

## **Divergent Lens: Examining Bias From a Neuroqueer White Privileged Perspective**

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CNST-610-B.2023SP: Social and Multicultural Foundations

February 14, 2023

### **Author Note**

This work addresses a rubric copied from our online course platform for a paper examining areas of personal professional development relevant to bias:

1. Name and explain each bias, including specific thoughts, assumptions, or beliefs
2. Describe how you believe these biases developed
3. How they have been maintained
4. How you feel each bias may influence your continued professional development
5. What you will do to work towards overcoming your biases

**Divergent Lens: Examining Biases From a Neuroqueer White Privileged Perspective**

When considering areas of professional struggle, I have a rich history of software development experience to draw from. I also have innovative (at least in terms of my personal exposure to various corporate spaces), forward looking, and inclusive motivations driving my sense of purpose. The struggles I have encountered in group spaces, beyond dyadic interrelation, were almost exclusively driven by pervasive and subtle aggression befalling anyone outside the inner circle, the shibboleth holders. Business needs over human rights is business as usual in a hegemonic behemoth.

These forces, especially in those peers who have walked through life assuming their personal preferences and thoughtless defaults applied across diverse populations, seem rooted in each individual who has dared to dream of acquiring a sense of belonging. That is to say, all of us; any time we are seduced into separation of concerns resulting in othering, we reactivate and enact internalized messages of oppression. Those forces most applicable in my personal story at present are the fear of Black people I've been taught since birth into a Nordic family, the fear of male-identified people I've been taught through abusive relationships, and my deep loathing of "normal" as something to which we should all be striving as we look around and see suffering in every region under the same blood-stained flag of neurotypical conformance.

**Naming the Biases**

I've been unpacking racist tendencies ever since my youth, though I never made much progress before enrolling in Africana Studies to fulfill an elective requirement of my B.A. in Music. Having been forced by bullies into shouting epithets at Black people passing through the neighborhood where I spent most of my youth, I pledged early to push back against that ish. The

university professor who challenged my naive assumptions while I struggled to integrate concepts relevant to unfamiliar cultural norms and diaspora aided my understanding tremendously. I became much more intimately involved after graduating and moving to a state where the original constitution made it illegal to live there as a person of color (I was not aware at the time). Having graduated from the high school ranked 14 in the nation for diversity of population at classes sized 300-500, and living that whole time within earshot of one of the largest army bases in the country, I experienced shocking awakenings relevant to white privilege with regularity while the overwhelming majority of the people in the region surrounding my new home were living the dream of cis/het/white/neurotypical conformance. I thought it might be possible to participate in marginalized communities, and was often held at bay owing to distrust in my appearance, though opportunity was very rarely actualized outside of work settings.

Childhood sexual abuse and neglect, theft of personal belongings, locker room assaults, bisexual erasure, partner abuse, unethical management practices, and direct experience with authority figures ranging from doctors to police who acted with impunity, above any laws, in pursuit of their self-centered and often bigoted aims, all provide me with sound reasons not to trust the men folk. Even still, with concentrated effort, male identifying peers hold me at arm's length while engaging in circles of female identified conversation seems almost effortless.

I am neuroqueer because I neuroqueer (Walker, 2021). A term invented as a verb in autistic community by an esteemed professor of psychology, who also runs an aikido dojo, has expanded in public discourse to define an electable identity inclusive of anyone willing to voice and/or enact opposition to the violence of "normal". This concept was birthed by a person many

would still define as lacking theory of mind, simply owing to unexamined repetition of things they were taught. Fuck that noise.

### **Developing the Biases**

America's founding fathers ensured durable positions of power for themselves through vilification of people who were easily recognizable as not being members of the in-group. This gate keeping of advantage has continued through generations into the present. Also implicated as a foundational influence in my suite of biases is the trickle-down economics of trauma rooted in the ethnocidal effort applied during the Christianization of Nordic peoples by Nordic peoples while bowing to the will of the church in England. Responses to the ultimatum "Convert, or die!" run through these veins. Many good Scandinavians are also good Lutherans, and my family of origin allowed no exceptions. The uninformed enforcement of dogma and stigma continue to ring in the halls of my memory. All of these influences share the common thread of artificial hierarchy, and compliance at all costs, for exclusive benefit to the privileged elite.

### **Maintaining the Biases**

The primary reason racial bias persists in my awareness would have to be its origin in my father's overtly racist jokes (learned on the flight line from mechanics who manipulated and abused their peers while he served abroad, enlisted in the Air Force). These are early and oft repeated impressions. Witnessing pearl-clutching at every other neighborhood park, trailhead, and Twitter handle, empathic capacity has me simmering in it daily.

Each time I'm affected by ignorant masculine aggression, I withdraw a little more into solitude or the few safe places I've found hosted by queers and allies. Each time I witness the brutality of a colleague getting ogled and made the object of a wager, I strive to make contact

and query for their level of awareness with regard to the microexpressions I'm detecting.

Neither retreat nor subterfuge have served me well in moving beyond this bias.

In the case of the oppression of the neurodivergent, I'm much less actively involved in stirring the pot. All it takes to activate a response to an anti-bias mission is receipt of a message about another filicide from autistic community, or reading news of Black children getting arrested and charged with felonies for behaviors I've witnessed in meetings with business executives that result in cool-down sessions that looked an awful lot like booze fueled lunch meetings on the corporate card from where I was sitting. A reminder that the Judge Rotenberg Center continues forcing children to carry backpacks full of batteries and wires which enable staff to remotely issue electric shocks for non-compliance (Bascom, 2012), devices which have multiple times been ruled illegal for use on livestock worldwide, such reminders keep this bias absolutely raging.

### **Influences of Biases**

I feel a certain level of comfort with and awareness of my relationship to racial bias. I've long maintained acquaintance with folks from many racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Talking about personal stories with people unlike me has been an active pursuit since learning about foreign exchange programs in junior high school. If anything, the stress endured in educating others holding white privilege about how their bias affects people in ways they only rarely consider may be my biggest hurdle along this avenue.

Male privilege is something I've recently seen expressed by a trans woman who refused to acknowledge the impacts of her male conditioning. When even people who transition away from male gender expressions continue to wield such frequently toxic force without regard for

the impacts on others, fighting the patriarchy takes on much more complex undertones. While she chose to aggressively attack any misstep that could possibly be construed as transphobic, especially in her male peers, I have been opting for inviting peers into private check-ins and allowing them to save face while addressing the impacts of their behavior. This, in some ways, feels like service to an oppressor. Confronting men, even with airtight arguments, only rarely seems to work out in my favor, so I'm unlikely to engage with male aggression unless I'm attacked personally. My skills are better expressed in holding space for those affected.

The privilege afforded to people expressing neurotypical conformance wrecks havoc in neurodivergent experience (Yergeau, 2018). I've often been asked to complete the same level of artifact creation as my peers on top of doing all the work to accommodate their ego fragility while simultaneously seeking to maintain a reasonable sensory diet in environments that are actively disabling, environmentally as well as interpersonally. Only then would I have leadership's blessing to develop the program which would address accommodating even the most mundane and simply addressed of my needs.... Organizational acknowledgment of the same needs that might have led to a leveling of the playing field have repeatedly and suddenly doubled my workload. Once again, fuck that. Inhumane treatment resulting from concern regarding organizational liability or mistrust, armchair diagnosis, and saviorism (also known as making official accommodation requests), is ubiquitous in my experience.

### **Overcoming the Biases**

Expanding the space I can hold for cognitive dissonance is a familiar pursuit, it was through such effort that many of my software architectures came to fruition. Regarding bias specifically, I plan to continue engaging in dialog with people who feel unfamiliar, unsafe. This

is not new territory by any stretch of the imagination, but I have waxed and waned in the level of effort I have been willing and able to devote toward maintaining the appearance of prosocial behavior through a countersocial embodiment.

Education and outreach, building of neurodivergent and allied coalitions, modeling of frequently pathologized yet beneficial behavior, busting myths through literature reviews and direct experimentation, .... These are all currently active pursuits as well as intentions to hold while my growth edges continue shifting. I didn't expect to encounter so much ableism in a space such as these halls of contemplative learning. I didn't expect it in every professional setting in which I've ever participated. Nonetheless, it is here, and I will fight it.

### References

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