

# Free essay on diversity reflection

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## **Personal Reflection on Diversity**

My experience in the diversity session opened my eyes to some things about myself that I knew, and yet didn't know. What I mean by this is that I was consciously aware of some of my biases and also that I recalled some unhappy events that took place during my childhood, but I didn't understand how those prejudices and experiences affected me in the context of my life and work today. I didn't think much about them at all, and some I simply ignored. Furthermore, I certainly didn't consider how they might influence people other than myself. Now I am beginning to realize how my own assumptions and beliefs not only impact others in the moment, such as during a conversation or a meeting, but how they can affect outcomes in the lives of my staff, colleagues, clients and others.

Take, for example, my bias against facial piercings and tattoos. I really don't like them and I have been quite open about that. Tattoos and in particular, piercings, signal to me that there is something extreme about the person who has them. What, I wonder, can be the motivation for someone—usually rather young—to mark him- or herself for life with an often elaborate design that may mean nothing to him or her a few years down the road? I can't help but think that they are seeking attention or are angry and making some sort of political statement. That kind of attitude is not something I want to bring into my workplace, so I have consciously not hired several job candidates who had obvious tattoos.

conducted 25 in-depth interviews with hiring managers and found that employers who did not hire applicants with tattoos were driven by concerns that customers would find the body art unacceptable.

I've learned that I also have ignored, at least in practical terms, my childhood baggage and its influence on who I am. I've been thinking quite deeply about the six dimensions of cultural diversity: ethnicity, gender, race, age, sexual orientation and physical abilities. On most of those dimensions, I am among the majority and thus hold the power. I am white, in my 40s—an age that is considered appropriate for my current level of career achievement—heterosexual, and have no physical disabilities.

I am female, which in some power contexts is considered inferior, and this has sparked a lot of thought from me since the diversity session. While I was aware that I often hold back from commenting in a business meeting, I attributed it to being collegial and a team player. Even though I hold a Bachelor's degree and am the VP of Operations of a healthcare organization, I find myself deferring to the many male VPs who surround me. I tend to let them direct meetings, agendas, and conversations. This is especially odd because I am a registered nurse, and as such I am usually more qualified to inform an important decision than my male co-workers. Instead of speaking up, I tend to sit back and stay silent. I think this is due to my lack of self-confidence, which then brings me to the baggage from my childhood.

I feel the dimension that most negatively affected me is an outside dimension, economics. I come from a lower socioeconomic class than many of my peers. Neither of my parents were educated beyond basic schooling, so they were not particularly concerned that I get good grades or complete homework assignments. In fact, I can't recall ever having a discussion with them about life goals, going to college or what it takes to prepare for a successful adulthood.

I was not popular at school and never had the things that the cool kids had. I didn't have the latest clothes or electronics or even good nutrition. Most often the only meals I received were the free breakfasts and lunches provided at school. I believe this affected my self-esteem, leading me to internalize a sense of being less than other people.

Listening to what others shared in the diversity session, I began to see that I had—and have—some advantages that others lack. Simply by virtue of my race I am usually accepted as benign at most public places. No one assumes I am trying to shoplift, for example, even if I walk into an expensive shop. But a person of color can't rely on people to assume he or she has good intentions. I need to be more conscious of my privilege in this regard.

I recently read a very enlightening article written by Robin DiAngelo (2015), a professor of cultural diversity and social justice at Westfield State University in Massachusetts. She wrote about racism not as the actions or beliefs of a single individual, but as a “ multidimensional and highly adaptive system” (italics mine) of unequal resource distribution. Curious about her, I looked up her biography and found that her childhood was similar to mine. “ I grew up poor and white,” she writes. “ While my class oppression has been relatively visible to me, my race privilege has not. In my efforts to uncover how race has shaped my life, I have gained deeper insight by placing race in the center of my analysis and asking how each of my other group locations have socialized me to collude with racism. In so doing, I have been able to address in greater depth my multiple locations and how they function together to hold racism in place. I now make the distinction that I grew up poor and white, for my experience of

poverty would have been different had I not been white” (DiAngelo, 2006). This was very powerful for me, and I am intent on stepping back as she did to examine my childhood baggage from my own “ multiple locations.” I need to continue to learn in this class as well, and to recognize that I am qualified for my position and work on my fears of insecurity. Most especially, I want to remember that my privilege positions me to stand up for those who aren’t in the position of power to do so themselves.

## References

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