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Frantz Fanon's Ambivalence Revisited in America's Faculty: Narratives of Black and White Faculty Struggles with Cross Cultural Mentoring

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Abstract

As the American university campus becomes more diverse, special attention must be given to the interactions between faculty and their students. Mentoring relationships become even more significant as Black faculty, plagued with negative stereotypes, become mentors to White students. Conversely, White faculty members become mentors for Black students. This article explores the experiences of two faculty members as they journey through their cross-cultural mentorships. Their struggles, strategies and successes are analyzed using the qualitative method, Scholarly Personal Narrative, which may shed light on the complexities of cross-cultural communication.

Key Words: Diversity, cross-cultural, mentorship, faculty

Introduction

Diversity and Cross-Cultural Communication

In today's Academy, Black faculty and students continue to face the issue of being perceived as a sell-out or acting White as they journey through their academic careers (Harper, 2006). Concurrently, in no other time in American history have White faculty had to interact with such a diverse student population. The angst and anxiousness exist in both Black and White faculty members as they delve into this confusing, conflicting abyss named cross-cultural communication. *Black Skin, White Masks* by Frantz Fanon (1967) discusses the psychological ambivalence that Blacks face when interacting with Whites. To a certain de-

gree, one can argue to lesser or greater today, Blacks continue to experience internal cultural conflicts and reticence when interacting with Whites; and concurrently Whites with Blacks even in a more equitable society.

Scholars and practitioners on university campuses across the United States hear the word “diversity” used in a myriad ways. Whether it pertains to policy, programming, recruitment, hiring, or visibility; the word has become part of the fabric of how university’s operate. Many times it refers to ethnic and racial diversity of the college campus. What does this mean to the faculty member? And how does it apply to their daily interaction with students of different ethnicities? How does it assist the Black professor interact with the White student; and the White professor interaction with the Black student?

The landscape of American higher education has been littered with incidences, legal cases from *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* to *Grutter v. Bollinger (2003)*, in which race has played a pivotal role. In many instances diversity is approached from a very myopic framework; one in which numbers and percentages takes precedence. However, the realization that numbers do not necessarily create environments, human interaction(s) create environments becomes important. Interacting with someone of a different ethnic background, social status, and/or geographic identity can be challenging; and many within the landscape of higher education have not been trained in cross cultural communication or competence.

Although there are numerous definitions and approaches to cross-cultural communication, these authors have chosen to adopt Ozturk’s (1991) perspective that individuals who intended to communicate across cultures must “build bridges of appreciation and mutual respect, [and] must bring to the encounters cul-

tural pattern-detecting skills... shed their ethnocentric biases entirely...” (p.80). Ozturk, continues to state that individuals must take steps in researching cultures external to them so that they can become more knowledgeable and sensitive to the nuances of the other culture.

Campus Diversity, Faculty Interaction and Cross-Cultural Mentorship

Antonio (2003) reminds us that “the faculty and student worlds are not separate-each one influences the other. Faculty interact with students almost daily, walk through a campus where students dominate the social landscape, and develop hundreds of relationships with students, both casual and close” (p. 15). Thus as Antonio (2003) states the social and academic interface between faculty and students is extremely extensive and for one from either group to believe that their existence on the campus is independent of the other would be egregiously imprecise. As a result, the development of communication develops, not only verbally in the classroom but also in a more general sense: the clothing worn, the spaces occupied, demeanor and disposition. But the common reason that both exist at the university is simply the educational process, in the role of either learner or disseminator of knowledge. It is within that common ground contact is initiated, most of the time in the classroom. But the university provides other avenues for contact such as undergraduate research, advising, social events, and workshops among others. Here, faculty and students wrangle with communicating with each other starting from attempting to understand what each requires for their existence on a campus, such as a grade or intellectual feedback. The social, cultural and personal paradigms undoubtedly impact how each individual receives and delivers information. As

such the university campus with its myriad of faculty and students represents one of the most diverse environments possible: a multicultural system. Thus, faculty should also consider themselves to be integral parts of this multicultural system, and not as benign entities.

Brown (2009) suggests that “studying and living on a multicultural campus promises the development of cross-cultural competence that will lead to personal growth, improved career prospects and greater social cohesion both local and globally” (p.439). Louis (2008) also believes that it is necessary that the social spaces that university campuses provide are necessary to foster cross-cultural interaction. However, this does not occur as a result of some type of automatic osmosis. Personal development and growth many times transpires through learning new elements and facts from the people with whom we interact; thus immersion into a multicultural system does promote the possibility of growth in comprehending and interacting with others of differing cultures, genders and beliefs. This inception of comprehension and personal malleability to cultures is only the embryo of cross-cultural competence. Faculty, in particular, have the opportunity to learn from hundreds, possibly, thousands of students from completely divergent backgrounds. As such faculty can begin to virtually fill their coffers with information on personal and cultural differences.

As previously mentioned, merely being in the presence of a plethora of cultures does not spontaneously make an individual competent in interfacing with others of different cultures and backgrounds. “The simplistic view of cross-cultural communication holds that if people from radically different cultural backgrounds interact, cultural understanding will automatically result. This is not true, unless

other knowledge has been introduced before the encounters occur” (Ozturk, 1991. p. 79). Therefore, there needs to be intentional steps taken by faculty before a cross-cultural interaction can take place. These steps can be prompted by faculty development units, departmental initiatives to improve interactions with students or even peer mentoring from other faculty. These approaches may encourage faculty to reflect on their stations as faculty, the culture and positions of privilege they may possess, and develop an awareness of their role in the multicultural system of the university.

Taking a mental assessment of one own cultural features and biases, examining another’s culture, making comparisons, citing differences, attempting to not judge, researching their cultural heritage, and then comprehending that the person with which one interacts is an individual and may not necessarily fall into a particular category within their own culture. These are all exercises that can breed a more positive interaction with the student of a different culture. This intra- and extra- personal cultural research creates a context for a more effective cross-communication; and should be encouraged. When cultural differences and issues are researched, and synthesized with one’s own beliefs it allows for greater interactions and even productivity, regardless of the educational scenario (Parson & Reiss, p. 199). Specifically these exercises can enhance the mentoring process, because it not only lends itself to understanding cultures, but more so to understanding individuals. Thus deeper more meaningful mentoring relationships may ensue utilizing these approaches.

Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) regard mentoring as a process whereby a student is positively socialized by a faculty member. They assert that the faculty mentor assumes the sta-

tion of “role model, teacher, advisor, guide, and resource” (p.70). Cross-cultural mentorship adds another very significant layer to the mentoring process. In reference to cross-race mentoring Stanley and Lincoln (2005) state:

The successful mentoring relationship, in our experience, is characterized by trust, honesty, a willingness to learn about self and others, and the ability to share power and privilege. Mentors must also learn how to recognize their protégés’ strengths and weaknesses, nurture their autonomy, treat them as individuals, capitalize on their skills and create opportunities for challenge and growth. (p.46)

Therefore, adapting proactive strategies for internal and external cultural research and adopting a disposition of trust, honest and nurturing are all important when faculty engage in cross-cultural mentoring. Some of the major advantages of cross-cultural communication are faculty (a) developing a greater understanding of self and the cultures that exists outside of one’s own (b) developing the ability to connect with, and subsequently impact, a larger student population (c) developing the skills to fosters deeper and more meaningful relationships because of better cultural awareness and comprehension and (d) acquiring skills that can resolve conflicts, specifically when divergent issues pertain to culture arises.

However, one must also be aware that developing these competencies is not an easy process, personally or professionally. There are many challenges such as the development concepts of diversity which are applicable to all individual because everyone may have a completely different idea of the meaning of diversity. The use of language is another major hurdle to overcome in cross-cultural communication. Particular words, phrases and

saying may be viewed as offensive or derogatory to other cultures that may be perfectly innocuous in another culture; thus developing the sensitivity to wording and language will always be a major challenge. Faculty many times are the experts in their field, and one may extrapolate that as experts they do not readily seek assistance from others. Two challenges arise from this; first, faculty may not have experiences “not knowing” for an extended period and as such may find it difficult to admit not possessing the skills to be culturally competent. Second, they may not have the ability and/or diffidence to ask another for assistance for fear of being viewed as incompetent. Thus the road to cross-cultural competence is laden with personal and professional obstacles before even the substance of the area could be addressed. It takes an individual to make a conscious effort and to believe in the inherent benefit of cross-cultural communication to embark on that journey.

Methods: Scholarly Personal Narrative

Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) is an alternative style of scholarly writing within qualitative inquiry. Its basis is steeped in the narrative tradition. Nash (2004) purports that SPN, as a method, utilizes the perspective of the scholar as the primary focus. This method uses the first-person voice in the development, garnering and analysis of information. The method allows for the lenses of the individual who experiences to be valued and frame the concept of the experience. Using Nash’s (2004) and Nash and LaSha Bradley’s (2011) guidelines, the authors of this article developed a series of questions and ideas that established the framework of the narrative itself. The narratives were then deconstructed to explore possible themes that may run through both narratives and experiences. The

narratives should not only reflect the conflicts that the faculty members experiences with cross-cultural mentoring but also shed light on the complexity of higher education in America and the need for constant dialogue and training with respect diversity.

Professor Mick's Narrative Background

Professor Mick is a fulltime clinical assistant professor who is not on the tenure track; teaching, and advising are the two major components of his position. He is a White male and possesses years of experience working with and advising students of color, but not exclusively. Prior to his life as a faculty member he worked within athletics at a number of private liberal arts colleges. He has become a mentor to students of many ethnicities including Black students.

How It Came To Be

His afro was not the only thing that set him apart in my class. It was his mature perception of things that struck me as odd for an 18-year-old college freshman. He was taking my class because of his interest in the athletic training education major within our department. It was a prerequisite class that we utilize to gauge the intellectual capacity of potential students in our program, which requires all interested students to go through an application process halfway through the fall semester. Part of the admittance process was a formal interview with a panel of our faculty. This is where I first became aware of the chasm between his life and mine.

We asked him a question in regards to ever having faced adversity and to provide an example. He replied that at the age of 10 he knew that if he did not leave home he would just become another Black male statistic. By my perceptions his home life was nothing

short of horrific. His mother, who at one point carried three jobs, was an alcoholic. With no father present, they lived on government assistance and food stamps. He was in one of the poorest parts of inner city Detroit where gunshots and drugs were considered the daily norm. This is a stark contrast to the type of neighborhood that I am accustomed to, because to me a neighborhood has always been a place where safe and friendly social interactions occurred. He encountered constant verbal abuse from his mother and it began to take its toll emotionally. So he escaped, under his own volition and the financial help from his uncle, to boarding school on the East coast. While he did not achieve scholastic excellence he did do well enough to continue on. He made ends meet anyway he could. He participated in athletics and exhausted himself in maintaining the distance from his home by working odd jobs throughout the summer months. He would return for short stints mainly because of his great grandmother and his affection for her. He felt like he had to do whatever he could to absorb and deflect away some of the abuse that his mother would lash out to both his grandmother and great grandmother who lived in the house.

We admitted him into our program not only because of his story, but the character that he demonstrated throughout the interview. His grades, although on the low side of admittance, were high enough and to be honest we just all saw something in him. It is hard to put my finger on it. It was almost like you have this young man standing before you who has seen and been through the types of trials mentioned earlier, and yet here he was. His perspective on life was broader than most young men his age. He spoke softly, never showing arrogance, and still there was a confidence within him. The second semester,

however, proved to be vastly different. About a month into it he started missing classes, failing to turn in assignments, and not showing up to his clinical rotations. We all met as a department and it was determined that the individual meetings we were attempting to have with him about his academic status were not having an impact. The proper procedures were followed and student development was contacted to help provide a support network. Appointments were made and they provided someone in the student affairs department to act as his “mentor.” The network that was meant to be supportive in many cases quickly found out the task they had before them as he failed to meet their demands of attending meetings with certain student services. My plea for their continued guidance and flexibility seemed to be met with the belief that they were doing all they could. Granted, he had much to blame for their current perception of his efforts and desire to remain in “good academic standing.” So I called him up and asked to set up a time to meet with me.

It must be noted that at this point in my academic pursuits I was in the midst of a doctoral level *Diversity and Equity* class that at the same time had been illuminating my mind on what it truly meant to be of privilege. The newly acquired awareness of my social capital in relation to those of other ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, etc. was being placed into an entirely new context. My insecurities about being able to relate and effectively articulate the benefits of a college education to him were vast. However, I needed to know what was driving this sudden free fall towards academic wasteland.

Privilege

I am a White, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual male. I have been blessed with

countless opportunities throughout my life, many of which I did not earn. I am a first generation college graduate, a result of a set of parents that had the financial means necessary to fuel my endeavors. Their guidance and relentless expectation to be scholastically successful was ever present. They spared no expense as I was groomed through private elementary and secondary schooling. My quest for knowledge sent me to a private, out-of-state, liberal arts college that fostered tremendous intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual growth which eventually catapulted me towards a masters degree. All of this I thought at the time was the normal expectation of someone in our society. To advance, one must obtain, and what better place to do both in the land of freedom and endless opportunity.

I epitomized what it means to be privileged, however as each day passes I become more aware of what privilege has allowed me to gain access to, and at the same time much more aware of how the system in place has reinforced the notion that this is how it is meant to be. Johnson (2006) stated that this privilege “is created and maintained through social systems that are dominated by, centered on, and identified with privileged groups” (p. 128). The self-reflection I have been doing since the class has opened my eyes to how vast a net of obliviousness I have been comfortably living in. Never once did I think twice about the access I have to things like transportation, food, shelter, preferential treatment, loans, educational resources, family, job placement and attainment, and governmental securities based off historical marginalization and isolation of the non-dominant groups.

This is how I started my conversation with him. I wanted to open the doors of dialogue in hopes to build trust and in turn gain

insight to his perspective. I followed this up with a question as to whether or not he understood the gravity of the opportunity he was throwing away. His answer was that he never saw college as an opportunity; rather, to him he merely saw it as an escape. My challenge had been laid before me.

Access, Capital, and Perception

He was dreading going home for spring break and having to be confronted with the horrific home life that he had been running from since age 10. His way of coping was the systematic shutdown that he was outwardly conveying to everyone at the college. He looked defeated. He made the comment that maybe everyone back home was right about him, “that no one like us from inner city Detroit goes to college and even beyond that graduates with a degree.” Recounting everything that was said during that conversation would be exhaustive and quite timely. The crux of the exchange of dialogue was that I was going to take him on as a mentee mainly due to what I saw in him that set him apart from so many other freshmen. He had proven he possessed the internal fortitude to survive and I wanted to empower him in how to utilize this to succeed. I had the knowledge of how to navigate through the institutional pillars to build on the social and intellectual capital that he so desperately needed to be made aware of. I made it clear that my reason for doing this was to empower him with an additional set of subjective and objective principles that would foster growth through access. It sounded great and quite believable and he left my office that day with a handshake of agreement.

Weekly talks were scheduled with an open door policy extended to ensure that he knew that I was going to go beyond the surface of advising. There were some stipula-

tions to our agreement that involved tutoring and a thorough understanding of what he needed to do to remedy the current perception with his professors. I told him that I had no problem walking with him to appointments, something that I believe he found to be unexpected. Our early conversations revolved much more of *him talking* and *me listening*. I knew I needed to gain insight into his worldly perspective, to look through the lenses he was looking through in order to better understand where he was coming from. Through these conversations my hope was to gain an understanding of the aspects of his culture that I had no clue about. In addition, I have reached out to colleagues who could shed light on the struggles they have had with cross-cultural mentoring and the learning that has been done through their experiences of both success and failure. The one thing that I wanted to make quite clear to him that I was not doing this for me, and nor was it going to be a dominant group member who has emotional sensitivity to the unfortunate circumstances stacked against the “other.” He had already experienced this type of relationship with his assigned “mentor”, which constituted him sharing his experiences and struggles and the mentor being brought to tears due to the events that he shared. No true advice or direction was given other than making a couple of scheduled meetings for him to attend, which he did not show up to. He even made the comment to me that he thought the sessions were more beneficial and therapeutic for the mentor rather than for himself.

An awareness of the depth and breadth of my privilege and the access that has resulted from it has only recently been brought to light, mainly as a result of my interactions with him. The idea of privilege and how privilege is a feature of a social system has really been reinforced, and I struggle with

this concept. I struggle because I as I become more aware I realize that I will never fully understand. I will never fully understand, because I will have never lived it and experienced it. No matter how much I research or read I will never fully relate. I battle constantly with the thought of what his perception of me must be. Does he see this relationship that is being cultivated as the “White man helping the poor Black kid?” Or does he see it as someone who listens and hears, interprets and provides guidance, empowers and facilitates, and in the end sees it as an investment of time, energy, and love for a fellow human being with a different historical set of circumstances?

Risk V. Reward

Some of my colleagues have shared that they thought this to be an admirable thing I was doing, because of the investment of time and energy that it would take. The risk of getting burned and being left at the altar is always present, but never focused on. There is also the risk of getting too attached, too involved so that what I end up doing is enabling him rather than empowering him. The worst possible outcome of this relationship is that I start treating him like a son. I will be very honest that I truly do not know how to completely navigate through this as the human element plays such an important role in all of this. I know there are many more mountains to climb and failures to get up from, and it is my hope that I maintain perspective during this journey. He has been so use to a structured format of living his life while at boarding school, that there is much to learn in regards to becoming self-reliant and sufficient through knowledge and experience. This can be risky and in many instances it correlates to that of a parent. The leash must be let loose to a certain extent

even when times of failure are inevitable. Failure, as many of us know, is one of the greatest teachers. However, this can be risky given the fragile state of mind that he still is in. He has grown up around failure his entire childhood. There are no success stories to lean on from a family perspective, no nuggets of knowledge to be passed along on how they overcame and succeeded.

There is also the risk of perception from the institutional powers that be. How will they perceive the White male mentor and the Black male mentee? On the other end of the spectrum what will his friends and family back home think about the relationship? Will he even let them know about the agreement that we made? What pressures might be placed upon him? Will they see it as a reinforcement of the past Civil Rights battles or as the White man helping along the Black man? Will they say things like “So you couldn’t do it yourself, so you needed the help of the White man?” Will this have an effect on the dynamic of our relationship? How will we both handle the perceptions and judgments that will inevitably be brought to light? I have no answer to these and am quickly learning that, as in life you can never be prepared for everything. I do know that it is worth the risk, instinct and the push from a power greater than my mind can comprehend has reinforced this notion.

I am sure that he has perceived risk outside of the aforementioned concerns, although at this point in our mentoring relationship I have not fully come to grasp all the barriers that are in place. There will be barriers that come up that will have to be analyzed, addressed, and worked through. Along each of these steps it is my hope to empower and guide him to being able to overcome and advance forward when faced with similar situations. This is part of the reward. To em-

power him with the knowledge that he can navigate through an educational system that was not originally built for his, or even my access. The large reward would be the springboard that a successful completion of a college degree would offer. Watching him walk across the stage not with just a degree, but a sense of empowerment is the ultimate goal.

Hopes and Outcomes

I know the road ahead will not be easy, but this young man is worth it. This is why I am in higher education. To make an impact on students' lives, an impression of what one person can do to make a difference. My hope for him is that he comes away equipped with a broader set of social and intellectual capital than when he arrived on campus. It is my vision that he leaves college with a greater understanding of the value his historical set of circumstances can be utilized to affect others in a positive light. It is my hope that he can take the positives and negatives of our mentoring relationship and then look to pass on what we learned together. In the end I wish for him to be the success story that his family and friends back home can look to as a guiding light.

On a personal level, I believe students today have been given a label that is a product of a societal and educational structure that we created. My hope is that out of this comes a pushback, a resistance, against the natural flow of the way things are meant to be. I want to shed light on the fact that I do not believe that our educational structure is truly set up for success and access for all. The central idea of White privilege permeates through all sectors of education. It is evident in the "Whiteness" of policy making on the institutional level with a focus on the "other" group. It is also evident in the classroom. Different

social perspectives are being more openly discussed, as more educators understand the importance of the assumptions of White privilege and power it has had on society and education. The next step is to not just facilitate discussion but to implement this dismantling of White privilege and power within the institutional framework of our universities. I hope to begin to do this by bringing awareness to my colleagues by the things that I learn both from a cultural and historical perspective that is vastly different from my own.

This will hopefully provide an example of the recognition of importance of seeking the perspectives of different individuals' historical backgrounds and the life experiences in terms of class and gender. It is my hope that it will also provide a lens to look through in relation to societal pressure to conform, and the challenges that it may pose to advancement within education. I am certain that this may not happen right away. Whether it happens five years from now or seven years from now, my hope is that it will plant a seed.

Professor DAL's Narrative Background

Professor DAL is a full time assistant professor who is on the tenure track; and his teaching, research and service components also include the responsibility of advising. He is self-defined as a Black man and possesses years of experience advising students of various ethnicities. Prior to his life as a faculty member he worked within student affairs and became a mentor to students of many ethnicities including White students for over 15 years.

The Campus, the Professor, the Context

There has always been an overt awareness that I was a minority on my old University campus. It was a great campus, full of tradi-

tion, pride and history. It possessed a very difficult past in terms of racial and ethnic relations. However, the University had made a concerted effort to support diversity; not only in recruitment and retention but also with programming, the curriculum and student affairs. However, as a faculty member, I was relatively well respected by my colleagues and the students with whom I interacted. I was an alumnus, and thus had been at the University for about nine years. Therefore, in certain respects I was part of the fabric of the campus and I understood, for the most part, how things worked. But I never knew that being a mentor to a White male would be one of the most life altering events during my time on that campus.

Simply put, I am a Black male professor, who came from a middle class family. Both parents were in the household, and both worked. We lived in a middle class subdivision in the suburbs of the capital city. My mother was a teacher, and my father worked for the government. We lived in what was considered a “good neighborhood”: lawns were manicured, houses well painted, cars in their open-aired carports, grass on the edges of sidewalks and children riding bicycles and playing in the streets. I attended a prestigious high school and then proceeded to complete all three of my degrees at relatively well-known universities. Education was prioritized in the home and higher education encouraged. I was in no way shape or form impoverished. In fact I was the opposite. We were a privileged family, lived well, enjoyed life and possessed the characteristics and knowledge to be socially mobile. It was always interesting, in my later years, that my life to many seems to be the exception and not the rule when it pertains to Black families. One day a White student mentioned that “The Cosby Show was not real; there are no Black families with

two professional parents in the home”. I, obviously, begged to differ. And it represented for me the reality that Black in the United States regardless of their position in life, situation or education will many times to be viewed as a “story of poverty”.

The Beginnings

“You? Metallica? Really?” was one of Jon’s first reactions during one of our first social conversations. The disbelief of his sentiment that a Black man could actually listen and appreciate music that has not been historically attached to people of color was astounding. It the first time I took a mental note of his preconceived notions of me; regardless of what he actually knew about me. His notion baffled me; especially in light that the course I previously instructed him was a cultural awareness class. Jon, a fictional name, was an intelligent, diligent and open-minded young man, who had contributed to the course significantly. He was a 19 year old White male from a middle-class family; a student of social sciences; active on campus and a very pleasantly tempered young man. He did buck the system however; both his parents and his older sibling were graduates from the rival university and he decided to break the trend. He came to our University as part of a program that actively recruits students from high schools that are not on the University’s primary target list. As such the vast majority of the students are ethnic minorities, underrepresented populations, and first generation students. Jon was an anomaly.

We connected during the course as we discussed culture, racism, discrimination, and social justice. He enjoyed the exchanges in class. Many times after class; he and I would talk for another hour about the implications of the material discussed. He was opinionated, but the class allowed him to develop a differ-

ent perspective of culture and class; and this coincided with his anti-establishment rhetoric.

I saw him frequently; he was an honors student so he was in the “honors office” frequently. He and I, with another instructor in the honors office, would talk about current social happenings, issues on campus and to certain extent the philosophy of social behavior. The conversations were meaningful and his academic acuteness was blatant. What was strange to me was that he started to gravitate towards me as a mentor, rather than the other instructor who was a White male.

He also explained to me once that I was more knowledgeable than any of his professors in his major and they had a very “dry” sense of reality. He expressed his trust in my perspectives that I always seemed to break it down in the most comprehensive way. So for those reasons I started to understand why he “chose me” to be a mentor. I was flattered and honored that he felt confident enough to discuss with me his academics and his life experiences and growth.

Social Status and Social Capital

As some mentorship relationships evolve, both parties become comfortable with each other and begin to express more freely than before. I learned more and more about Jon as time passed. But what was very interesting was as much as he attempted to separate himself from his family, equal amounts of energy were expended to share and claim his levels of social privileges. His discussions included such topics as his exclusive membership local wineries, family lake houses, and the social connections he possessed in the state. From my perspective, it was almost the antithetical all his discussions about the downtrodden. Yet, as a mentor I listened and encouraged his pride.

However, I did challenge him about the privilege he advertised. “Privilege? What privilege? My family worked hard for what they have!” he retorted. I smiled and let him defend his station for about 20 minutes. He seemed confused and bewildered. I proceeded to ask him how does that relate to his interest in social justice issues, and towards the end even suggested he think about the notion of White privilege and guilt. Almost sullen he left the conversation, but I knew he would be back in a fiery blaze.

But I was concerned. Was I able to truly help him make the connections between his life and his espoused beliefs? Did I have a well-informed grounding about his background to actually challenge him? Unlike my advising for academics, where I possessed a healthy knowledge of curriculum and degree plans, did I aid him or hinder him in his growth? Unlike my class, which he was a student, I didn’t prepare my wording and frame the direction of my discourse. I simply asked him on impulse and without a serious study of my wording. I doubted myself. Was it the social differences that fueled my concern? Was it the fact that I was a Black man pointing out his White privilege? What would be the repercussions? It was the first time that I felt truly unnerved by the unknown possibility.

Our next conversation, about two weeks later was very enlightening. He had reflected on what we spoke about and attempted to answer my question. From my perspective it wasn’t the answer that mattered, it was that he was able to discover where his philosophies were placed in relation to his actual social status. Jon, almost reluctantly, admitted his privilege and began his journey to reconciling the two. “How did you have that perspective?” he asked, almost wondering how I was able to assess his level of social status

and acquisition of social capital from his family and experiences. We had a wonderful, and lengthy, conversation that delved not only into his family history and privilege, but he began to examine what his role was in society in bringing about social justice in whatever sphere he decided to be a part. This was the first of numerous conversation on his direction, his education and his purpose in life.

Summation

That episode in our relationship was a turning point. It was here that we both grew in our respect for each other. He also, for the most part, never assumed anything about me culturally; my perspectives, my preferences, or my directions. He appreciated my differences and valued my position as a faculty member. I, in turn, exponentially grew in admiration for his maturity in his ability to reflect on his position privilege and his understanding of the advantages that he possessed. I viewed him as a person willing to grow, yet strong in conviction. I watched him evolve for the next two years, as he merged his passions into his academics and his academics into choices for a career and life that addresses the needs of people less fortunate. If that one scary question and our numerous conversations bore that in him, then I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to be a facilitator of growth.

Discussion: Common Themes and Experiences

Analyzing both narratives many themes emerged. However, both faculty believed (a) they experienced ambivalence and engaged in reflection (b) their purpose was to facilitate social, academic and personal growth in the students and through the process develop themselves and (c) they had to be willing to

trust the students and discuss and engage difficult issues that may be foreign from their own cultural paradigm.

Both faculty members experienced degrees of doubt in their ability, whether by ethnicity or by knowledge-base, in addressing difficult social issues. However, both were also very mindful for their limitations in terms of their truncated understanding of the cultures of their mentees; and thus they both proceeded with caution while making the distinct decision to follow though in addressing their specific issue. Doubt also arose as a result of White privilege for the White faculty and perceived marginalization for the Black faculty. Via reflection and a determination to facilitate growth in their respective protégés, both faculty members forged forward, even in apprehension, for the sake of the student.

The idea of social capital also was a thread of both experiences. Social capital is a term that has been utilized more frequently over the last two decades (Pawar, 2006). Unfortunately the term seems to be a chameleon of sorts and possess multiple meanings to multiple fields. Grootaert and Bastelaer's (2001) as quoted by Pawar (2006) states:

There is, however, no consensus about which aspects of social interaction and organization merit the label of social capital, nor in fact about the validity of the term 'capital' to describe this. Some academicians have questioned the use of the word 'capital' to capture the essence of social interactions and attitudes. (p. 213)

Pawar (2006) continues by citing Putnam's (1993) definition of social capital as 'trust, norms and networks' that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit" (p.215).

In the context of this set of narratives social capital may be defined as those elements, beliefs, experiences, perceptions, values and behaviors that an individual possess

as a result of their individual, community and societal experiences. It is simply what a person brings to the table socially; it is a synthesis of their cultural and experiences. More accurately, however, the term cultural capital may be more apt. Goulding (2008) describes cultural capital as “a sociological concept linked to social inequality and social position, and is often described as a set of cultural competencies which a person needs to acquire to participate in a whole range of cultural activities” (p.235). Thus, as both faculty member engage in dialogues with the students, the student brings to the table their own set of beliefs, perceptions and privileges, or lack thereof, and the faculty member has to understand these and address these with the student in terms of the students’ larger world and life contexts. This is aligned with Stanley and Lincoln’s (2005) reference to power and privilege and a mentor’s duty to “recognize their protégés’ strengths and weaknesses, nurture their autonomy... and create opportunities for challenge and growth.” (p.44).

The idea of social capital is pivotal in cross-cultural communication because it is the experiences and values from the various communities, homes and populations that frame the perspectives and paradigm of the individuals. And mentors must be cognizant that they may have a completely different value set and experiences than their mentees and as such must listen for the embedded meaning in their words, actions and behavior. The notion that people are more than the sum of their experiences is important for mentors to be aware: but more so is the understanding that it is an individual’s synthesis of their experiences that creates beliefs, ideologies and behavior. Thus, the mentor must be mindful that skin color and cultural background may only be the tip of the iceberg of difference;

social norms, mores, language, values, perceptions, concepts, and realities may all be divergent from theirs, but are equally as valuable.

Implications and Conclusion

Frantz Fanon is regarded highly by social scientists, as a major voice that addresses the conflicts and experiences of Blacks as they interact Whites. Fanon discusses the psychological ambivalence and the attempted acquisition of cultural capital of Blacks. This mirrors the struggles of faculty as they attempt to bridge the cultural chasm between them and their students, especially those of different cultures. As outlined by the faculty in these narratives, even the most well-intentioned and even experienced faculty, Black or White struggle with cross-cultural communication in their mentorship. One major take-away from this analysis is that faculty who intend to improve in their craft via the development of cross-cultural skill will have to face their own personal demons and endure psychological discomfort for the long term and overall betterment of the field. It is indeed not an easy road.

Strayhorn and Terrell (2007) purports that faculty-student mentoring predicts student satisfaction. Ergo, if faculty can find ways to improve their cross-communication with their students, more positive interactions can result in more positive college experiences. These two narratives, although not generalizable to all faculty who are engaged in cross cultural communication, can shed light on the personal struggles that faculty experience as they encounter students of different cultures. The narratives also exemplify the intricacy and intentionality that cross-cultural communication involves. Fanon (1967) states “To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that

language, but it means above all to assume a culture” (p.17). As Black and White faculty continue to learn about the diversity of their campuses, the multicultural character of their classrooms, and the complexity of effectively communicating with the twenty-first century student that they take concerted steps to develop a greater knowledge of self and others, disposition of openness and a commitment to the enrichment of the lives of all students they encounter.

Faculty who engage in any process of self-development and cross-cultural communication will indeed find the process reflective, sometimes arduous, and that takes time to reach a platform of effectiveness. However, the payoff of personal growth and the development of deeper and more meaningful relationships as a mentor are gratifying and beneficial. The road towards cross-cultural competency is difficult and requires a dedication of self, support from one’s department and the insight of faculty peers. But in this multicultural system we know as the university, it is imperative to be competent cross-culturally.

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