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Being Both the *Other* and the Dominant

I am a white, queer, cisgender man. My mother is a school teacher and my father is an engineer. I grew up in a middle-class household where both of my parents' income only had to be split between my only brother and I. Both of my parents come from middle-class backgrounds, too. Truth is, I have never had to worry about money in my life; I have never had to deal with racial microaggressions; I have never been subjected to violence because of my gender identity. I grew up having a rather privileged life because of my social standing in mainstream United States society. My white skin, middle-class upbringing, being a man, and undeniable queerness have all determined my power, privilege, and inequity, affecting how I experience and navigate the world and people around me.

Perhaps the social identity that I carry with me every day of the year, which also happens to be the most obvious is my race. As mentioned earlier, I am white. This has given me countless privileges compared to my peers of color. I grew up in a small, right-wing town just north of Cincinnati, Ohio for a good portion of my life. I think this is significant because there were not many people of color for me to socialize with--everybody was white and I did not get to see how the social construction of race works first hand. It was there where I feel I learned a lot of fallacious concepts about race and racism. I was told to stay colorblind and to not acknowledge that people of color are not white and that whites are raced as well. I was taught that civil rights

leaders such as Doctor Martin Luther King Junior fixed all the problems of racism, so there is no need to acknowledge the race of someone or discuss it for that matter. However, a blatant act of racism occurred when the neighbors who lived down the street from me, an interracial couple, had a cross burned in their yard. It did not make that much sense—if racism was dead and we were supposed to be colorblind, why would somebody do that? That was when I started to become racially aware.

Most of my growth in becoming racially aware has come from my Women's Studies educational career at Clark College, and now at Washington State University. I learned that I did not have to acknowledge race because of the fact that I am white; I did not have to see myself as a racialized person because I grew up with power stemming from it. The agent group never has to see themselves as the being [*insert social identity here*] because they do not have to deal with consequences that it brings on. This power has given me countless privileges that Peggy McIntosh describes as "an invisible package of unearned assets which [sic] which I count on cashing in each day… like an invisible weightless knapsack [sic] of special provisions, maps, passports, … and blank checks" (49). Like Peggy McIntosh, I too carry this invisible knapsack around as long as I have my light skin. McIntosh continues to list some of the privileges that she has received or can expect to receive based on her race. Some of these include being able to find a band-aid that will match the color of her skin, being able to visit retail stores without having asset protection follow her around, and being able to get credit without people doubting her ability to pay it off (50-51). I also get to experience these same privileges because I am white.

Perhaps the social identity that is less evident on the outside, but still influenced my upbringing is my class. My current socio-economic status is middle class. I still belong to this

social group because I still live in the house I grew up in—I still live with my parents. If I only worked the current job that I have, I would be considered working class, or even poor because I only make minimum wage. The money in my family has given me considerable privileges. One these is the privilege of writing this essay—to be going to a higher education institution to get the Humanities degree I am working on right now. Perhaps my middle-class lifestyle is what made me want to go to college. Everybody in my family has been to college, including all of my grandparents who are now in their late 80s. There was a sort of pressure for me to attend. Being middle class, all of my life has given me the privilege to go to College, for my family to be able to buy our own home, to not have to worry if one of my parents lost their job, and to have food on the table every night at dinner time. I often feel that my middle-class privilege has been stretched further than what some other families of the same status have, too. I only have one other sibling who is approximately two years younger than me. That means the share of both tangible and intangible resources are not stretched between seven other siblings like in some other families. All of the resources that went to my brother and I were for us and did not have to share with other siblings. Each of us received more resources than we would have if there were more kids in the family.

My gender has definitely played a role in my upbringing, too. As I mentioned in the introduction, I identify as a cisgender man here in the present day. However, reflecting back on my gender, especially looking at when I was a middle schooler and a lower classman in high school, my gender has not been static over the years. I knew the language to use back then, I probably would have identified as genderqueer or non-binary. I did not feel like a man or a boy. I did not feel like a woman either. Whenever my teachers divided the class into a girls' section and

a boys' section for the purpose of the lesson or an activity, I felt out of place. I felt like I did not belong with either of the genders that western culture mandates. I was still on the masculine side of the gender spectrum in my youth, which I feel gave me some privilege. For the most part, I presented masculine. I wore clothes marketed towards boys most of the time, I kept short hair, and I did not wear makeup. However, the "boy clothes" that I picked out were sometimes in traditionally feminine colors such as pink, I would wear traditional women's accessories on occasion, and I liked to paint my fingernails for fun. These things alone afforded me predictable harassment from some of my peers. I also acted in a feminine manner. I did not have a single friend who was a guy; all of my friends were women. I did not fit the masculine crowd in my high school. I did not play football, I did not wrestle, I did not engage in any traditionally masculine sport for that matter. The culture surrounding it was too masculine for me and I remember actively thinking that at the time. I feel that I have gained a substantial sense of safety regarding now that gender presentation has shifted to mostly masculine. This sense of safety is the privilege I receive because I am a man. With my current gender, I do not have to worry about the harassment I will receive if I go out wearing my current wardrobe, which does not include pink scarves and nail polish anymore.

The previous three social identities granted me the position of agency when juxtaposing people with target statuses of comparable social identities. However, my queerness breaks my breaks this streak. In his essay "Missing People and Others," Arturo Madrid compares his being Mexican-American to being what he describes as "*the other*" (16-20). Growing up in small-town Ohio, I always knew that I was different from the other kids. This difference became apparent after my parents gave me "the talk" and I found myself fantasizing about being with other boys. I

tried to replace the men in the fantasies with women, but that did nothing for me. That was when I found out I was gay and started experiencing my own internalized oppression because of it. I hated myself and I looked online to find out more about it and to see if I could change sexual orientation (fortunately that is not possible). Being gay in Christian and conservative Ohio left me with a figurative death sentence on my head. I felt the need to keep it from my friends at all cost and keep the secret for the rest of my life. In the fifth grade, I made it my life goal to marry a woman so people would not think that I was queer. My own queerness made me *the other*, not in the sense of race, but in sexual orientation. Since I moved to Vancouver shortly after making that revelation, I felt a little safer to come out of the closet, a disadvantage unique to people who are queer because I was assumed to be straight in this heteronormative culture. I have also shaken a lot of the internalized oppression that came with my discovery.

If I had been born from parents who are black, or been hit hard by the Bush Administration recession of 2008, or even turn out to be a straight guy, this essay would have turned out to be completely different. Maybe I would not have gone to college but would have needed to go right into a working-class position to stay there for the rest of my life. Maybe the people in my life would look different. Maybe my childhood goal to marry a woman would have been because of an attraction rather than societal pressure. The narratives from my life would have been from the perspective of another person, proving that my social standing as a white, middle class, cisgender, queer man has affected my perception and navigation of the world and the people I come across inside it.

Works Cited

McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege." *Race, Class & Gender: An Anthology*, edited by Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins, 8th ed., Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013, pp. 49-53.

Madrid, Arturo. "Missing People and Others." *Race, Class & Gender: An Anthology*, edited by Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins, 8th ed., Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013, pp. 16-20.