

Managing Emotions in the Workplace:

An Examination of Race-based Treatment of African American PAs

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Theoretical frameworks

- **Systemic racism** – racism beyond *individual bigotry*; overarching oppression woven into the foundation of US society, casting people of color as inferior in conscious & unconscious ways
- **Emotional labor** – the everyday emotional performances that occur in human interaction; and the effort it takes to control/manage those emotions

Hochschild's emotional labor

- Emotional labor is part of the organizational structure of work, particularly in the service sector
- Create outwardly appropriate “facial and bodily display” to make others feel comfortable

Acts of emotion work

- Adjust tone of voice/posture
- Smile, cordiality
- Eye contact
- Laughter
- Suppress or amplify one's own feelings
 - All despite one's personal circumstances, internal emotions, and internal beliefs

Examples of emotional labor

- Customer service worker remaining calm and neutral despite frustrated & irate customers
- Flight Attendant showing friendliness, smiles, and restraint to the varied personalities & emotion states of passengers
- Teachers displaying varied emotions and persistent enthusiasm to keep students engaged

Emotional labor in medicine

- 2 layers of emotion work:
 - **Deep acting**: manipulate internal thoughts/feelings to feel desired emotion
 - **Surface acting**: modify expression of emotions
- Layers in opposition of one another in medicine
- Art of “detached concern”—Displaying outward empathy toward patient & family while remaining internally “objective” & calm

Systemic racism approach

RACE AND THE WORKPLACE

Understanding racialized interactions

- The structural organization of every major US institution is white
- White cultural norms pervade the environment

Blacks in Healthcare Setting

- Medicine, both clinically and academically, has been historically reserved for white men
 - Blacks have been historically excluded
- In addition to emotional labor as a healthcare provider, Blacks must navigate race-related issues at work

Common acts of discrimination in the workplace

- Offensive remarks, jokes, stereotypes
- Assumed incompetent
- Labeled insubordinate

Examination of PAs in the workplace
EMOTION WORK STUDY

Data Collection

- Online survey of Physician Assistants' experiences in the workplace (clinical & academic)
 - Sample drawn from national membership survey from the AAPA
- In-depth interviews with African American PAs

Online sample survey

- 391 looked at the interview; 253 completed it (65%)
 - Whites non-Hispanic 64%
 - Black non-Hispanic 22%
 - Other

Race-based themes from survey data

- Offensive remarks, jokes, stereotypes
- Knowledge is underestimated
- More credentials needed to prove worth
- More work required for promotion
- Refusal of treatment by patients
- Lowered evaluations by students
- Challenges for students of color in PA programs

Recurring survey responses

- In clinic:
 - Patient requested another provider; refused to be treated by black PA
 - White patient did not allow black PA to touch her
 - Patients used words like the "n-word" or "KKK" or "ignorant" toward black PA
 - Poor evaluation for low productivity, despite others with lower productivity getting better eval
 - Colleagues make racial remarks about other patients

Internet survey: Overt racial slights

- As a student:
 - Preceptor told student that minorities were in PA programs only secondary to affirmative action, not because they actually qualified
 - Told by professor while PA was student that they were tired of their tax dollars supporting lazy welfare recipients

Internet survey: Overt examples

- During hiring:
 - Hiring staff informed PA that she would be first minority in clinic. When asked if they foresaw that as being a problem, she was told “it was not like you are moving into the neighborhood”

Internet survey: Overt examples

- In academia (recurring responses):
 - Black faculty members expected to publish more work on the a similar tenure track line
 - Evaluations are consistently lower than other faculty, even when other faculty teach tougher courses and/or students earn lower grades
 - management and handling of student/faculty issues are unnecessarily questioned

In-person interviews

- Interviews with African American PAs
 - Seven individual interviews
 - One focus group with 3 PAs
 - Totaling 4 males, 6 females
 - Interviews conducted by 1 black and 1 white interviewer

Coping with raced-based mistreatment: Interview themes

- Minimize/Dismiss
- Anger/Repressing Emotions
- Educating Whites
- Placating Whites

In-depth interviews: Minimize/Dismiss

- **Context:** I had people come in with confederate flags and those sort of things. You know, they would call and say,... “Well, I want to see the colored girl. Because she was great.”
- **Response:** And I really didn't take offense... [T]his is what they know... [T]hey weren't trying to be offensive – they wanted to see me. You know, they loved me. [T]hat's what they were taught. That's what's been inbred to them
 - Participant 004, p.2

In-depth interviews: Anger/Repressing Emotions

- **Preface:** [The patient] would just refuse to see me.
- **Response:** I've had a lot of anger at times about it. You know, it just upsets me that people are still like that even though I know they're like that.
 - **Participant 004, p.3**
- **Interviewer:** How do you all cope?
- **Response:** I get angry so I don't feel like I'm coping as well. Because I get angry, I get frustrated
 - **Focus Group 002, Respondent 3, p.14**

In-depth interviews: Educating Whites

- **Preface:** I've had supervising physicians or [other physicians] make comments I feel were inappropriate. Like, "You've got to get your ghetto on." Or, "You're gon' get ghetto-fabulous with your patient" ... Which I feel... is very demeaning.
- **Response:** And I kind of do get on my soap box and want to tell them why it's not really being aggressive, its more being assertive and the history behind, so they know the historical context of why black women have to feel that way.
 - **Participant 004, p.3**

In-depth interviews: Educating Whites

- **Preface:** I've told some colleagues and they've said, "Well you just have to pull yourself up by the bootstraps."
- **Response:** [B]ut here are the things you have to realize. There are some people that don't have boots. How can you pull yourself up by the bootstraps when you don't even have boots?
 - **Focus Group 002, Respondent 2, p.11**

In-depth interviews: Placating Whites

- **Interviewer:** How do you all cope?
- **Response:** But I also have found a way, just to kind of present myself, and I have a real laid back attitude... and so I kind of come at them a different way and so they are a little bit more accepting.
 - **Focus Group 002, Respondent 2, p.12-13**
- **Response:** [D]oing everything that I can to treat them like I treat everyone else. So that they see, she's a great practitioner. [N]ot just that, but, "She's good. I like her."
 - **Participant 004, p.4**

Conclusions from data

- African American PAs 40x's more likely to experience discrimination in both the clinic and academic workplace
- Requires excess emotional labor to manage expressed emotions apart from inner emotions
 - Ignore offensive remarks, actions, interactions

So What?

Costs to black Americans' health

- Using one's own emotions to influence other's feelings and emotions comes at a cost to health
 - Mental/emotional health
 - Physiological health

Stress response

- Emotions are tied to biology—stress pathway (HPA-axis)
- Emotion work shown to have health-related consequences; elevated cortisol levels → physical and mental ailments
- If displayed emotion differs from internal emotion, the chronicity can have an impact on emotional health and well-being

Epigenetics

- Science of altering gene expression
- External environmental exposures affect our expression of genes and, ultimately, health
- Psychosocial stress linked to epigenetic changes on specific chromosomes that regulate bodily function
- Similar findings have been noted on telomere length that protect DNA from damage

Questions?

