

Critical self reflection of social work



As feminist writer Starhawk said, "Only when we know how we have been shaped by the structures of power in which we live can we become shapers" (Starhawk, 1988) It is essential for every participant of social activity to know our own complex social locations, social position, and identities. By acknowledge how these factors are processed, we could understand what privilege we has hold and what oppression we are involve in order to improve our capacity for social work and practice anti-oppressively in our daily life.

Features of Social Locations

Our memberships are interactional, they are "come into existence in and through relation to one another". (Ringrose, 2002) Knowing what futures of our social locations are and how they are consolidated and changed by each other could improve the depth of our self-awareness and warning us be critical.

People usually ask me questions about my nationality, location of hometown, and my occupation when we start a conversation. Therefore, most of time I am identified as a female student who comes from a developing country of Southeast Asia. Broadly speaking, the reason why these questions have been asked commonly during our communication is because of these social location have a same feature which has a huge impact on our behaviors, accents, appearances. In the other words, they are visible and audible for people to recognized and identify. However, compare with these social locations, my political affiliations, religion are more difficult for others to indentify due to the abstraction of these social locations that make them relatively invisible and inaudible. The influence of these social locations are

ideological. They have constructed our ideology, social norm and even have shaped our identity. My social locations are various, I am an oppressor while I am oppressed by others. Understanding these features of my social locations could help me to aware the privileges, powers, and injustice that these social locations have been brought to me and to avoid these unfair privilege, “ power over” and subjective feelings of injustice , in order to share power with others and practice anti-oppressively in daily life.

Message of Identity from Society

As Aristotle has pointed out in his book Politics, “ Man is by nature a social animal”, (Stagiritis, 2000) human being always has demand to connect with others in order to gain a sense of belonging in society. They have been self-locating, identifying others and being identified base on their experience, education, religion, race, gender and more elements of society during their connection which means that our complex identity have been constructed by these elements.

As an individual with multi-dimensional identity, I have been received various societal message in my daily life. Some of these messages are relate to my cultural background while some messages relate to other elements. I moved to a capital city which named Kunming from Shilin (a small town of southwest China) when I was young, for the first few days in my new school I wear the traditional Yi costume as what I did in my previous school in Shilin as an Yi people. However, my new classmates gave me a hard time because of I wear a dress with embroidered totem instead of wearing a “ normal” dress as they did; my teacher punished me to stand on a chair with arms extended upwards in front of the entire school because I refused to take off

my bracelet on the weekly assembly. Although I spoke fluently Mandarin and had been raised in an urban intellectual family as majority had, most of students even teachers in my new school shown their unwillingness to communicate with me and used “ your people” to separated me from them. In my understanding, the difficulty to “ fell a sense of belonging and acceptance” (James, 1991) causes the feeling of being isolation, it was a societal message about my identity at that time. The message are conveyed to me by isolating me physically and psychologically from the majority. After receiving the message I started to refuse to wear any Yi clothes and accessories to school because the painfulness from being isolated from “ normal” people was unbearable for me as a teenager. During that time, my identity had been adjusted by following the process which has been pointed out by Smith,” moving from unawareness and lack of differentiation to ethnic awareness and self-identification” (Smith, 1991).

Power and Privilege

Our society is diverse in many aspects, such as gender, religion, age etc. These differentiations “ cause(s) fear, mistrust, and hatred” (Uvic, 2004) and bring us advantage and disadvantage in our life. What is more, these differentiations have been used as justification for holding “ belief in the superiority of one way of being over another” (Uvic, 2004) . We need to understand what type of power has been embedded in our social locations in order to practice anti-oppressively when we face the inequality and injustice.

Being a twenty-one year-old heterosexual female, I have been experienced power-from-within and power-with due to my complex social locations. As

being defined as a “ young people”, there are various resources and opportunities out there for me when I need them such as entertainment resources , education opportunity etc. These elements provide me materially and emotionally supports to help me increase personal power in order to against the oppression from society. However, I should not feel happy with this unequal advantages because this institutionalized ageism does not provide equally opportunity for elder to take part in meaningful social activity or “ exercise their capacities in socially defined and recognized ways” (Muallaly, 2002) . In order to resist privilege and unearned advantage, I have been participated in a volunteer group which works with elder and to power connect with them in order decrease the influences of institutionalized ageism on elder. Meanwhile, as being a heterosexual female I have holding many invisible and visible privileges. For example, I will not be judged by people if I hand in hand and walk on street with my boyfriend; my sexual orientation will not be treated as “ immoral” or “ abnormal”. There are many social constructions are built base on the assumption that every individual’s sexual attractions are to someone of opposite sex. Instead of seeing these privilege as advantage, we should not only see them as social resistances and avoid power-over in our practice, but also respect and “ support all non-transitional forms of sexuality” (Uvic, 2004) by following Queer Theory. These unfair and unearned advantages will resist our society to develop comprehensively, humanely and justly and we definitely have the responsibility to be aware of diversity and never assume people around us.

Purpose of Social Work

It is essential for social worker to know the purposes of this profession because these purposes are the direction for us and provide clients with a constructive solution when we work with them.

When I began this course, in my understanding the purpose of social work was improving the physical environment of individual as in a micro level and promote the justice of society as in a macro level. As my learning about this profession has been processing, my ideas of social work purpose have expanded. According to purpose for this profession which is defined by The National Association of Social Workers, the mission is " promote or restore a mutually beneficial interaction between individuals and society in order to improve the quality of life for everyone" (Dubois, 2004), this profession assists individuals to create a supportive social system that help clients to achieve their personal goals. Dubois and Krogsrud have mentioned about social work purpose in their book Social Work: An Empowering Profession, they said social workers strived to release human power in order to ensure the well performance for individual and to release social power in order to promote social injustice. (Dubois, 2004) More specifically, the purpose in Micro level is to enhance clients' ability for social functioning and to match individuals with favorable resources. From a macro perspective, the purpose is to stimulate the development of social justice. These purposes are leading entire profession to strive to create an better society.

Social Justice

Social justice is a key point to promote the fairness and equity in our social environment. Depending on the concept of this course, there are some

elements which are necessary for social justice to exist. These elements are: acknowledgment of the connections between social with politic and economy (Uvic, 2004), awareness of social injustice, action and movement, fairness of policy, and equality of social opportunity. In order to promote the justice of social construction, I have positioned myself as a participant of social activity who has desire to against injustice and have responsibility to think critically, act anti-oppressively with belief in that everyone has right to share equal physical resources and to be benefited from comprehensive policy. However, there are might resistances stand in my way when I involve activities to fight for political justice and economic redistribution. These resistances could be lack of resources and effect of bureaucratization. In order to avoid the resistance from these two dimensions, I should not be afraid to question the policy and speak out to let government know what is needed by people. Also think and act critically instead of working hidebound. Bridget used her action to examine that everyone has ability to make difference in our society. We shall never give up our goal for working to promote justice in social system. As American social critic James Baldwin said, “ according to the way people see it, and if you can alter, even by a millimeter, the way people look at reality, then you can change the world.”

About This Profession

Social Work is a profession which attempts to “ demonstrated the interconnectedness between individual changes and social changes” (Uvic, 2004). To some extent, the primary purposes could include unpacking the complicity both in societal structure and individual life. This profession should not position itself as an “ caring and help” institution and stay in this <https://assignbuster.com/critical-self-reflection-of-social-work/>

image, this profession should stand out to “reconnect the political with social” (Uvic, 2004) and involve the economic redistribution in order to ensure that everyone has equal worth, opportunity, and dignity in society. There are two questions I need to be answered, first question is how to act anti-bureaucratically in workplace and the second one is what can I do when there is no matching resources for clients. To practice efficiency, I need to get spiritual and technical supports from myself and co-worker, and people around me to point out what I did wrong. This activity from Art Journal helps me to understand myself better and help me to know why I choose this profession, it also help me to know what is boundary when I work with clients.

Our society is not perfect, to some degree its awareness for diversity, injustice government policy and inequality distribution of physical resources are resisting the promotion of social justice. we have responsibility to understand clearly what our ideology perspective is and what power we have due to our social locations and identities. These could release human power and social power in order to enhance social functioning and social policy. Sometimes it is not easy to have the visible effect for promoting the quality of life to entire society, but it worth us to strive for and fight for. As a Chinese old saying goes: No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.