# Racial Bias and Student Ratings of Instructors

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According to the literature, racial bias may influence how students rate professors on Student Opinion of Teaching (SOT) evaluations (Centra & Gaubatz, 2000; Harlow, 2003; Kogan, Schoenfeld-Tacher, & Hellyer, 2010; McPherson, Jewell, & Kim, 2009; Spooren, Brockx, & Mortelmans, 2013). The accuracy of student evaluations of teaching has been rigorously debated independent of their effect specifically on faculty of color, with specific challenges to their ability to assess instructor performance (Anderson & Smith, 2005; Clayson, 2009; Uttl, White, & Gonzalez, 2017).

Lakin (2016) notes that the current model of evaluation of teaching may not incorporate some of the stronger indicators of quality teaching: current knowledge of the content area, active delivery that promotes critical thinking and student involvement in the learning process, positive student-teacher interaction, effective assessment, regular and specific feedback, and rigorous evaluation, and meaningful use of classroom technology. The student evaluation of these five areas may invite negative racial bias, with each being tied to previously identified literature related to the experiences of faculty of color in higher education (Anderson & Smith, 2005; Martinez & Welton, 2015; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2008; Tatum, Schwartz, Schimmoeller, & Perry, 2013).

Racial biases expressed in SOT's reflect historical racial stereotypes, but the lens of racial microaggressions provides a more contemporary framework for understanding. Racial microaggressions
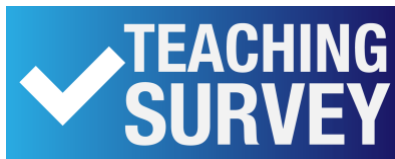
are defined as a series of mini-assaults and are a challenging aspect of prejudice to clearly identify, due to their often indirect, subtle, or unintentional nature (Brunsma, Feagin, & McKinney, 2003; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). They reflect much of the changing displays of racism since the Civil Rights movement, where more overt behaviors were replaced with covert or aversive presentations (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002).

Sue et al. (2007) describe this "death of a thousand cuts" in three forms, microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. The microassault can be identified in its intentionality and direct action-orientation, commonly reflected in the use of slurs or other visible acts (Sue et al., 2007). Microinsults are more subtle in their presentation of racism, such as correlating ones achievement with quota or affirmative action programs (Sue et al., 2007). The microinvalidation will be more direct, but will focus on negating the experiences of minoritized people (Sue et al., 2007). These microaggressions are generally reflected in the open-ended sections of the evaluations for faculty of color: being too loud, intimidating, and having a personal bias against the students (Harlow, 2003; Tuitt, Hanna, Martinez, Salazar, & Griffin, 2009).

A stronger understanding of the potential for racial bias in student opinions in teaching is useful in helping clarify and maximize the value in the feedback provided by the ratings system. It should also be considered as part an overall assessment of teaching in complement to ongoing instructional evaluation through other means including instructional consultation and peer observations and reviews.
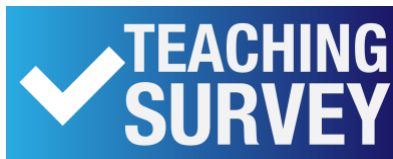
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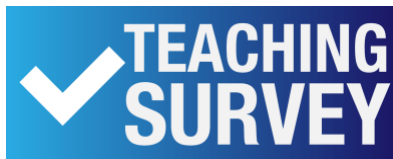
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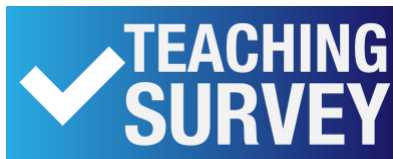
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