



# Center for Critical Race Studies at UCLA

## Research Briefs

June 2016 • Issue No. 2

### Understanding the Corollaries of Offensive Racial Mechanisms, Gendered Racism, and Racial Battle Fatigue

William A. Smith  
University of Utah

One of the most significant and persistent concerns for Communities of Color is the effect of racism. People of Color are constantly stressed from the burdens of defending their humanity and existence. Rarely are the diversities and intersectionalities of their humanness considered, as they are forced to respond to how dominant White society sees and treats them: as a racial group only. For example, a socially identified Puerto Rican woman might see herself not only at the intersections of race and gender but also at intersections of class, physical impairment, sexuality, phenotype, ethnicity, and languages. Yet, dominant society forces her, “back,” into a more “simplified” racialized or racialized-gendered identity. Subjectification streamlines the process for classifying People of Color as racial/ethnic stereotypes, reinforcing discriminatory practices and reducing the process to race, the easiest and most common group denominator. Such reductionism activates and strengthens most Whites’ abilities to acquire psychological, emotional, physiological, economic, cultural, and residential wealth.

People of Color experience acute or chronic stress from discriminatory treatment and racial microaggressions, decreasing their biopsychosocial health. Racial microaggressions include but are not limited to merciless and mundane exclusionary messages, being treated as less than fully human, and civil and human rights violations. Racial microaggressions heighten perceptions of an endangered, questionable existence in People of Color’s minds (Profit, Mino, & Pierce, 2000) and are key to understanding increases in Racial Battle Fatigue (Smith, 2004) resulting from the psychological and physiological stress racially marginalized individuals/groups experience in response to specific race-related interactions between them and the surrounding dominant environment. Race-related stress taxes and exceeds available resilient coping resources for People of Color, while many Whites easily build sociocultural and economic environments and resources that shield them from race-based stress and threats to their racial entitlements.

What is at stake, here, is the quest for equilibrium versus disequilibrium in a racist society that marginalizes human beings into substandard racial groups. The charge to more fully understand racial disequilibrium raises a corollary charge to better comprehend how racial misogyny and misandry impacts Women and Men of Color’s lives, achievements, ambitions, wealth, and health. Identifying and counteracting the biopsychosocial and behavioral consequences of actual or perceived racism, gendered-racism, and Racial Battle Fatigue is a premier challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dr. Chester M. Pierce (1970) coined the term racial microaggressions to help psychiatrists and psychologists understand the enormity and complications of what he classified as racism's "subtle blows" which are "delivered incessantly" at Blacks (p. 267). He subcategorized racial microaggressions as part of offensive mechanisms "which assure that the person in the inferior status is ignored, tyrannized, terrorized, and minimized" (p. 267). Racial microaggressions, then, are subtle attacks or invalidations against individuals because of race or ethnic group membership.

Offensive mechanisms ensure racialized groups are consistently kept in unbalanced positions, responding to micro- and macro-level attacks. Racial micro-offenses or microaggressions help explain how racism shortens life expectancy in targeted populations. The body codes racism as a violent attack. As a result, racism can be experienced as both a macro-level (social) and micro-level (individual) stressor that negatively impacts the psychological, emotional, and physiological health of People of Color in the U.S. (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas/os, Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, and bi- and multiracial people) (Anderson,

1989; Brondolo, Brady ver Halen, Pencille, Beatty, & Contrada, 2009; Carter & Forsyth, 2010; Pierce, 1970, 1974, 1975a, 1975b, 1988, 1995; Ramos, Jaccard, & Guilamo-Ramos, 2003; Smith, 2004, 2008a, 2008b). Racial Battle Fatigue is caused by the constant redirection of energy needed for emergency situations, mainly for psychosocial reasons, to deal with race-related stress. This also compromises resilient coping resources when used for responding to mundane forms of racism. Energy redirection and loss depletes psychological and physiological resources needed for important, creative, and productive areas of life (Smith, 2008b). The cost of racism must be understood as deterioration in the quality of life, stunted personal achievements, reduced interpersonal emotional effectiveness, and shortened life spans. These conditions occur from exposure to chronic and pathogenic forms of everyday racism.

## DISCUSSION

The cumulative effects of racial microaggressions can be linked to illnesses, shortened lifespans, lack of self-confidence, lowered motivation, trouble concentrating, excessive worrying, avoidance, hyper-vigilance, irritability, headaches, diabetes, fatigue, and muscle tension (Anderson, 1989; Smith, 2004, 2008a, 2008b). Microaggressions affect most racially marginalized and

oppressed people in the U.S. and cause stress hormones, designed to deal with acute danger, to operate as if they were in a chronic state of guardedness and threat. The threat can be at racial/ethnic group or racial-gender group levels. Disturbingly, the effects of real and anticipated racial microaggressions are supported within the larger societal structure, particularly in terms of racial misogyny and racial misandry.

Racial misogyny justifies and reinforces the subordination and oppression of Women of Color. Offensive racial misogynistic mechanisms operate to specifically target and marginalize Women of Color (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, 2010). A classic example of a social structure leading to racial misogyny and Racial Battle Fatigue is the hyper-policing of Black people. Sandra "Sandy" Bland's frustration at what many People of Color perceived as an unwarranted police stop was highlighted on a police video recording in July 2015. Within days of her arrest, Bland was found dead. Bland had lived in towns in Texas and her home state of Illinois where Blacks are up to four and a half times more likely to be stopped for traffic violations than White drivers and more than four times more likely to be searched (Nathan, 2016). This and many other examples cause Women of Color to have

increased levels of Racial Battle Fatigue that jeopardize their ability to live healthy and peaceful lives as partners, mothers, sisters, and friends.

Racial misandry refers to an exaggerated pathological aversion toward racially marginalized Men of Color that is reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices, and behaviors (Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2007; Smith, 2010). For instance, despite video evidence, most police officers can be acquitted or never charged for the unarmed killing of hundreds of African American and Latino boys and men (Hall, Hall, & Perry, 2016). Boys of Color must learn very early to negotiate a society that devalues their existence regardless of their innocence, age, education, or social-economic standing. Like racial misogyny, racially misandric environments cause Men of Color to negotiate hostile and often caustic conditions at the expense of unimpeded growth and development. This places Men of Color in jeopardy of Racial Battle Fatigue.

At the micro- and macro-level, offensive racial mechanisms—experienced as continuous racial attacks—can lead to Racial Battle Fatigue. A full understanding of the cost of racism and how it impacts People of Color in their pursuit of a healthy and

productive life is needed. Once offensive racial mechanisms are understood, successful strategies can be developed for reducing Racial Battle Fatigue and promoting a healthier and successful life for People of Color.

## CONCLUSION

Researchers must begin more complete investigations concerning how systemic racism, institutionalized oppression, and racial microaggressions cause Racial Battle Fatigue in the lives of People of Color. These investigations must be undertaken at racial/ethnic and racial/ethnic/gender levels, inclusive of multiple identities. We must understand commonalities across groups but also more nuanced ways an oppressive system attacks specific marginalized identities within racialized structures. This represents the biggest gap in our understanding and ability to develop effective defensive mechanisms.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, N. B. (1989). Racial differences in stress-induced cardiovascular reactivity and hypertension: Current status and substantive issues. *Psychological Bulletin*, 105(1), 89-105.
- Brondolo, E., Brady ver Halen, N., Pencille, M., Beatty, D., & Contrada, R. (2009). Coping with racism: A selective review of the literature and a theoretical and methodological critique. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 32(1), 64-88.
- Carter, R. T., & Forsyth, J. (2010). Reactions to racial discrimination: Emotional stress and help-seeking behaviors. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*, 2(3), 183-191.
- Hall, A. V., Hall, E. V., & Perry, J. L. (2016). Black and blue: Exploring racial bias and law enforcement in the killings of unarmed black male civilians. *American Psychologist*, 71(3), 175-186.
- Nathan, D. (2016, April 21). *What Happened to Sandra Bland?* Retrieved April 28, 2016, from <http://www.thenation.com/article/what-happened-to-sandra-bland/>
- Pierce, C. M. (1970). Offensive mechanisms. In F. Barbour (Ed.), *The Black seventies* (pp. 265-282). Boston: Porter Sargent.
- Pierce, C. M. (1974). Psychiatric problems of the Black minority. In G. Caplan & S. Arieti (Eds.), *American handbook of psychiatry* (pp. 512-523). New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Pierce, C. M. (1975a). The mundane extreme environment and its effect on learning. In S. G. Brainard (Ed.), *Learning disabilities: Issues and recommendations for research* (pp. 111-119). Washington, DC: National Institute of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.
- Pierce, C. M. (1975b). Poverty and racism as they affect children. In I. Berlin (Ed.), *Advocacy for child mental health* (pp. 92-109). New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.
- Pierce, C. M. (1988). Stress in the workplace. In A. F. Coner-Edwards & J. Spurlock (Eds.), *Black families in crisis: The middle class* (pp. 27-35). New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.

## REFERENCES CONT.

Pierce, C. M. (1995). Stress analogs of racism and sexism: Terrorism, torture, and disaster. In C. Willie, P. Rieker, B. Kramer & B. Brown (Eds.), *Mental health, racism and sexism* (pp. 277-293). Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Proft, W. E., Mino, I., & Pierce, C. M. (2000). Stress in Blacks. In G. Fink (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Stress* (pp. 324-330). London: Academic Press.

Ramos, B., Jaccard, J., & Guilamo-Ramos, V. (2003). Dual ethnicity and depressive symptoms: Implications of being Black and Latino in the United States. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 25(2), 147-173.

Smith, W. A. (2004). Black faculty coping with racial battle fatigue: The campus racial climate in a post-civil rights era. In D. Cleveland (Ed.), *A long way to go: Conversations about race by African American faculty and graduate students* (pp. 171-190). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Smith, W. A., Allen, W. R., & Danley, L. L. (December 2007). "Assume the Position . . . You Fit the Description": Campus Racial Climate and the Psychoeducational Experiences and Racial Battle fatigue among African American Male College Students. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(4), 551-578.

Smith, W. A. (2008a). Campus wide climate: Implications for African American students. In L. Tillman (Ed.), *A handbook of African American education* (pp. 297-309). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Smith, W. A. (2008b). Higher education: Racial battle fatigue. In R. T. Schaefer (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of race, ethnicity, and society* (pp. 615-618). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Smith, W. A. (2010). Toward an understanding of Black misandric microaggressions and racial battle fatigue in historically White institutions. In V. C. Polite (Ed.), *The state of the African American male in Michigan: A courageous conversation* (pp. 265-277). East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.

Smith, W. A., Yosso, T. J., & Solórzano, D. G. (2007). Racial primes and black misandry on historically white campuses: Toward a critical race accountability in educational administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(5), 559-585.

---

**WILLIAM A. SMITH**, Ph.D. is an associate professor at the University of Utah. He holds a joint appointment in the College of Education in the department of Education, Culture, and Society and the School for Cultural and Social Transformation in the department of Ethnic Studies.

### Center for Critical Race Studies at UCLA

1041F Moore Hall  
Los Angeles, CA 90095  
[ccrs@gseis.ucla.edu](mailto:ccrs@gseis.ucla.edu)



### MISSION STATEMENT

The Center for Critical Race Studies at UCLA supports interdisciplinary, collaborative, and policy-oriented research on issues critical to Communities of Color.

---

**Center for Critical Race Studies Briefs.** An ongoing series offering research on critical issues facing Communities of Color. Editor: Daniel G. Solórzano. Co-Editors: Tanya Gaxiola Serrano, Ryan E. Santos, Nora Cisneros, Alma Itzé Flores, & Nichole M. Garcia.

This Brief Series was made possible in part through funding from the offices of the Dean of the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies (GSE&IS). For more information please visit us at [www.ccrs.ucla.gseis.edu](http://www.ccrs.ucla.gseis.edu)