



STUDENT CASE STUDY #3

Based on Experiences Shared During the AOTA 2020 Be Heard, We're Listening Sessions

BACKGROUND

Demographic information: Occupational therapy assistant student, Black woman, second career

Themes: Diversity is not inclusion; Black students don't feel like they fit in; Black students can't be themselves; Black students experience mental fatigue and trauma; Dual personality.

PRIMARY SCENARIO

Like many, Ashley is the only Black student in her OTA class. She often feels alone and that she stands out as the "minority." Ashley experiences what she calls a duality as a Black student. Every day, she presents as two different people. She even goes by two different names while at school versus in her professional life.

While Ashley sees similarities between her two personas, they require her to present very different behaviors and actions. It is mentally draining and fatiguing. The "code-switching" is something Ashley learned throughout her lived experiences, especially in her previous career.

Ashley now teaches code-switching to facilitate her teenage daughter for her assimilation. Ashley fears the possibility of hurt or harm to her child if she does not present in a way that is non-threatening to others who have a bias toward her skin color. Living with this fear, financial hardship, and challenges of being a single parent, has not only caused her stress, but impacts her attendance in class and performance during fieldwork.

CONNECTIONS

Themes Presented in Case Study

- Lack of diversity and representation
- Experience of racialized trauma, stress, and fatigue

AT A GLANCE

Recommended Actions

Faculty Support & Training:

- Provide faculty and fieldwork educator bias training.
- Faculty actively act as a voice for Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students and actively work to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into all actions.
- Apply institutional change, including rigorous self-examination among the faculty, program, and institution.

Financial Support:

- Establish resources for financial support specific to students' group, outside of the institution.
- Provide financial support for costs of applying to school, and joining AOTA.

Advocacy:

- Advocates needed to understand the experience of BIPOC students' pressures-micro-aggressions, collective trauma.
- Teach students self-advocacy-to ask for what they need.
- Train faculty to inquire about issues that impact BIPOC students. This practice should be incorporated into the standard operating procedure for all the students as part of advisement.

Student Resources & Support:

- Develop opportunities for BIPOC students to become involved (e.g., Student Con, ASD, Micro-opportunities for involvement, Summer Institute, mentorship).
- Develop mentorship programs.
- Incorporate images through the program environment that reflect and support diverse groups.
- Provide additional supports/resources for all students to address the impact of current/societal events.
- Ask all students what resources they will need to support them during the crisis.
- Learn what hardships/struggles students of color have.

Analysis and Strategies

Now that you have reviewed the case, review the AOTA DEI Toolkit evidence-based resources and address the following questions:

- How was the person impacted?
- How does this case impact the field of occupational therapy?
- What are the implications for clients and stakeholders as a result of these experiences?
- What strategies would you employ?