

Racial Battle Fatigue

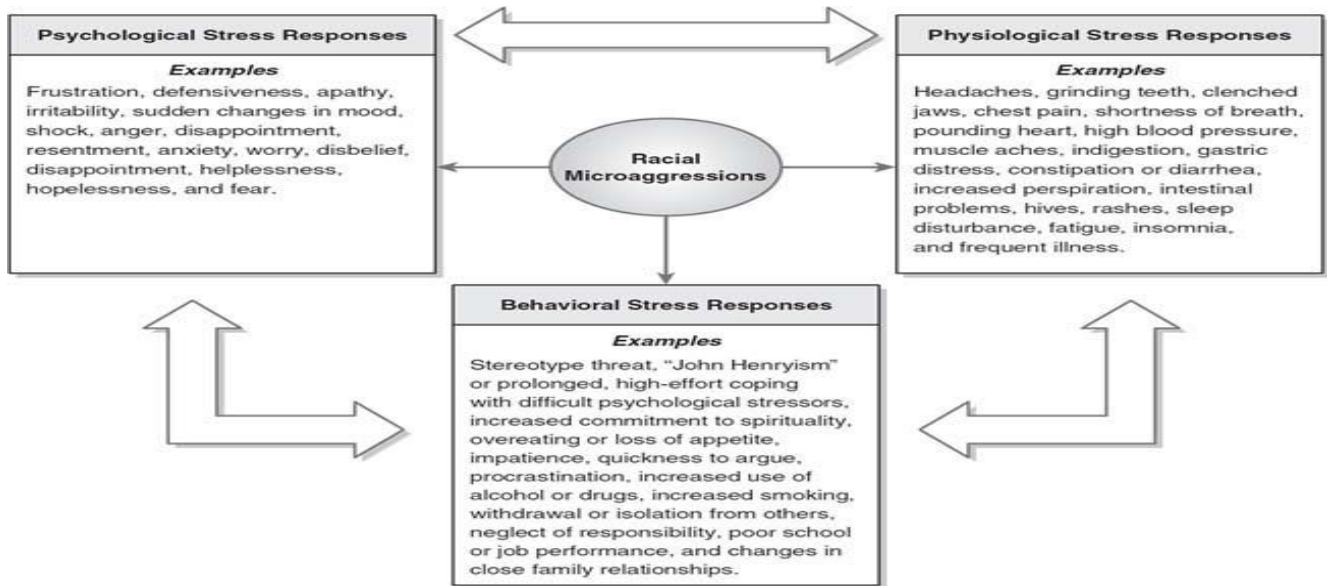
Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) was a term coined in 2008 by Critical Race Theorist William Smith. It was originally used in reference to the experiences of African American men in America but is now expanded to describe the negative and racially charged experiences of all people of Color (PoC) in the United States. William Smith defines RBF as

“cumulative result of a natural race-related stress response to distressing mental and emotional, conditions. These conditions emerged from constantly facing racially dismissive, demeaning, insensitive, and/or hostile racial environments and individuals.”

People of Color experience daily battles of attempting to deflect racism, stereotypes, and discrimination in predominately White spaces and must always be on guard or weary of the next attack they may face. Both the anticipation and experiences of racial trauma contribute to Racial Battle Fatigue.

Racial Battle Fatigue causes People of Color to suffer various forms of mental, emotional, and physical strain which can lead to psychophysiological symptoms. The symptoms of RBF are: *suppressed immunity and increased sickness, *tension headaches, *trembling, and jumpiness, *chronic pain in healed injuries, *elevated blood pressure, and *a pounding heartbeat. When People of Color with RBF anticipate racially motivated conflicts, they may experience rapid breathing, an upset stomach, or frequent diarrhea/urination. Other possible symptoms are constant anxiety, ulcers, increased swearing or complaining, insomnia or stress/anxiety dreams, rapid mood swings, difficulty thinking or speaking coherently, and emotional/social withdrawal in response to racial microaggressions or while in environments of mundane racial stressors. These stressors can lead to long-term health issues and cause People of Color to lose confidence in themselves and their self-worth.

Racism is often perceived as a personal threat/battle. After facing that threat/battle continuously in predominately White spaces, People of Color may experience RBF leaving them mentally, physically, and emotionally drained. This race-based trauma can create symptoms and experiences much like PTSD. If RBF goes untreated or dismissed, this stress-related psychological and physiological disease can be lethal and can kill gradually and stealthily through hypertension and poor health attitudes and behaviors.



DEALING WITH RACIAL TRAUMA

Weathering the cumulative effects of living in a society characterized by White dominance and privilege produces a kind of physical and mental wear-and-tear that contributes to a host of psychological and physical ailments.” Dr. Ebony McGee Vanderbilt University

Traditional coping methods of “John Henryism/high effort over-achieving perfectionism” – working twice as hard to prove one’s worth and “Grit-Perseverance-Resilience” though understandable responses, they are can further perpetuate feelings of distress. People of Color need to find other ways to address Racial Battle Fatigue and coping with hostile environments and people causing them to experience trauma. All of us must work together to remove inequities and all forms of discrimination, marginalization, assault, insult, and invalidation to reduce the negative impact on individuals and society as a whole due to Racial Battle Fatigue.

Mindful Isolation: Disconnect from triggering interactions or other situations that might elicit the fight, flight or freeze response. You have the right to walk away from negative and trauma-inducing situations.

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 support group or knowledgeable therapist who understand systemic racism, microaggressions, and racial trauma to assist you. You are not crazy!

Adapted by OCEE from Morgan Goodman: “Racial Battle Fatigue What is it and What are the Symptoms?”; JustJasmineBlog.com; & Vanderbilt University Counseling Center.

Connect in Community: Seek out people who recognize and appreciate you and your experiences. Process your feelings with people who are empathetic and understanding of what you face and endure. Sharing your pain with others who understand can be a road to healing. Being part of a supportive network helps.

Engage in Social Justice Causes: Using your pain and healing to help others brings fulfillment and meaningful focus to hurt, rage, and sadness while easing isolation by connecting with others to bring about change. Do not martyr yourself but find ways to channel your pain into doing good for yourself and others.

Participate in Relaxing Activities such as yoga, meditation, creative outlets, aromatherapy, enjoyment of nature. Find places and ways to comfort, destress, and support you.

Practice Self-Care: Taking good care of yourself doesn't mean you are selfish. It means that your needs count too! Feed yourself well, exercise, get good rest, avoid toxins, reduce stress situations, and BREATHE!

Attend to Your Whole Essence: give yourself time, space and support for your emotional, mental, psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being. Racial trauma affects all aspects of your being.