

Chapter 21

Transgressions on Students and Faculty of Color in Higher Education: A Consideration of Potential Strategies

Milton A. Fuentes

Montclair State University, USA

Casey R. Shannon

Yeshiva University, USA

Muninder K. Ahluwalia

Montclair State University, USA

Crystal S. Collier

Argosy University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter considers transgressions that students and faculty of color face in higher education. Specifically, the chapter examines how implicit bias and microaggressions affect the experiences of students and faculty of color. Special attention is paid to strategies that prevent or address these transgressions from both personal and contextual approaches. The chapter ends with a thought-provoking case study that portrays the multifaceted dimensions of these troubling transgressions in the classroom and provides the reader with some reflection questions to consider.

INTRODUCTION

While research clearly illustrates that institutions of higher education benefit from having diverse students and faculty (Rodriguez, 2014), the converse may not be true. Specifically, transgressions such as microaggressions (Young, Anderson, & Stewart, 2015) or implicit biases (Boysen & Vogel, 2009) found in these settings can compromise the academic or professional well-being of international, immigrant, undocumented, and native-born students and faculty of color in the United States. Adopting a proactive, empowerment, and wellness-based approach, four multicultural experts, who are faculty and administrators in higher education, consider these transgressions and provide effective strategies that individuals and groups could use to successfully manage or minimize the deleterious effects of these transgressions. Specifically, in this conceptual paper, the authors considered relevant literature as it pertains to academic institutions in the United States and engaged in ongoing dialogues to determine the most pertinent, key concepts and best practices based on their professional endeavors (e.g., teaching, research, and service.) to support students and faculty of color. The sections that follow include: a reflexivity discourse, enumerating the authors' social-cultural positions and values as they relate to the content of this chapter; a case study that portrays the multifaceted dimensions of troubling transgressions the classroom, an important learning space in higher education; an overview of transgressions in higher education; and a discussion of racial and ethnic transgressions and strategies for preventing or addressing them from both personal and contextual approaches with students and faculty of color respectively. The chapter concludes with remarks and reflection questions that assist readers with considering how the concepts of this chapter may relate to their academic settings.

SOCIAL LOCATIONS AND AUTHORS' STANCE

Given the importance of reflexivity in multicultural inquiry (Cumming-Potvin, 2013), in this section, the authors discuss aspects of their identity that they deemed salient and which informed the perspectives considered in this chapter. The authors also made these identities explicit as they worked together to allow for discussion about shared and different perspectives. Readers are encouraged to hold the authors' social locations in mind as they read this chapter. Each of the author's locations clearly informed and guided their thinking and perspectives as related to the content of in this chapter; similarly, readers will process the information presented through their own lenses informed by their own social locations. The readers are encouraged to reflect on this premise as well as consider how their socio-cultural profiles facilitate or impede learning in this important area.

With respect to the authors' social locations, the first author is a mid-career academician, who identifies as a light-skin, Puerto Rican male and first generation college student. While his socio-cultural profile is quite nuanced and informed by other factors (e.g., class, sexual orientation), his skin tone, race, ethnicity and generation status have all been key factors in his personal and professional trajectories, informing his research, teaching and professional efforts. The second author is a White, early-career faculty member, who also identifies as a first generation college student. She is an advocate for educational equity and systems change, and she is committed to an applied research agenda that seeks to explore the first-hand experiences of individuals and communities facing oppression. The third author is a mid-career faculty member who identifies as a middle class African-American female. Her experiences growing up within a religious, middle-class family from the rural south has also shaped the lens through which she views

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