

I can distinctly recall my ears burning, my heart racing, and my brows furrowing: the physical sensations of my opposition and internalized racism while reading Accapadi's (2007) "When White Women Cry: How White Women's Tears Oppress Women of Color". Similar feelings bubbled to the surface in reading Cabrera's (2018) *White Men on College Campuses: Racism, White Immunity, and the Myth of "post-racial" Higher Education*. I have come to identify those anatomical responses and suppressed feelings as internalized racism. The only way I am able to process my reactions and identify behaviors rooted in oppression, is if I take the time to dive deep into how each of my social identities interact. For instance, my initial opposition to Accapadi's (2007) article was intrinsically linked to my desire for racial comfort (DiAngelo, 2011, p. 60-61). I was so agitated at the idea that the expression of emotions could be oppressive that I completely missed the purpose of the article and concerned myself with making excuses of why I was not a bad person for feeling this way about the article. Upon rereading this article, I was impacted by the "One Up/One Down Identities section (Accapadi, 2007, p. 210). Thinking about the ways in which I, as a gay White man, am able to engage in a way that does not become representative of my communities and I have the privilege to navigate situations with my privilege (White, man) spearheading any context. The ongoing scouring process of embedded, oppressive thoughts is visceral but inextricably required in my pursuit of a critical self-assessment. This course has opened a door for me to continue this internal process and engage in external mediums through social justice centered leadership and practice. It is through utilizing an array of social justices texts such as *Principles and Ethical Commitments* from

Darder's (2018) *Critical Leadership for Social Justice* (Darder, 2018, p. 152-157) and *Emergent Strategies* (brown, 2017) to inform my praxis in student affairs.

In regards to applying newly acquired understandings from the course and the texts read to my praxis, I have not had an opportunity via assistantship or internship due to the absence of those in my time at Oregon State University up to this point. Despite this, I have found that social justice work and the readings presented by this course are applicable to life outside of student affairs. Darder (2018) explicitly explains that critical leadership in social justice has many forms, one of them being "Moral Commitment" (Darder, 2018, p. 153). Darder describes a sense of backlash in regards to opposing capitalistic causes of misfortunes to humans and the need to 'fight the good fight' (Darder, 2018, p. 153). This form can certainly be expanded to other general contexts in that social justice advocates must expand efforts outside of a 9 to 5 job. Critical leadership in social justice requires a lifestyle commitment to foil the oppressive nature of our society. Another form of critical leadership according to Darder (2018) is as a Political Act (Darden, 2018, p. 153). Using this form of critical leadership, I have specifically applied social justice centered concepts when critiquing the current political atmosphere and considering what folx are targeted or left out by legislation and rhetoric in way that is similarly defined by Darder (2018).

A separate context in which I have used our social justice texts in my recent memory are story circles. These circles are defined as a gathering of individuals that have the sole purpose of giving and receiving anecdotes that correspond to a prompt to encourage educational dialogue (Hill, 2017, p. 60). After everyone has had a chance to share their story, themes are drawn up that correlate or distinguish stories together or apart, respectively. In my group of friends, we set

up a time to talk about our goals for ourselves in our respective degree programs we are attending. Since graduation of last year, many of us had begun to fall out of touch with one another. This activity was used to strengthen existing bonds. We set a clock, similarly to our storytelling circle we participated in class and shared when it was our turn and listened to each other when out of turn. Even though each of us were aware of how anxious we all were about being successful in our programs, being able to hear uninterrupted monologues that were unique in delivery, yet interconnected in feeling was so beneficial for our group to regrow again as friends. Hill (2017) describes that storytelling circles can encourage group bonding, and in my experience, can even serve as a tool to renew bonds that are no longer as strong as they once were. In accordance with Hill's (2017), storytelling circles are an excellent way to foster dialogue that checks those with privileged/dominant identities whom have tendencies to take up a disproportionate amount of space in dialogue circles. Storytelling circles in turn give those with historically smaller platforms and minority voices an opportunity to speak their unapologetic truths into the space.

Unapologetic truths finally surfaced in our cohort. Spaces and opportunities were given for the People of Color in our cohort to finally speak their minds about the undue burden that has been placed on them in the classroom in regards to educating or taking care of the White students in the cohort. The reading from DiAngelo (2011) highlighted some white supremacist pieces I had unknowingly spoken into journals. An example of this being that I had highlighted the enlightenment I had while listening to cohort mates that are People of Color. This is certainly something I have done in spaces outside of our program and something that I am now trying to be more aware of. This reading on White fragility has enhanced my toolkit when talking to other

White people in race based conversations. As this article suggests, it is ultimately on White practitioners to engage in these conversations with fellow White people about power and privilege. A mantra I have encountered is that, “there is a time and a place.” I have found that this line is typically used when White folx are desperately trying to see themselves out of a conversation that could potentially provoke White fragility or threaten racial comfort. It is in these moments that I, as a White practitioner, must utilize my privilege to engage in these dialogues to make change. As I do not have an assistantship, I work in a health business office that is primarily dominated by middle-aged White women. Many discussions occur around race and many times I hid behind my privilege of being White, despite the fact I have been gifted an opportunity to engage in racial social justice environments. After reading DiAngelo’s (2011) article, I made a pact to myself and to People of Color that I would dig deep in those moments of needed dialogue with fellow White people, regardless of the time or place.

Another reading that has required me to dig deep and changed my view of my praxis is Cabrera’s (2018) *White Men on College Campuses: Racism, White Immunity, and the Myth of “post-racial” Higher Education*. Relating to DiAngelo’s text (2011), I was struck with this sense of responsibility to engage in critical self-assessment and reflection so I can encourage other White men to commit to similar processes. The initial shock came from how pervasive racially arrogant attitudes were on college campuses. I personally do not have many White men in my circle of friends despite being one myself, but this article enforced the notion that I will in fact be serving students that will identify as White men and exhibit harmful racially arrogant behaviors. In understanding that you do not get to pick the student, I have to be ready to encounter, examine, and exfoliate White supremacist ideals that a majority of White men hold, according to

Cabrera (2018). Despite the distancing of myself from these ideas and White men on campuses, there are shared experiences between those students and myself which serve as enough of a foundation to engage in difficult conversations around White power and privilege.

Outside of interacting with social justice concepts on an interpersonal level, Chapter 2 of *Creating Multicultural Change on Campus* served as an excellent resource in describing the ways in which I, as a student affairs practitioner, will apply multicultural change at a systematic level (Pope, R. L., Reynolds, A. L., Mueller, J. A., & Musil, C. M., 2014, pp. 42-60). Through the introduction of multicultural organization development (MCOOD) theory and model, I am able to assess campus entities and social climates in order to inform my methods of enacting social justice oriented changes on campus (Pope et. al, 2014, p. 21). The process of change as designated by MCOOD theory includes four components (Pope et. al, 2014): locate agents of change, critiquing the readiness of the institution for a multicultural change, submit and interact with an assessment tool in regards to the readiness, and plan out the process for change (Pope et. al, 2014, pp. 25-26). This chapter also gave insight to the process in which a diversity office on an institution's campus becomes the sole place fighting for diversity and inclusion on campuses, despite the fact that it takes a community and overarching institutional commitment to diversity and inclusion to overcome oppressive and hostile environments on campuses (Pope et. al, 2014). Regardless of what position I serve at on a campus, social justice and inclusion must be at the center of my praxis.

A final piece of literature that has forever changed the way I view my praxis is *Emergent Strategies* (Brown, a. m., 2017). As I previously stated, I do not have a venue/position in which I can concurrently learn and apply tips taken from this book such as an internship or assistantship,

but I feel emboldened particularly by strategies given to us such as adaptive and fractal (brown, a. m., 2017). With adaptive, the student population and their needs change at such a rapid rate, that I must be intentional in listening and matching students at their respective levels in order to support them appropriately and efficiently. Fractal is the most fascinating strategy due to the fact that I had never considered the idea that it is important to look more closely at the micro level of things and how they are interrelated to create a big picture. I think this notion of focusing on the small things can also prevent burnout in social justice work and provides opportunities for social justice centered student affairs practitioners to not be overwhelmed by the bureaucracy and complex systems that need challenged in order to enact change.

To further my critical self-assessment, I will utilize the ACPA/NASPA social justice and inclusion competency rubric to essentially grade myself. Throughout the components of this competency, I have rated myself at a foundational level throughout due to the relatively recent start in social justice work and no student affairs position for applicability of the components (“Understanding of Self and Navigating Systems of Power”, “Critical Assessment and Self-Directed Learning”, “Engaging in Socially- Just Practices”, and “Organizational Systemic Advocacy”). With regards to the ability to express one’s social identities, I understand that this is a necessary process for myself to work through for numerous reasons. My time in the College Student Services Administration (CSSA) program has provided an excellent foundation for me to explore the ways in which my social identities interact with one another and interact with other people's’ identities as well. An example of a time that I worked to understand and articulate my own identities and intersectionality was through an assignment in Student Development Theory. As a class, we were able to write down our many social identities and reflect on identities that

have the most influence on us and identities we wanted to know more about. This component is particularly relevant in times of trying to navigate communities with dominant and minority identities. Exclusionary practices can be emulated in minority identity communities to exclude particular identities as is seen in dominant identity communities. Understanding intersectionality can hopefully lead to dialogues about the detrimental effects exclusion can have and bring myself closer to inclusive and equitable practices.

My ability to identify influential systems of socialization is found in my knowledge from the history course on higher education beginnings in the US. I was given a preliminary understanding of systems of socialization, specifically the oppressive nature of higher education that exists today, and how it is rooted in the foundational building of American higher education institutions that were forced upon Black and Brown bodies and violently enforced. Cuyjet (2016) talks about political intersectionality in Chapter 4. It is described as a feeling or experience that individuals may encounter competing agendas where their multiple identities intersect. A personal example of where I have experienced this in navigating a minority identity (sexual identity) with dominant identities (white, cisgender man) and the effects the latter can have on fellow LGBTQ+ members. Stigmatization in the LGBTQ+ community is rampant and despite being a minority community, dominant white supremacist and misogynistic values bleed into the minds of community members about what bodies are valued versus those that are not. The final component of the Understanding of Self and Navigating Systems of Power foundational section declares practitioners should be able to speak to their capacity in expressing their foundational understanding in social justice and inclusion. This component can be addressed in the social

justice personal philosophy statements we wrote and shared with our classmates this term and arguably through this critical self-assessment paper.

The next component of the rubric is “Critical Assessment and Self Directed Learning”. I have placed myself in the foundational level of this assessment. The foundational level first states that practitioners should be able to, “utilize critical reflection in order to identify one’s own prejudices and biases.” In my experience, the weekly journals in this specific course have been particularly beneficial in generating critical reflections of my own prejudices and biases. Coupling the reflective piece of journaling while incorporating readings enhanced my ability to locate white supremacist tendencies still existing in my system. This point brings home from Chapter 2 in which Pope, Reynolds, Miller, and Musil (2014) talk about the pervasive, deep, and intentional nature in regards to characteristics of systems (systemic racism). The following bullet point states that practitioners should, “participate in activities that assess and complicate one’s understanding of inclusion, oppression, privilege, and power.” Cuyjet’s (2016) Chapter 4 brings to light the importance of engaging in coalition building. For me, the storytelling activity acted as away to be intentional in listening to one another, but also helped me learn further into my understanding of inclusion, oppression, privilege, and power without feeling as if I am forcing people with minority identities to share their stories. This is mainly in that they (hopefully) feel they have the autonomy whether to share their trauma with others (specifically White classmates) or not. Furthermore, the space that was given in class to engage in a caucus with other White cohort mates to talk through fears and feelings in a way that still focused an anti-racist mission was priceless for me.



“Engaging in Socially- Just Practice” is the following section of the ACPA/NASPA rubric. Again, I have rated myself to be in the foundational level. The first point in this component compels practitioners to, “integrate knowledge of social justice, inclusion, oppression, privilege, and power into one’s practice.” At this time, it is difficult for me to say I am even at the foundational level being that I have no particular “practice” to integrate social justice into. This is a primary reason why I have graded myself at a foundational level. Personally, it is one thing to say you practice social justice, but it is another thing to actually do it. A section from the readings that resonated with me that I hope to apply one day is found in Cuyjet’s Chapter 17 (2016). “Create identity-explicit, not identity-exclusive spaces.” (Cuyjet, M. J., Howard-Hamilton, M. F., Cooper, D. L., & Linder, C., 2016, p. 386). Following in the foundational level, the rubric asks practitioners to, “connect and build meaningful relationships with others while recognizing their multiple, intersecting identities, perspectives, and developmental differences.” This component, for me, draws in Cuyjet’s Chapter 4 (2016): Intentionality without tokenism (Cuyjet, et al, 2016, pp. 75-76). There is a balance of motivation in wanting to be friends with someone because you vibe well together and wanting to be friends because you can give each other something special. Another piece of this balancing act is that I want to be intentional when it comes to friendships and never want to enter a space or relationship with someone thinking that a color blind approach is ever appropriate. I truly feel that in relationships I have made with people in the cohort, I have connected with a diverse group of people in the cohort and am excited to see where my connections with these wonderful people go. The next point requires practitioners to, “advocate on issues of social justice, oppression, privilege, and power that impact people based on local, country, and global interconnections.” A

note that I snagged from Cuyjet's Chapter 17 (2016) was to, "...continually work to make the unconscious conscious" (Cuyjet et al, 2016, p. 386) as student affairs practitioners. In my personal social justice journey, I am working hard to listen, engage in critical conversations with myself and others, and stay in my lane to be the best anti-racist ally I can be.

The final piece of rubric is entitled, "Organizational Systemic Advocacy" in which I have rated myself in the foundational level. The sole bullet point in this section requires a practitioner to, "understand how one is affected by and participates in maintaining systems of oppression, privilege, and power." This statement makes me recall the article that noted particular behaviors that are directly rooted in white supremacy, such as perfectionism or urgency. This article immensely encouraged my understanding of how I have participated and maintained this system that seeks to keep intact this hierarchical system that oppresses and oppresses ruthlessly. In understanding from other class readings that even I, as a White person, am negatively affected by white supremacy (in a watered down way) was a further motivation to understand the ways in which I have benefited and encouraged white supremacy.

Going more in depth in understanding how my identity as a White student affairs practitioner can influence conscious or unconscious behaviors that carry consequences for People of Color, is a core area of growth that I have witnessed grow throughout the past 10 weeks, but also an area that is going to require a lifetime supply of nurture and critical assessment. Internally, I felt that before this program, I had a grasp on racial social justice and I was confident that I was the farthest thing from racist. Reality hit me through various readings, such as Accapadi (2007) and Cabrera (2018) that there is not so much a final stage of enlightenment in which I fully rid myself of white supremacist tendencies. In actuality, working

through the privilege and power of being White takes an undying commitment to be a work in progress. Without engaging in this process, I will be inadvertently simultaneously benefiting from and contributing to a white supremacist hierarchy that designates White bodies as more valuable. This internal processing is intentional and in accordance with Darder (2018) should never take a neutral stance in issues of social justice. The reason I believe the processing of my White identity and unpacking the privilege and power that comes with it is of utmost importance is not only because of how it can negatively impact People of Color in my everyday life, but also to see change occur externally in other White people. There is so much power in having a position on campus because of the ability to influence young minds at a stage in which they are particularly malleable. At predominantly white institutions, White students are not experiencing a necessarily diverse atmosphere and hold a lot of privilege in existing in spaces that were built intentionally for them and living amongst people that look and sound like them. All this to say that they are most likely not experiencing challenges to their privileged racial identities. This is especially true if these White students grew up living in other White dominated areas. As I student I absolutely fit the same mold of never challenged on the power and privilege I retained by moving from one predominantly white area to another for college. If I am able to show not only that I am critically exploring my White identity, I can inspire other White students to engage in similar processes that will hopefully lead them to a dedication to dismantle systems of oppression that cater to their identity as a White person.

Somewhat contrary to my previous paragraph, a particularly external area of growth that I want to name and commit to is to develop a true critical consciousness around intersectionality and how to incorporate it in my practice. We have had many pieces of literature that have

allowed me to absorb what it means to support students in an intersectional framework, but Chapter 4, “An Intersectional Approach to Supporting Students” (Cuyjet et al, 2016, pp. 66-78) was particularly beneficial in my education in this topic area. Being given the tools to identify the types of intersectionality, such as political, structural and representational were helpful to expand my prior understanding of intersectionality and apply it in various contexts (Cuyjet et al, 2016, pp. 69-70).

Throughout this essay, I have highlighted the need and intense nature of engaging in social justice practices. The motivation to do so stems back into my childhood and on from there. In my first journal, I wrote about my friend named Heaven. Heaven and I have stayed in touch despite moving to different parts of the United States. Heaven was the lone Black person (lone Person of Color in general) in my grade. I did not realize it at the time, but she was the first person in my life that helped me understand how differently the world could view someone that was not White. Despite identifying as differing races, gender, and sexual orientation identities, our bond has been one of the most priceless friendships I have ever had in my life. After I came out as gay, she was my fiercest defender against the bullies, and I for her (usually the same bullies). Having the privilege to live with her in my life has lit a social justice flame in my life that I refuse to let be put out by my own ignorance or complacency or others that do not agree with the idea that life should be nothing but inclusion and equity for all. Outside of being a loyal friend and someone who is happy to spend time with me to unpack my privilege and power, she is an incredible source of support and a person that I know is a lifelong friend and fellow social justice advocate. The latter trait highlights the importance of making a circle of friends that will encourage social justice growth, while on their own journeys.

Cabrera's (2018) chapters hit home for me as an additional source of motivation. He mentions that many of the White men that had answered his questions more oriented towards a desire for equality or showed signs of more equitable answers were White men that also identified with a minority identity, such as sexual orientation or religious identity. Outside of my friendship with Heaven, I really had nothing that challenged my White identity or any of my many dominant identities until I came out as gay to my small, rural, and farming community. During the storytelling activity, I talked about how I truly did not start to think about how oppressive our society was to minority identities until I openly identified as one, myself. While I might have similar origins as the White men I mentioned, I know that I must go beyond my internal processes and must seek out opportunities to engage in social justice work. If I spend time mulling over the origins of my social justice journey, I will not be successful in engaging in deeper self reflection that will enable me to be more effective in dismantling white supremacy and other systems of oppression. Throughout this work, I hope to utilize sources such as Owens', "Remembering Love: An Informal Contemplation on Healing" (2016) to take care of myself and keep my stamina.

Throughout my time in this program, I have been trying to decide where I want to work and in what capacity I want to work. The course and readings have taught me how truly pervasive white supremacy is and that it really does not depend on where you are working or what position you have, it is vital to our society and people with minority identities to center social justice and inclusion into your practice. Working in higher education will bring complexities and unforeseen obstacles, but knowing I have made a commitment to social justice has motivated me to continue in my personal pursuits in the context of social justice, but also

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spark the fire for students by utilizing theory, lived experiences, and practices that are grounded in social justice. At our cohort's social justice retreat, we talked about different roles people serve in social justice. While I am committed to keeping this role fluid and flexible to serve in the best ways possible, this course specifically has given me a huge push towards educating others about social justice. I am incredibly excited and hopeful to look back at this essay in years to come and see the progression that has occurred internally and externally.

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