

Student Culture and Identity in Higher Education

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Student Culture and Identity in Higher Education is about identities in transition within higher education and sits at the intersection of the study of identity, education, and culture. The intertwining nature of these three terms makes disentangling them an impossible task but that is not a task the reader need undertake. For this volume is not about strict definitions or contested boundaries, but rather it is about the relationship in-between,

the murky liminal space in which self and other are undone. The volume's postmodern and postcolonial ethos points the reader towards intersectionality, fluidity, and co-constructed knowledge. The topics of this volume require one to make peace with ambiguity and the pedagogical methods employed by the various contributors (Transformative Learning, Iceberg Theory, socio-contextual theories, and so forth) require students and instructors to brave the disorientation and discomfort that comes with authentic intercultural competence. Not only are instructors and students called upon to investigate their preconceived notions of others, institutions and policy makers are encouraged to investigate their deep-seated assumptions. Many of the contributors to this volume emphasize that students within institutions of higher education are not blank slates and hail from diverse backgrounds. So, educational policies and practices that assume a monolithic student body are missing the diversity and multiculturalism in their midst.

The chapters exploring these pedagogical methodologies note the challenges and rewards of their implementation. Transformative learning, for example, does not refer simply to exposure to difference but to a type of "reflective and critical learning that entails a reconfiguration of the student's sense of self, and one which relies heavily on active engagement in dialogue with those who are different from themselves" (Hart, Lantz, and Montague, 41). Green and De Cruz, citing Freire, note that transformative learning requires that individuals "be taught to critically examine the frameworks in which they live, learn, and work" (61). Critical examination of systems we inhabit often generates discomfort but this discomfort provides opportunity for growth. Transformative learning causes a "cognitive and emotional disequilibrium that offer(s) the opportunity for an individual to re-evaluate those features of identity which they had hitherto taken for granted, as well as to see and hear the other person differently" (46). Second language learners, according to Sachie, experience something similar as they are "constantly organizing and recognizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world through using the language" (20).

As institutions of higher education shift towards a consumer-focused model, transformative learning might be a hard sell. One can imagine few individuals enthusiastically signing up to be "transformed," and yet this is the aim of higher education. As an educator in religious studies and advisor in romance languages, I have seen the benefits of this methodology in action. Pushing students to question systems is paramount to higher education.

The chapters on women and the cultural attitudes regarding gender in higher education in places like China, Oman, Uganda, the UK, and the US are nuanced and go beyond surface distinctions, exploring the influence of ancient religions, traditional values, and economic initiatives on attitudes towards women and education. The reader is confronted with the living realities and the complexity and contextual nature of what we mean when we talk about blanket terms like gender and education around the world. These chapters include some unexpected surprises like the role of the Communist Party of China played in promoting a woman's right to education in the 1960s (78) or the popularity of the view in Chinese society, even as late as 2015, that "ignorance is a woman's virtue" (82). Bride price and polygamy are still practiced in Uganda and are just two of the social obstacles which individuals (without structural change) cannot easily overcome. Professional Ugandan women working in elite universities still face a number of challenges within and outside of the university. For example, the cultural mandate that women bear the bulk of the housework responsibilities means that these women do not have access to the same networking opportunities as their male peers. Hudson's chapter on identity and game design

surprises with the report from the Entertainment Software association that in 2016 adult women made up a larger portion of the game-playing population than do boys under the age of eighteen (114). Even with these numbers, there is still a lot of work to be done on improving gender diversity in game creation education.

Any reader interested in the ways institutions of higher education around the world are responding to the challenges of identity formation, defining and implementing intercultural education, or dealing with the limitations of policy would do well to read this volume.