This Battle is Not Yours or Is It?
Examining the Impact of Racial Battle Fatigue

Presenters
Brian J. Cousin – Rutgers University
Varselles L. Cummings – Texas A&M University
Jarrod E. Druery – University of Louisville
Learning Outcomes

• Understand theoretical framework of racial battle fatigue (RBF)

• Identify factors that lead to RBF

• Recognize how RBF impacts students and professionals

• Examine institutional climates and practices that perpetuate racism and RBF

• Discuss ways to challenge and cope with RBF while supporting and advocating for students and others who may be impacted
Theoretical Framework

RBF is a response to the mental and emotional distress that arises from daily encounters of racism (Smith, 2004).

Black faculty experience racial microaggressions, and their collective experiences convey that a lifetime of microaggressions and cumulative stress leads to RBF (Smith, 2006).

Black males are stereotyped, placed under increased surveillance and policing tactics, and characterized as being “out of place” or “fitting the description” of illegitimate non-members of the campus community (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007).

RBF involves the increased levels of psychosocial stressors and the resulting psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses of dealing with and fighting racism (Smith, Hung, & Franklin, 2011).

Racial microaggressions strongly impact psychological stress responses for Latinx (Franklin, Smith & Hung, 2014).
Theoretical Framework

Psychological Stress Responses

*EXAMPLES:* Frustration, defensiveness, apathy, irritability, sudden changes in mood, shock, anger, disappointment, resentment, anxiety, worry, disbelief, disappointment, helplessness, hopelessness, and fear.

Racial Microaggressions

Emotional/Behavioral Stress Responses

*EXAMPLES:* Stereotype threat, "John Henryism" or prolonged, high-effort coping with difficult psychological stressors, increased commitment to spirituality, overeating or loss of appetite, impatience, quickness to argue, procrastination, increased use of alcohol or drugs, increased smoking, withdrawal or isolation from others, neglect of responsibility, poor school or job performance, and changes in close family relationships.

Physiological Stress Responses

*EXAMPLES:* Headaches, grinding teeth, clenched jaws, chest pain, shortness of breath, pounding heart, high blood pressure, muscle aches, indigestion, gastric distress, constipation or diarrhea, increased perspiration, intestinal problems, hives, rashes, sleep disturbance, fatigue, insomnia, and frequent illness.

Figure 1. Cause and stress responses to racial battle fatigue.
Impact of RBF

- Racial Battle Fatigue and Anxiety Disorder
  - Generalized Anxiety Disorder (Soto, Dawson-Andoh, & Belue, 2011)

- **Physiological Impact**
  - Tension headaches and backaches
  - Loss of appetite
  - Elevated blood pressure

- **Psychological Impact**
  - Constant anxiety and worrying
  - Inability to sleep
  - Sleep broken by conflict specific dreams
  - Hypervigilance
  - Difficulty in thinking coherently or being able to articulate
  - Frustration
  - John Henryism
  - Anger suppression
  - Resentment
  - Keeping quiet
  - Social and emotional withdrawal
Calling In Black

https://youtu.be/cpVeUVcFMAU
The Struggle to Keep Up the Good Fight
The Struggle to Keep Up the Good Fight

- What are some of the institutional experiences and/or practices that perpetuate racial battle fatigue?
- How do we challenge some of our institutional practices?
- How may we be able to cope with RBF but still maintain professionalism?
- How do we support our students dealing with RBF?
The Struggle to Keep Up the Good Fight

**Steps to Self Care After Emotional and Psychological Trauma**

Race-based trauma can create symptoms and experiences much like PTSD. Repeated race-based trauma puts your emotional, psychological, and physical well-being at risk.

**Mindful Isolation**
- Disconnect from triggering interactions or other situations that might elicit the fight-or-flight response.

**Discharge Energy**
- Find ways to exert physical energy. Go for a brisk walk or run. Find (safe) ways to discharge intense anger that includes physical movement.

**Ask For Help**
- If you find yourself unable to cope, find a trauma support group or therapist to assist you. You matter.

**Community**
- Connect with people who you’ve identified as your empathetic and open support. Process your feelings with them.

**Well-Being**
- Feed yourself well
- Get good rest
- Avoid toxins
- Breath deep

JustJasmineBlog.com
Self-care doesn't mean you are selfish. It means that your needs count too.

CounselingRecovery.com
WE GON' BE ALRIGHT


Final Thoughts

Jarrod Druery, M.Ed.
University of Louisville
jedruery@gmail.com

Brian J. Cousin, M.S.W.
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
brian.cousin@echo.rutgers.edu

Varselles Cummings
Texas A&M University
vcummings@dms.tamu.edu