

Personal Diversity Reflection 2

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As I write this second reflection, I revisit my first reflection of the semester and I am intrigued by how segmented I portrayed my identities. I began my first reflection with the statement, “I am a White, cisgender, bisexual male.” I continued, going on to state individual reasons why I identified with each of those social identities, suggesting I experienced each of them unique to itself. This creates tension within my integrated sense of self. Am I a series of separate identities, or am I one comprehensive and integrated self? The answer... it is complicated.

In line with many of the course readings, I now see everyone, myself included, as a wholistic person, comprised of many separate yet mutually influenced identities (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Goodman, 2014; McIntosh, 1990). It is true, I am White; I am cisgender; I am bisexual; I am male. Equally true though, I am a White, cisgender, bisexual, male. None of my identities exist without the influence of the others, including a host of other identities not listed here. As a prime example of this interplay of identities, I experience a chronic emotional condition which is sometimes referred to as a disability, yet I do not consider myself disabled since I am otherwise able-bodied. In this example physical and emotional abilities intersect. This approach to identity extends itself to a parallel intersectional understanding of oppression and privilege.

The course textbook discerns oppression from prejudice through the addition of power (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Similarly, Goodman (2014) separates privilege into unearned advantages (a positive entitlement held by a select group) and conferred dominance (power which reinforces oppressive hierarchies). When applied intersectionally, I have come to the understanding that an individual may exist in some structures of power while experiencing disenfranchisement and disadvantage in others. As a bisexual male I experience male privilege

due to sexism, while also experiencing bi-erasure between both the heterosexual and homosexual communities due to monosexism (Dolan, 2015). In certain spaces, particularly some LGBTQ+ spaces, my male privilege interacts with my bisexual identity, to my unearned advantage, specifically in relation to non-male identifying bisexuals. This pattern of up/down identities (Accapadi, 2007) can be applied repeatedly through my identities. Taken further, through the infinite intersections of all the available social identities, all the oppressive systems and systems of privilege are connected.

Seeing the interconnectedness of systems of oppression and privilege motivates me to be a social justice ally (Edwards, 2006). I know that I am harmed by oppressive systems, even in my majoritized identities. In this way, I am encouraged to use my privilege to its own demise. I find it important to recognize that intersectionality and interconnectedness should not be used to minimize our responsibility. As a White, cisgender, male benefiting from racism, cis-genderism, and sexism, I have an obligation to transwomen of color, but also to all people of color, all trans* people, and all non-male identifying people. In addition to being anti-oppressive within my majoritized/privileged identities, I also have an obligation to resist internalized oppression of my minoritized identities. In my first reflection, I qualified this point, acknowledging “fatigue is real.” An example of my own complicity in an oppressive system due to fatigue comes when I describe myself as gay, rather than explain bisexuality, especially in instances where people may be familiar with my same-sex fiancé.

Even in the face of fatigue, resisting oppression and acting anti-oppressively is a commitment I must make as a student affairs professional. I want to believe in a meritocracy, supported by accessible education, but this class has illuminated the naivete of such a belief. In reality, public funding for education dwindles every day, decreasing accessibility for

vulnerable/minoritized populations (Carlson, 2016). Remaining informed about political candidates' plans for college affordability and public education funding, and then voting, are tangible actions I can take to reduce educational inequity. Already in preparation for the 2020 Presidential election, I have been keeping an eye on Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders' college for all plans. Local politics, such as K-12 funding, also matter as they can have long lasting impacts on student trajectories.

For any student who overcomes those immense existing obstacles to college entry, I must provide support, remembering we are all harmed by oppression (Karunaratne, Koppel, & yang, 2016). One way that I plan to put this into practice in my future profession is through the intentional creation of counterspaces. Beyond providing a space for community, this semester I have learned that counterspaces allow individuals to investigate less salient intersecting social identities. As I shared earlier, no identity exists in isolation. For example, a counterspace for racially minoritized students could and should explore identities beyond race, such as sexual orientation, religious identity, or socioeconomic class. This recognition of individual's difference helps defeat monolithic definitions of identity. As someone who wants to work in a campus LGBTQ+ resource center, I should understand that a campus LGBTQ+ resource center is about everything other than LGBTQ+ identities as much as it is about them.

Planning my future work in the field of diversity and inclusion necessarily requires reflective introspection. Before I can help others, both similar and different than myself, I must know who I am, as well as the unearned advantages and conferred dominance I carry with me. As McIntosh (1990) suggests, I should work to share those advantages with everyone so that they become unearned entitlements, while ending the conferrence of dominance. By ending the systems of dominance, oppression can be confronted. I believe it is important to work from a

perspective of privilege rather than from a perspective that views minoritized populations as deficit. A deficit approach maintains narratives of oppression by viewing majoritized populations as “normal” or the default in a way which blames minoritized populations for their own oppression (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Addressing personal privileges, acting anti-oppressively, and resisting oppression when possible are all great ideas, but they must be done with an attention to the lived experiences of actual people. Alone, I have one experience on which to base my perception of the world. Through authentic relationships with others, I grow that perception. It is a simple fact, relationships underlie social change. It is a more difficult fact to acknowledge, I have low resilience in social situations. I am often concerned with upsetting, offending, or minoritizing people, especially those who are already experiencing minoritization. Positively, it is this acknowledgement that drives me to diversity and inclusion education in the first place. The more I know, the less likely I feel to cause further pain. I am now in a prime space to focus on relationship, community, and coalition building.

I also need to address remaining areas of dissonance. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) say that oppression is embedded in culture and I do not disagree. However, I am inclined to defend all cultures by reframing the statement as, culture has been hijacked by oppression. Oppression uses culture as a proxy. For years I have had disdain with the intolerance toward non-heterosexual individuals expressed by many Christian denominations. But, by understanding that it is not Christianity that is heterosexist and that it is instead heterosexism which is using Christianity, my disdain begins to fall away. This view comes with a careful consideration. Culture exists at the institutional and societal levels, but choice exists at the individual level. In my first reflection I attempted to convey this point when I stated, “Ignorance is not an excuse.”

Individuals cannot be hijacked by oppressive systems. Neutrality and complicity, even through ignorance, is oppressive. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) describe this form of oppression as passive. Again, while I do not disagree, I believe change begins when we hold ourselves and our peers to a higher level of accountability. Even passive forms of oppression cannot be allowed to continue. Through “calling in,” and inviting people to educate themselves on systems of oppression and specific manifestations of conferred dominance, passivity no longer becomes an option.

I believe it is a big step to acknowledge that as an individual you are complicit in oppressive systems and to begin addressing your actions. I feel proud to have not only taken that step, but to have begun my next step, in recognizing the complicity of the institutions and people that I interact with, and to have begun holding them accountable to their actions. As I move forward, it is as a wholistic and integrated White, cisgender, bisexual male intent on continuing to hold myself, my peers, and my institutions accountable. This class, the experiences that accompanied it, and my own personal development, have led me to a point where I feel more committed to promoting social justice both within and outside higher education.

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