

COPING WITH RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

HERE AT CAPS WE UNDERSTAND THAT COLLEGE CAN BE A DIFFICULT TIME DURING WHICH STUDENTS MAY ENCOUNTER BOTH ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL STRESSORS. WHILE THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE CAN BE STRESSFUL FOR ALL STUDENTS, STUDENTS OF COLOR MAY BE SUBJECTED TO RACISM AND DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIORS, ADDING TO THEIR STRESS. RACISM CAN BE PRESENTED IN MANY WAYS BOTH OVERTLY AND SOMETIMES MORE SUBTLY BY STEREOTYPING INDIVIDUALS. SOME EXAMPLES OF OVERT RACISM INCLUDE RACIAL SLURS, MICROAGGRESSIONS, INAPPROPRIATE GRAFFITI, OR PHYSICAL VIOLENCE. ANY TYPE OF RACISM IS STRONGLY CONDEMNED BY THE UNIVERSITY AND WE URGE STUDENTS TO BE MORE MINDFUL ABOUT HOW THESE BEHAVIORS CAN CAUSE AN IMMENSE AMOUNT OF SUFFERING FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT IS TO PROVIDE INDIVIDUALS WITH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT RACE-RELATED STRESS IS AND WHY IT IS SO DETRIMENTAL TO A STUDENT OF COLOR'S WELL-BEING. THIS DOCUMENT ALSO PROVIDES TIPS ON HOW TO BEST COPE WITH RACE-RELATED STRESS AND HOW THE WIDER STUDENT BODY CAN SUPPORT STUDENTS OF COLOR SUBJECTED TO ACTS OF DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM.

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WHAT IS RACE RELATED-STRESS?

RACE-RELATED STRESS REFERS TO THE EXPERIENCE OF STRESS SPECIFICALLY CAUSED BY BEING A TARGET OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOR. THIS TYPE OF STRESS IS LIKELY TO CAUSE INDIVIDUALS TO FEEL EMOTIONALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY DISTRESSED.

WHAT IS RACISM?

RACISM IS DEFINED AS ANY TYPE OF PREJUDICE OR DISCRIMINATION DIRECTED TOWARDS A PERSON OF COLOR. ACTS OF RACISM CAN BE INSTITUTIONALLY OR INDIVIDUALLY CARRIED OUT. AN EXAMPLE OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM WOULD BE IF PEOPLE OF COLOR WHO ARE JUST AS QUALIFIED AS WHITE INDIVIDUALS ARE LESS LIKELY THAN WHITE AMERICANS TO RECEIVE AN OPPORTUNITY. ON THE OTHER HAND, INDIVIDUAL RACISM REFERS TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION THAT IS DIRECTED TOWARDS A SPECIFIC INDIVIDUAL. FOR EXAMPLE, USING A RACIAL SLUR OR STEREOTYPING AN INDIVIDUAL IS A TYPE OF INDIVIDUAL RACISM.

WHAT IS PREJUDICE?

PREJUDICE REFERS TO A BIASED ATTITUDE, BELIEF, OR OPINION ABOUT AN INDIVIDUAL BASED ON THEIR RACE OR GROUP MEMBERSHIP. AN EXAMPLE OF RACIAL PREJUDICE WOULD BE THINKING NEGATIVELY ABOUT A PERSON OF ANOTHER RACIAL GROUP SOLELY BASED ON THEIR RACIAL IDENTITY. OFTEN TIMES, RACIAL PREJUDICE CAN LEAD INDIVIDUALS TO DISCRIMINATE AGAINST MEMBERS OF ANOTHER GROUP.

WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

DISCRIMINATION OCCURS WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL OF A MINORITY GROUP IS TREATED UNFAIRLY DUE TO EXISTING PREJUDICES DIRECTED TOWARDS THAT GROUP. AN EXAMPLE OF DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOR INCLUDES REJECTING MINORITY MEMBERS A POSITION IN AN ORGANIZATION DUE TO THEIR IDENTITY.

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HOW RACISM IMPACTS STUDENTS OF COLOR:

- IT MAKES STUDENTS FEEL LIKE THEY ARE OUTSIDERS IN THE COMMUNITY
- THEY FEEL MORE PRESSURED TO “PROVE THAT THEY BELONG”
- MAKES THEM FEEL ANGRY, ANXIOUS, STRESSED, OR FEARFUL
- THEY MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY CONCENTRATING IN CLASS AND COMPLETING THEIR SCHOOL WORK

CONSEQUENCES OF RACE-RELATED STRESS:

AS STATED EARLIER, RACE-RELATED STRESS REFERS TO THE STRESS THAT RESULTS FROM EXPERIENCING ANY TYPE OF RACIST COMMENTS OR DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOR. HAVING TO EXPERIENCE RACE-RELATED STRESS CAN BE VERY EXHAUSTING AND DETRIMENTAL TO AN INDIVIDUAL’S HEALTH. BELOW IS A LIST OF SOME OF THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS THAT RACE-RELATED STRESS HAS ON AN INDIVIDUAL:

INTENSE EMOTIONAL REACTIONS:

ANGER
ANXIETY
FEAR
FRUSTRATION
DEPRESSION
HOPELESSNESS
ISOLATION
PARANOIA
SADNESS
SELF-BLAME
SELF-DOUBT

INEFFECTIVE COPING:

AVOIDANCE
DISENGAGING
SUBSTANCE USE
HEALTH CONCERNS:
HEART DISEASE
HYPERTENSION
MUSCLE TENSION

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ESSENTIALLY, EXPERIENCING RACE-RELATED STRESS CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT AN INDIVIDUAL BOTH PSYCHOLOGICALLY AND PHYSICALLY. FOR EXAMPLE, THE JOHN HENRYISM HYPOTHESIS STATES THAT INDIVIDUALS WHO EXPERIENCE STRESS FOR A PROLONGED PERIOD OF TIME DUE TO THEIR RACIAL IDENTITY ARE MORE LIKELY TO USE A GREATER AMOUNT OF ENERGY AND EFFORT DIRECTED TOWARDS THE STRESSFUL STIMULI. THIS IN TURN, NEGATIVELY IMPACTS THEIR PHYSICAL HEALTH. FOR THIS REASON, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO HELP PEOPLE OF COLOR ACTIVELY COPE WITH ANY STRESS THAT THEY MAY BE EXPERIENCING, SO THAT THEIR HEALTH IS NOT COMPROMISED IN ANY WAY.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COPING WITH RACE-RELATED STRESS:
UTILIZE ON-CAMPUS RESOURCES, SUCH AS CAPS, COMMON GROUND, THE OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS, THE DEANS, THE AREA COORDINATORS, ETC. THESE RESOURCES HAVE INDIVIDUALS THAT ARE SPECIFICALLY TRAINED TO BE AN INCLUSIVE SOURCE OF SUPPORT FOR YOU TO DISCUSS WHAT IS CAUSING RACE-RELATED STRESS AND HOW THEY CAN AID YOU IN OVERCOMING THIS STRESS. ADDITIONALLY, JOINING GROUPS FOCUSED AROUND DISCUSSION OF RACE AND ELIMINATING RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION AROUND CAMPUS CAN BE BENEFICIAL. THERE ARE MANY OF THESE CLUBS ON CAMPUS, IN ADDITION TO OPEN DISCUSSION EVENTS BASED AROUND RACE, MINDFULNESS, STRESS, AND MORE WHICH ARE HOSTED BY DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS THROUGHOUT THE ACADEMIC YEAR.

STRATEGIES FOR ALLIES:
RACE-RELATED STRESS CAN COME IN MANY FORMS AND CAN MANIFEST DIFFERENTLY DEPENDING ON THE INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCING THE STRESS. LEND A HAND TO THE INDIVIDUAL(S) YOU ARE INTERACTING WITH AND SHOW YOUR SUPPORT BY LISTENING TO THEIR STORIES AND STRUGGLES, AND AID THEM IN GETTING PROFESSIONAL HELP FROM APPROPRIATE STAFF MEMBERS IF THEY ARE ASKING FOR IT. IN ORDER TO MAKE AN IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY, TAKE WHAT YOU LEARN FROM BEING AN ALLY AND ATTEND OPEN DISCUSSIONS AND FORUMS TO CONTRIBUTE IDEAS TO TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITY INTO A MORE INCLUSIVE SPACE. LASTLY, EDUCATING THOSE WHO HAVE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT INDIVIDUALS OF CERTAIN BACKGROUNDS AND CULTURES WILL ALLOW FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE CAMPUS COMMUNITY.