Chapter  5

Consequences of Inequality and Exclusion on the Culture of Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores counseling research emphasizing depression, anxiety, and behavioral changes due to microaggressions. Other consequences discussed include academic stress and a lack of career advancement resulting from feelings of isolation, sense of belonging, low self-esteem, lower grades (students), and fewer opportunities for career advancement (faculty). Additional investigations include the role of exclusionary institutional policies and practices on minority faculty and student experiences. Additional discussions include same-race mentoring along with how microaggressions and the resulting consequences influence the culture of higher education institutions. In conclusion, best practices and practical applications recommend how to approach equity and inclusion in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Much of our academic culture has ancient roots—and the older the roots, the deeper they are likely to go. Attempts to shape the culture of a college or university must account for this if they are to be at all successful. (Shugart, 2013, p. 10)

This chapter will discuss the influence of equality and inclusion on the culture of higher education settings. It will also identify how experiences vary for different ethnic minorities. Ancient roots have molded the cultures of many college campuses and influenced the students’ experiences. Historically, American higher education institutions excluded several minority groups as institutions, founded for the benefit of a homogeneous student body, supported White males (Cabrera, Franklin, & Watson, 2016; Thelin, 2017). The policies and procedures at some institutions catered to the needs of the original student body. However, as the culture of society became more inclusive, campuses shifted toward diversity. Accord-

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According to Johnson and Strayhorn (2014, p. 387), there has been a “documented rise in Black enrollment at PWI’s since the 1960s.” The question is whether institutions, after years of struggle with equality and inclusion, have made modifications to policies and procedures to help the campus culture adjust to the current student body. The various experiences of minority students have profound influences on the students’ perception of inclusion in higher education.

Institutions of higher learning have been slow toward becoming more equitable and inclusive spaces for minorities. Blackwell and Pinder (2014) identified minorities as having to face many obstacles on the path to learning, which was “far from equal for all students” (p. 45). After overcoming challenges toward becoming members of institutional communities, minority students continued to experience inequalities and exclusion in the campus setting (Boatright-Horowitz, Crockett, Frazier, & Harps-Logan, 2013; Means, 2016). The combination of embedded prejudices in the beliefs of members of higher education communities and institutional practices that failed to adjust to the changing demographics of the student body prevent campus cultures from feeling inclusive for all.

Racism is prevalent in many higher education settings. It is exacerbated by policies and procedures built on exclusionary practices. Exposure to these types of occurrences creates anxiety and academic concerns resulting in additional stresses for students who identify as a minority. The promotion of inequality and exclusion create the perceived culture of the school, which, for minorities, can ultimately influence persistence decisions. As Shugart (2013) said:

culture is pervasive, shaping not only the obvious designs and decisions we can observe and document from our policy-making offices but also the millions of small, unobserved decisions, practices, and habits. (p. 14)

Small habits can lead to the continuance of inequalities and exclusion in higher education, as well as have a lasting influence on minority groups. According to Alvarado and Hurtado (2015, p. 3), “there are consequences of a hostile racial climate for underrepresented groups of all contexts.”

This chapter will explore the consequences of racism in relation to many components of institutional affiliations for both minority students and professionals in the higher education environment. In addition, the reading will discuss research to identify information supporting the need to address systemic inequities and inclusion in higher education to improve the cultures of institutions. The writing will also provide suggestions for practical applications and best practices.

RACISM BEHIND MICROAGGRESSIONS

The focus in this writing will not be overt forms of racism. Instead, it is subtle forms called microaggressions. Simatele (2018) defined microaggressions as “subtle and often unconscious or automatic actions or statements made towards a discriminated group” (p. 1) and “encompasses both subtle and overt or intentional behaviours and communication” (p. 2). Some people insinuate how words are just words. However, Campbell, Bradley, and Manning (2015) suggested:

those who see microaggressions as a serious problem and who bring up minor and unintentional slights reject the idea that words can’t hurt, that slights should be brushed off, that even overt insults should be ignored. (para. 6)