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WGSS 1110 - Gender, Sex Power
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Positionality Paper

When I think about myself, I consider the area I grew up in, a suburb of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I consider the people I grew up around, a predominantly white crowd. I consider my home life, where I was raised by a single mother. It was through this life that I am living that truly exposed me to so little, that I discovered all that I know about myself up until this point. I was exposed to very little at my public high school, and the minuscule amount of information I got from my family didn't satiate me at all, so I had to seek knowledge from elsewhere to truly reach the standard of understanding that I desired. I read articles and blog posts on news from other countries on the internet, attended workshops about racism in America, discussed different experiences with friends based on our differences, and more.

My seemingly most simple identity is also one of my most complex, and I still don't have a concrete way I feel on the topic. My gender escapes me. I know I was assigned a girl at birth, and I wasn't assigned the wrong body. But I also know gender is a social construct that I don't really buy into. I curse; I wear pants; I have many "masculine" aspects to my character. That doesn't mean I hate the color pink or I won't wear makeup, because those are two "feminine" things I truly love. I am certain aspects of both genders. I just can't seem to call myself gender fluid because being using feminine pronouns is so engrained in my mind I feel like I don't fit the *proper* description. I can go in circles over and over again thinking about how I fall into both categories. At the same time, I am neither. Thinking about it more it feels like a double bind of

“[doing] gender” (Lorber 116), I don’t categorize myself within the binary, yet the very categories I avoid are defined by the same binary. I cannot escape. Damned if I do. Damned if I don’t. I find myself in a similar tug-of-war over my racial identity.

I am a proud adopted Asian-American. Much like Rebecca Hurdis, I was adopted from Asia and raised in a white household. And like her, I want to determine my own characteristics, not have them determined for me by my race, yet I cannot escape the fact that I have experienced life differently than those of a different race than me. I wondered at a point in my life if my identity was being created “for me” and not “by me” (Hurdis 280). I only finally have reached peace inside myself by considering that I can be both Chinese and American at the same time because there are no *real* requirements to fill. The stereotypes of any group created by dominant groups has no actual say in what really makes them them. Another aspect of my identity is my sexuality. I identify as I panromantic grey-asexual. This means I form meaningful emotional connections with people of any gender but feel some sexual drive and very little sexual attraction. I feel like I shouldn’t buy into all this complex vocabulary of labels to finally identify myself. I also feel like putting a name to who or what I am gives me greater strength and conviction. It also makes me feel like I fit into the world in some way, that there’s a place for me in all its complexity. I’m always going in circles it seems.

I’m not happy to be what is considered to be oppressed in most of my identifying groups, but I am honored to be able to speak from a place of oppression and be heard. I’m not white; I’m a person of color. I am surrounded by media in which my features and skin tone aren’t the beauty standard. For years growing up I didn’t like how I looked, the only comfort I could find in my

appearance was that my eyes weren't to heavily monolidded, so I looked almost white. At least, that's what I told myself.

I'm not straight; I'm queer. When I discussed another one of my friends who was asexual with my mother, she completely dismissed me and invalidated my identity. I was too scared to even breach the idea that I was asexual to an extent also. She just kept playing it off as "she just hasn't found the right man," but I know that isn't how it works.

I'm not a man; I'm kind of a women, kind of somewhere else on the spectrum. When I walk home, I cradle my pepper spray close. When I go to parties I go with friends and *never* leave my drink alone. But when I am asked to identify my pronouns, I never know what to say and often end up choosing feminine pronouns because that's what I've used all my life, even if it never really feels right. There are few aspects of my life that I consider myself privileged, and I say that in the least self deprecating way I can. I am privileged in the fact that I am an able bodied, upper middle class individual. I'm lucky enough to walk into any building, whether or not there's a ramp for me, and while I say I'm a broke-ass college student, I have no income because I'm not even looking for work. I'm not really broke or financially disadvantaged. Though on the surface I feel I've lived a full and advantageous life, there are small things that seem insignificant but put me in a place of oppression. That's not to say that because I'm an Asian-American queer woman that my life stinks and all I do is get pushed around, regardless of the fact that I've always had a roof over my head and could readily take on a flight of stairs. I've been unlucky in some of my experiences but having an intersectional positionality doesn't excuse or discount my other experiences. Having an intersectional identity has been helpful to understand both sides of the privilege-versus-oppression argument. Because I am not the

dominant group in my racial identity I can observe how the system of white privilege oppresses me, but because I am an able-bodied person, I can experience how the system benefits me. I can also internalized the ignorance that comes with having privilege, an “unearned asset” that I’m not supposed to “remain oblivious to” (McIntosh 86). Having those intersecting parts of my identity to make me both privileged and oppressed allows me to breach the gap in my own understanding of the entire system of privilege, and if I have it my way, it will help me bridge the gap between others too.

I can use examples from both ends of my intersectional identity to illustrate how larger institutions are for and against myself and others with the same or similar identities to my own. From my outward appearance as a cisgender woman, I’ve had many experiences where men have catcalled me, put their hands on me without my permission, told my to smile more, amongst other more degrading and rude things. This all ties into the underlying internalized idea that women are objects for a man’s sexual consumption. *Dreamworlds 3* illustrated this idea well and plainly came out and said that the adolescent and adult men and women are bombarded with imagery of gyrating, scantily-clad women who are only there to serve men, if not sexually, which it usually is, it’s some other way. Women are unequal to men and are only there for their viewing and sexual pleasure. No one says it out loud, but the internalized message is that women aren’t even equal to animals; they’re equal to objects. Another of my experiences that relates to systematic equality on a larger scale is the missing representation of people of color in television and film, particularly Asian characters. Whenever I watch “diverse” shows and movies on television or see a “diverse” commercial, it’s always a bunch of white people with one black person. To me, that’s not diverse, that’s a sad attempt at being diverse. There’s so few positive

and accurate portrayals of Asians and Asian-Americans that I hardly wonder why everyone thought my Asian friends and I were related. To have more than one Asian in something, they had to be family, otherwise why use them when you can just get another white guy to fill the role? The majority of the time an Asian person appears in film and tv they're a perfect stereotype. I never saw people who looked like me on tv because the normative visage was a plain white person, not an ethnic person. The normative culture was being American, having pretty blue or green eyes, skinny with no cultural practices. American television and film took no time to explore other cultures besides their own when I was growing up because it was never worth it. My culture, black culture, Indian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, African, Native American culture was only ever fun as a halloween costume or a sports team mascot. This all surely shows just how deprioritized cultural and racial diversity is representation in media. The fact that so few actors and other workers in the film industry draw little attention to this exemplifies how internalized the whole concept is.

This assignment has made me think long and hard about how I present myself through my identity. It sounds stereotypical to say, but I don't like labels because I like to define who I am on my own terms. I won't let the systems that try to keep me down continue to do just that. I also want to help free and educate others who are oppressed by the same and different systems than I am. Before this assignment and before this class, because already this class has changed how I want to experience my life, I wouldn't speak up when someone said something "a little racist" or "a little sexist." I would gloss over it in an attempt to not cause conflict or be labeled as the feminist who ruins everyone's fun or sees everything as racist. Now I know I want to speak up. I don't want to brush anything I have in the past under the rug. And I know I'll make some

enemies, it's okay. It will make it easier to clear the way for more aware people who know who how I identify and where I stand on these very important issues. Writing this paper also forced me to look at how I am privileged, not just how I am oppressed. I don't like to think that I have ignored the issues of those who are oppressed by the same system I benefit from, but I have. I've justified my ignorance with ideas like "I'm never mean or say classist/ableist things." I do though, I can't ignore the fact that the scant amount of attention I give to the issue of classism and ableism is unfair comparative to what I put into the issue of racism or sexism or heterosexism. I now question not just who I am, where my identities lie but also who I want to become.

Work Cited

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