, it is not worth my sleepless nights, I am so tired of the administration not listening or acting on the racial instances on campus, I feel helpless to the students, they need more advocates, perhaps the admin will listen to a white male? A Latina Advisor of 15 years in a liberal arts college

There are not many people who understand why I am so passionate about the retention of my students, especially students of color. When I am told that the university does not see color and all students are treated the same, I feel my heart pounding, because they are not seeing me for who I am and what I bring to the table or understanding why the student has issues.

A Latina Advisor of 15 years in a liberal arts college
Behavioral:

I advised & taught courses at a southern public university. Department chair Michaels gave everyone a fruit cake from a decades old Civil War family recipe. The other advisors warned me just to accept the fruit cake, and then toss it. As Thanksgiving approached, I had planned to stay in the city for the holiday, but instead went home to the Midwest. Dr. Michaels had already invited me for dinner earlier in the month. The rural county where he lived had a long KKK history.

When I informed Dr. Michaels that I had changed my plans to fly home, he was first disappointed and then angry with me. I tried to explain, but the damage to our relationship was done. Civil war fruitcake, going to a rural county with a Klan history was a lot to handle that first year of teaching.

*An African American faculty with 25 +years of college work.*

$D$
What are RBF long-term consequences?

One of the latest academic works, featured in the Journal of Anxiety Disorders, focused on generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) — defined as more than six months of severe worrying and tension.

Researchers examined data from the National Survey of American Life, a study of more than 5,800 American adults — 60 percent of whom were African American, nearly 25 percent were Afro-Caribbean, and 15 percent were non-Hispanic whites. More than 40 percent of the African Americans surveyed recounted receiving some form of racial discrimination, and nearly 5 percent suffered from GAD. Meanwhile, nearly 39 percent of Afro-Caribbean respondents said they received discrimination, and less than three percent developed GAD.

What can advising offices do to reduce Racial Battle Fatigue and manage microaggressions?
Strategies for Recovery and Resiliency

Self-care, wellness, Spiritual and mindfulness interventions

• Self-care is, “something someone does to improve the sense of subjective wellbeing. How one obtains positive rather than negative life outcomes” (Barnett et al., 2007).

• Ask yourself if you’re being triggered. Acknowledge your answer.

• Stop, breathe, remain calm, Don’t panic.

• Assume the intent was not malicious; assume ignorance.

• Recognize there is no right way to respond.
Strategies for Recovery and Resiliency

Self-care, wellness, spiritual and mindfulness interventions

Make clear your feelings to the microaggressor, help them understand why you did not appreciate their remark or action.

As Maya Angelou said, “When we know better, we do better”.

Seek peer support. You are not alone in experiencing RBT and living with microaggressions.
### Strategies for Recovery and Resiliency

#### Institutional climate strategies and systemic peer support resources

- Provide professional development to all advisors, faculty, professional staff and students about RBT and microaggressions.

- Collaborate with EAP, counseling services, and other employee benefit offices create online support resources for employees.

- Establish wellness policies that address microaggressions and acknowledge the existence of RBF.

- Assess institute climate for academic advisors and other professionals.
NACADA Support Resources

Advising Community within NACADA dedicated to advisor retention and wellness. Talk with Jake Rudy and Kacey Gregerson

Multicultural Concerns Community. Kim Nanez Incoming chair

Husband, Miracle (2016) "Racial Battle Fatigue and the Black Student Affairs Professional in the Era of #BlackLivesMatter, The Vermont Connection. Vol. 37, Article 10. Available at: http://scholarworks.uvm.edu/tvc/vol37/iss1/10

Thank you!

Doris W. Carroll  dcarroll@ksu.edu
Mark Nelson  msnelson@okstate.edu
Sonia Esquivel  Sonia.Esquivel@usafa.edu
Racial Battle Fatigue. *Strategies for Recovery and Resiliency in Academic Advisors*

**Reading Resources**


Husband, Miracle (2016) "Racial Battle Fatigue and the Black Student Affairs Professional in the Era of #BlackLivesMatter, *The Vermont Connection*. Vol. 37, Article 10. Available at: [http://scholarworks.uvm.edu/tvc/vol37/iss1/10](http://scholarworks.uvm.edu/tvc/vol37/iss1/10)


