

Diversity Statement

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As a gay man growing up in a rural, conservative Southeastern state, I experienced stigma and discrimination, which led me to suppress my identity. This suppression involved hiding who I was from high school peers out of fear of bullying, hiding it from my parents at risk of them disowning me, or putting on a facade at my church to remain employed there. It was not until college that I was surrounded by others like me who were open and proud about their sexuality. This new environment of acceptance and celebration of one's true self was a profound turning point for me. Here was where students and faculty embraced me and showed me the positive impact of an inclusive, accepting community. This contrast with what I encountered at home raised my awareness of how subtly oppression can manifest, but also how liberating it is to reattribute an aspect of my identity into something empowering.

I have alternatively been afforded more privileges than I can ever hope to identify as a middle-class White male, and these privileges became more evident once I moved to New York City, where disparities abound in every corner. Among these include economic privilege (e.g., access to education, stable housing, healthcare), racial privilege (e.g., encountering fewer barriers in the job market or social interactions), gender privilege (e.g., being more readily heard and respected in professional and social settings), and cultural capital. Now, I am more motivated to advocate and ally for marginalized groups, supporting policies and initiatives that reduce inequality and promote social justice.

As a clinic coordinator at Fordham University's Community Mental Health Clinic, I worked with patients and families from underrepresented backgrounds in the Bronx. Our practice operated

under a sliding scale based on financial need, and my job was to work directly with our patients to determine where they stood along our sliding scale. Although my personal and professional growth was deeply fostered while working here, I grew more dissatisfied with our healthcare system after seeing the many layers of socioeconomic barriers to receiving mental health treatment. This experience has reinforced my commitment to equity in all aspects of healthcare. It has challenged me to consider how to make my future psychological practice more accessible to all.

From my personal experiences, it is critical that I uphold the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and that the doctoral program I enroll in aligns with and promotes them. The specific actions I can take to promote multicultural values are inextricably linked with my training as a school psychologist. For example, this involves reflecting and seeking feedback on my blindspots, like microaggressions or unconscious assumptions I might have about another racial or cultural group. In my assessment training, I can take steps to understand better the populations the instruments were and were not standardized on so I eliminate cultural bias when testing. I view multiculturalism as a critical lens in school psychology; thus, all activities should be viewed through it.