Chapter 2
Overcoming Implicit Bias in Collaborative Online Learning Communities

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will lay the groundwork for exploring implicit bias and the effects in the online higher education environment. The authors will analyze privilege, power, oppression, and institutionalized bias and explore examples in higher education, through both student and faculty perspectives. The chapter will focus on collaborative solutions to a diverse variety of case studies on implicit bias across race, culture, gender, ability, and other dimensions. An emphasis will be placed on reflective analysis and creating collaborative experiences for online students and educators.

INTRODUCTION

Uncovering implicit bias can be challenging and the intense self-exploration necessary in assessing personal attitudes can be painful, just as discussing them and finding solutions can be overwhelming. This chapter will focus on exploring different types of bias, examining dimensions of power and privilege, considering effects of stereotype threat, utilizing tools for self-examination and uncovering and discussing implicit bias in a collaborative manner.

Both explicit and implicit bias can be found in many aspects of the higher education experience and can be especially challenging to address in the online environment. Implicit bias experiences can range across a variety of contexts including having immediate effects on faculty attitudes and perceptions impacting policies, expectations, communication and grading (Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 2012; Gullo & Beachum, 2017), as well as indirect effects such as through letters of recommendation (Houser & Lemmons, 2018), mentorship opportunities, international service, recruit-

ment and engagement (Diversity Abroad, 2016), to name a few. Explicit bias is bias that is easily seen and identified and is most often the bias discussed in the media and in learning contexts. This chapter will include examples of both explicit and implicit bias in an effort to ensure that both are recognized and addressed. In the online environment, recognizing and addressing implicit bias can be especially challenging.

Examining the multiple facets of implicit bias in higher education is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of this issue. The objectives of this chapter are:

1. Distinguish between explicit and implicit bias in a variety of contexts
2. Discuss dimensions of power, privilege and oppression as they influence attitudes and perspectives of both faculty and students
3. Identify how stereotype threat can have profound and far-reaching effects on students
4. Explore case studies on implicit bias along with solutions and resources
5. Provide empowering strategies for communication and collaboration for diverse populations in higher education

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Consider how subtle underlying perceptions impact behavior and attitudes in the following examples;

- An African American man making a floral delivery to Professor Magee, dean of a law school in a high-priced San Francisco neighborhood expresses confusion and disbelief when the petite, casually dressed black woman answering the door announces, "I am Professor Magee" (Magee, 2015)
- A teacher who considers herself to be impartial to her students, unknowingly conveys lower expectations for students of color, offering less instances of praise and intervenes more frequently with disciplinary action towards students of color. (Kirwan Institute, 2012)
- A female college student taking a math test in a room full of mostly males, scores worse than she would have if the test were given in a room with a balance of males and females (Hill, 2018)
- A student with dyslexia is given less homework and easier assignments
- A female professor is less receptive to a Middle Eastern student and takes offense to some of his comments in the online environment because she believes he does not respect women. While she doesn't voice these perceptions, they do affect her perception of the student.
- A white male in an online classroom comprised of primarily of female women of color does not participate frequently due to his concern of offending someone by saying the "wrong thing."
- An online college professor engages in less discussion with a female student who mentions "her wife" in discussion posts because he feels uncomfortable realizing the student is a lesbian.
- An online instructor does not provide requested letters of reference to students who do not attend graduation where she can meet the student face to face.
- A student who uses a wheelchair for mobility is assured that the study abroad accommodations will be wheelchair accessible and she will be able to participate in all activities. The accommodations were not wheelchair accessible and the student had to be carried into and out of the room each day which was demoralizing for the student.
- Faculty recruit students as mentors for other students based solely on faculty recommendations.

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