

Creating Identity Safe Learning Spaces

Stephanie A Fryberg

The formidable challenge for teachers in 21st century classrooms is to create learning environments that attend to the needs and perspectives of an increasingly diverse student body. This is particularly true of students who enroll in psychology classes. When students feel they belong and can be successful, what is referred to as identity safety, they are more motivated and perform better academically. One prominent feature of identity safe learning environments is cultural matching, which is when the culture of the learning environment matches the individual's cultural understanding of self. One reason low-income and racial-ethnic minority students experience a lack of identity safety in mainstream learning environments, such as American universities and schools, is that these environments are characterized by independent models of self, which are experienced by low-income and racial-ethnic minority students as a cultural mismatch. To highlight the power of identity safe spaces, the first set of studies will examine how the sources and consequences of student success are associated with a cultural match or mismatch between the students' model of self and the dominant learning environment. The second set of studies will examine how culturally grounded interventions, by way of reframing the dominant learning environment, positively influences motivation and performance. Together our research highlights the need to address the role that existing dominant cultural norms and practices play in contributing to educational disparities for diverse students, and the need to reframe these practices in ways that acknowledge and honor the cultural strengths of these students. Specific practices for creating identity safe classrooms will be discussed.

SPEAKER BIO

Stephanie A. Fryberg (a member of the Tulalip Tribes) is the University Diversity and Social Transformation Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan. As a social and cultural psychologist, her primary research focuses on how social representations of race, culture, and social class influence the development of self, psychological well-being, and educational attainment; and on designing interventions that reconfigure educational spaces to improve outcomes for racial minority and low-income students. Select publications include: *The truly diverse faculty: New dialogues in American higher education* (Edited volume with E.J. Martínez), *Cultural models of education and academic performance for Native American and European American students* (with R. Covarrubias & J. Burack), *Unseen disadvantage: How American Universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students* (with N.M. Stephens, H.R. Markus, C. Johnson, & R. Covarrubias), *When the world is colorblind, American Indians are invisible: A diversity science approach* (with N.M. Stephens); and *Of warrior chiefs and Indian princesses: The psychological consequences of American Indian mascots on American Indians* (with H.R. Markus, D. Oyserman, & J.M. Stone). In recognition of her work and service to the field, Dr. Fryberg received the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues Louise Kidder Early Career Award, Otto Klineberg Intercultural and International Relations Award, University of Arizona Five Star Faculty Award, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology Service

Award, and in 2011 was inducted into the Multicultural Alumni Hall of Fame at Stanford University. Dr. Fryberg also provided testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs regarding the impact of racist stereotypes on Indigenous people, was lead psychologist on an Amicus Brief for Harjo v. Pro-Football, served as an expert witness in the Keepseagle v. U.S. Department of Agriculture class action lawsuit, and currently serves as the lead researcher for Illuminative, a national research-based effort to shift the narrative about and decrease bias toward Native People.