

**Divergent Ingress: Consideration of Where and How I Show Up**

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**Author Note**

This work addresses personal reflections on how an Autistic Nonbinary Bisexual Nordic assigned male at birth into a family ignorant of white privilege enters into relationship. A full exploration of this topic was not required, owing to recognition of prior work toward the section of this class in which the author was originally enrolled being combined with our current professor's section of the course into one huge class. The author, knowing the value of such personal exploration, has chosen to engage in the prompt with a fresh take and a nod toward incorporating material from lessons relevant to discussions in which they have participated throughout the current semester, both within and external to evaluated settings for discovery.

### **Divergent Ingress: Consideration of Where and How I Show Up**

Given the sensitivity of topics embraced in the curriculum for this course, coupled with apparent reticence of participants to reveal vulnerable parts in large group settings, I don't recall feeling like we got near the core of these highly important considerations very often. It left me pondering the need for a boot camp of sorts; a place where newly enrolled members of a contemplative community would be called in and invited to hold various normative philosophical and interrelational theories throughout their time enrolled in the curriculum. Such consideration might include instruction relevant to how students will be expected to demonstrate wrestling with, and/or capacity for holding, challenging material as well as the need to expose vulnerable parts (or at the very least, embrace speaking from devil's advocate positions), engendering more richness and depth of exploration than a combination of lectures and surveys could ever be expected to wield. The results of this work might then be compared to externally witnessed behaviors as part of the evaluation of student work throughout their program of study. One model for such an approach was provided, albeit indirectly, in the prompt for this reflective paper. Contemplative boot camp modules might progress through topics such as *How I Identify*, *Perceived Incongruence*, *Lived Experience*, *Privilege and Oppression*, *Divergent Influences*, *Growth Edges*, and *Broaching Differences*. The remainder of this work will reveal the author's personal examples of consideration and exposure along these same lines of intrapersonal inquiry.

#### **How I Identify**

My primary social locations reveal a bizarre intersection of marginalized and privileged spaces. While I was assigned male upon birth into a family with ancestral roots in Norway (as well as some additional influence from surrounding regions in what is commonly referred to as

Scandinavia), we didn't hold many practices from the old country in my family of origin. This rupture of an already tenuous grasp on ancestral wisdom is something I've worked throughout my life to repair. The disconnect is something I see as rooted in the ethnocidal efforts of converts from the old ways into monotheism, effort to bring everyone else along with them into "the one right way" to worship, as taught by the English (consolidating power as an international force to be reckoned with at the end of the Viking Age). At the same time, our intimate ties into the natural world gave way to the pursuit of precious metals and weapons of dominance; indirect idol worship subverted ceremonies invoking a multitude of sacred ancestral support and wisdom.

While those aspects of my integrated identification model may be obvious to informed observers, my marginalized parts have most certainly taken up more of my energy and attention, and they remain largely invisible unless explicitly centered. I came out as bi during high school in a richly diverse subset of suburbia before the internet had captured general public interest. The neurodivergence I battled throughout my life was not identified, recognized, or diagnosed until I had suffered othering over more than four decades. Intense grief and celebration inherent in arriving within community, and finding my first glimpses into a sense of belonging, during my early 40s rattled the foundational assumptions of how I "should show up" in any given space. Personal work devoted to teasing apart the sensory-seeking and sensory-avoiding aspects of my own individual flavor of autism, eventually yielded a revolutionary redefinition of a life-long experience of holding equal parts feminine and masculine potency that never seemed to meet much affirmation or acceptance until I found the words to express my nonbinary gender identity.

### **Perceived Incongruence**

In the order of their introduction to this work, some frequently encountered bias:

“Mighty white o’ you, *brother!*”... “Here you go, *sir.*”... “Aren’t those *Nazi symbols?*”... “Loki is my favorite *Marvel character!*”... “Oh, you must love having *all those options* for sex partners!”... “Why don’t you just *admit you’re gay already?*”... “Well, you don’t *look autistic.*”... “*Isn’t everybody* a little ADHD?”... “You should start *hormone therapy.*”... “Well, *if I misgendered you* I’m sure I would have apologized.”...

The unrecognized, and often subconscious, assumption of cis/het privilege, white fragility, abled privilege, and male privilege as the prevailing experience I encounter feels quite often like an empty sham perspective. And, ... I generally hold the ability to mask and appear in these ways on demand in situations where authentically representing any marginalized aspects of my bodymind and/or behavior is entirely unsafe. I was recently described by a peer as having abdicated privilege in openly discussing divergence. This chafed because, in this claim to supposed abdication of power as described, there was zero recognition of the deep psycho-spiritual costs levied against my access to those falsehoods (Pearson & Rose, 2021). The assumption of choice privilege may well be the most damaging aspect of encountering this collective perceptual incongruence....

Passing is not a choice in my opinion. It is minimal access to relatively safe harbor during torrential downpours in unforgiving winds. I take a hit in terms of dysphoria every time I’m misgendered by someone who has prior knowledge of my pronouns. I suffer physical pain almost every time peers indulge in an emotionally driven outburst resulting in sudden volumetric peaks. I miss out on information assumed to be shared whenever cross-talk prevents me from parsing any intelligible communication out of the unified audio stream I perceive. I risk falling into company with, and being abused by, overt racists any time I display ancestral symbols of

power and magic. I weigh the costs of participating in LGBT+ community and resulting erasure of bisexual reality against violent acts meant to rob me of safety after “threatening” a cis/het male with my glance in public. I am denied support of self-regulation practices in stereotypic movement manifesting in various pathologized presentations as bobbing at the waist, pacing in circles, gleeful clapping, or rhythmic thrumming of digits swinging from arms perpetually finding comfort in odd angles and levels of pressure, because of concerns over distractability or odd appearance. In short, external and uninformed demands claim to rule my internal landscape.

### **Lived Experience**

At the time of my graduation from high school, my peer group was nationally ranked among the most diverse populations in public schooling at class sizes in the 400-600 student range. This was due to its proximity to one of the largest (collection of) military installations in the country (and the dependence of those forces upon marginalized people when engaged in the globalization of eugenic and careless dominance). There were no openly queer people, by my recall, in those halls until my class represented and led the way for following classes’ open acceptance. I didn’t know anything about countersocial groups until I started attending lunches in a “family” restaurant while apprenticed to an openly gay general contractor during my undergraduate studies. Subsequently, I engaged in the live music scene at the Underground, an all ages club in the basement of the Hide ‘n Seek complex (a now closed, but then infamous, gathering spot for queerly relating) and dove headlong into discovery and experimentation.

Relatively fresh out of the closet and seeking community, reading about the torture of my contemporary Matthew Shepherd (Brooke, 1998) a couple hours drive north from my own alma mater, along highways I had recently traveled, was strong motivation to return into the relative

safety of closeted obscurity. In concert with overwhelm from honing my news feed to portray a balanced view of the wreckage wrought by colonialism, consumerism, environmental destruction and hate crime, it only served to further stoke the fire of social injustice raging within my belly. It also served as motivation for diving deeper into the self-medication I arrived at after a then-recent brush with clinical negligence, improper medication, and gaslighting. Depression and suicidality have been simmering with potential on the back burner ever since.

So I went to work in corporate spaces. I consistently received messages about how I was showing up oddly, speaking nonsense, demanding too much, asking too many questions, or being creepy, though specific definition or discussion framing these ill-perceived behaviors were found to be entirely lacking or absent. By the end of my multi-decade career in software development I had been passed over by peers half my age repeatedly. Many of the people I mentored and worked with as peers in cross functional teams later reported earning double my own salary. Never once was my search for disability accommodation met with anything beyond bare refusal or attribution to seeking extra privilege. Over the course of one final 6-month job search, often consisting of daily recruiting engagements, not one of the companies I interviewed revealed any knowledge of the neurodiversity paradigm, much less any planning to support the very real and ignored needs of neurodivergent people whose skills for pattern matching and creative solutions drive corporate success (Bascom, 2012; Silberman, 2015; Yergeau, 2018; Walker 2021).

### **Privilege and Oppression**

I consider myself a hyperlexic autodidact. That is to say, my deep and enduring pursuit of semantic meaning, coupled with my ease in comprehension of new material, allow me to pick up knowledge and integrate it with my prior understanding almost immediately. This gave me

what many consider to be too sharp a tongue. I consider it my strongest weapon against bigotry. Reading both of those statements together gives rise to thoughts and memories of tone policing....

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised given the apparent lack of contemplation many of my peers evidence in relation to experiences outside their own defaults in privileged locations. Even still, I find it remarkable that my colleagues are not more intimately involved with discussion around tone policing. I beg for consideration in requesting mindful awareness of speech volume and cross-talk, and it seems to be taken as though I'm unreasonably limiting their freedom of expression. I raise a contrary opinion and I'm told I have to present it in a more calm manner using more polite language before my truth will have any chance of being contemplated. It all smacks of Milton's double empathy problem (2012), and the ubiquitous lack of accountability present in privileged social locations.

### **Divergent Influences**

I am hopeful that my intersection of marginalized identities, along with their co-occurring psychological and biomedical distress, have been made plain in the spaces I have occupied since enrolling at Naropa University. I arrived with decades of lived experience, and years of literature review and community networking under my belt. I felt ready to educate away ignorance that I, and my various communities, continuously battle. My presence in this clinical mental health graduate degree program is a direct response to very clear calls from community for authentic representation in research and therapeutic practices. This late into the information age, there really does not appear to be any good excuse for failing to platform, née include, the very same voices of marginalized people who continue suffering under the violence of the clinical gaze.

It is with this understanding, and boldly declared position, that I registered a new group under the auspices of the Student Union of Naropa. Neuroqueer Naropa is already providing a space for building community, advocating for change, and sharing resources among an inclusive-by-default approach to planning. Neurodivergence crosses all racial, ethnic, cultural, and regional boundaries and the voices of this population continue to be stifled by well-funded interests in pursuit of our elimination instead of our integration. More locally, access to accommodation and resources assured by federal law (and still only rarely enacted in ways that are meaningful to the people affected) is of special concern. We have held space for outrageous personal stories revealing bypassing throughout the organization entrusted with teaching new clinicians how to avoid doing so, and plan to speak truth to power via strategic actions.

### **Growth Edges**

I arrived, as the eldest member of my cohort by about a decade, with a great variety in relevant experience and transferrable skill. Even after working the systems for social success I have cobbled together through the years to the best of my ability over the duration of this entire first year within the cohort, I rarely feel included. This is not disability as commonly viewed as resident in one's body. This is disability, as reframed by Cal Montgomery in dis-enablement via social context (Bascom et al, 2012, p. 76), with the more recent addition of post-burnout sensory overwhelm to long-term baseline PTSD symptom and stigma management. My edges come in witnessing willfully ignorant and ableist positions voiced or enacted by people with whom I'm obligated to interact. I'm terrified at the thought of putting my trust in no less than half of my cohort members, and we go on belay next term, not to mention unrepaired ruptures with facilitators who will be leading us into the back country....



Perhaps my most dangerous edges come in my own blind spots. I have long acknowledged running afoul of them, ever since youthful brow-beatings over hidden curriculum violations occasionally resulted in physical beatings as added experiential depth for lesson integration. As I know all too well, asserting boundary violations as an autistic person is frequently met with acts of neurotypical aggression (Yergeau, 2018, pp. 172-173). If my own embodied neurological overwhelm at trauma triggers or sensory abuse is met with aggression in the moment, how am I to do anything but shut down within a catatonic fear tunnel, flee the scene, or assert my boundaries in ways of being that are frequently interpreted as aggressive...?

### **Broaching Differences**

I've been seeking out discussion of differences since at least junior high school, when I first came into awareness of foreign exchange programs for students. Hosting several students, and longing to embark on my own exchange trip, provided a frequently precocious teen with plenty of opportunity to engage with perspectives truly foreign to my lived experience. Students from Thailand, Iceland, Costa Rica, and so many other mysterious and wonderful places gave me the gift of practice in broaching difference before I had any notion that I might be studying the topic in graduate school, so my plan for personal development is much the same as it ever was:

- read everything that looks to hold interesting and/or unique perspective
- engage in social networking as allowed by spoon inventory and accessibility
- build community through group facilitation and disability activism engagement
- continually seek out new relationships and learning from unlikely teachers

As ever, I welcome feedback on any or all of this content through continued conversation and/or correspondence. I'll close with a template applicable to many broaching scenarios:

*I've noticed a difference in the way we're showing up in this relationship, and I wonder if you might be OK with sharing how this idea resonates with what you're feeling in this moment...?*

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