



DIVERSITY IN PERSPECTIVE

Thinking and Acting

SECOND EDITION

Edited by

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Preface

The first edition of this book was created for a specific purpose: to help adjunct instructors provide consistent and quality instruction in the sections of a course that was too popular for full-time faculty to teach. In that sense, the first edition was a success; however, it was our desire to approach the concepts of identity and access in a more personal way.

With this edition, we chose a narrative format and a focus on personal experiences with facets of identity and how they provide access to different types of capital. Each of the chapter and vignette authors is speaking from their own experiences and in their own voice. Because of this, each chapter has its own feel, as it is as unique as its authors; some of them are more personal and some are more academic. We felt it was important for each author to share their experiences with identity and access in their own words. While we included many facets of identity in this edition, it is important to note that identity is complex and contains so many different facets that it would be difficult to discuss each of them, even if we limit our scope to identities that significantly impact the educational experience of each individual. For example, identifying as a first-generation student or being affiliated with the military (active duty, National Guard, veteran, and/or dependent), which has its own culture, can affect one's educational experiences in real and meaningful ways.

We included several facets of identity in this edition that are not explicitly addressed in the first edition because identity is a complex and fluid thing; how we see ourselves (and the world around us) changes over time and in different situations. A lot of times, when we think of identity and diversity, we think of only a few aspects of who we are, and even those can get reduced to a dichotomy (either this or that with no in-between). That kind of thinking isn't productive because it oversimplifies complex concepts, and because it erases identities, making some people think they are not included in the conversation about diversity. Diversity includes all of us, and we all have a part to play in ensuring fairness in our communities. This edition is meant to be an inclusive and personal way for all of us to engage in these conversations. Personal stories and experiences are a starting point, a place to experience and show empathy; when reading these accounts, take note of where you feel a connection and which experiences and feelings resonate with you. Those are great places to start the lifelong conversation that is at the heart of both editions of *Everyday Diversity*.

Introduction

Our advances in technology and communication have made it possible to get information from an infinite number of sources, and that can make it difficult to know what sources can be trusted and how the information they provide has been created. Because we don't know which sources to trust, it can be easy to trust sources and opinions that match our own. This is particularly true about controversial issues or those that have a lot of emotional involvement. While this may be easy and comfortable, it doesn't always provide us with the best information, information that we will need as we act as both citizens and professionals.

Some of the “touchier” issues that we face today revolve around culture, diversity, multiculturalism, and social justice. The words have become politicized in a partisan way, and we do not always have the same meaning when we use them. The meaning we attach to the words is largely based on our own positionality (discussed momentarily), which we will call the word's connotation. The word's connotation and our feelings about it are not necessarily the same thing as the word's true or objective definition, which we will call the word's denotation. To be responsible citizens and professionals, we need to learn how to assess information, especially information about which we have some feelings regarding the connotation, to be able to see the issues with as little bias as possible.

For this book's purposes, we'll use the following definitions, which build on each other, for these important words. Culture is our shared way of life; it is fluid, as all cultures are constantly evolving due to technological advances in the areas of economic production, transportation, and communication. Diversity is the ways we are different; this is much more nuanced than we normally make it, because we tend to focus on intergroup (between cultural groups) differences and ignore intragroup (within cultural groups) differences. Multiculturalism is a perspective that values cultural diversity and pluralism (it is okay to be different), as opposed to assimilation (we should all be the same). Social justice is a perspective that actively works toward equity (providing access to the resources each individual needs to be successful), as opposed to equality (giving everyone the same access to resources regardless of their individual needs), by challenging systems that promote and sustain inequity. When we talk about access to resources, we are talking about different types of capital and who can use them. You might have heard the term capital in a way that references economics; this type of economic capital includes money, real estate, and other assets. There are other types of capital, as well, including cultural, social, and symbolic. Cultural capital refers to our knowledge of cultural expectations, like insider knowledge about how to navigate our environment. An example of cultural capital might be knowing how to dress for social occasions. Social capital is more about who you know than what you

know; it refers to the networks of which you are a part that can help open doors for you. Symbolic capital is access attached to reputation or titles. One example is having an advantage in a job application because you have a degree but no experience; another might be your older sibling's behavior influencing how teachers respond to you in the early days of the school year.

Our initial reactions to these ideas are largely based on our positionality. Positionality is like our point of view, but on a systems-level scale. It includes things that we cannot control or change: things that are the luck of the draw, so to speak. These things are so much a part of us that we do not even realize how much they influence the ways in which we see the world. Just like our literal point of view is limited by where we are standing, so our positionality is limited by our standing in a variety of social contexts. None of us can see everything from our positionality; we each have our own little slice of reality, and we need everyone's little piece of the puzzle to make a full picture of the reality of any given situation. When we can only see our own piece, we can get a skewed version of reality. For example, what do you see in this image?



What do you think is happening in this situation? What context clues (which will be based on your own individual experiences, your positionality) did you use to interpret the image? What feelings did the image cause you to experience? Take a minute to consider this image and unpack your feelings about it and why you think it makes you feel that way. Ok, now that you have gotten your initial thoughts on paper, let us look at some additional pieces of the puzzle.

Figure 0.1 Dorothy Counts (cropped). Copyright © Cesar (CC BY-SA 2.5) at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dorothy_Counts.jpg.

How did your initial interpretations and feelings about the situation hold up when you were able to see more of it? This is how positionality impacts the way we see the world. It can be a shock that our perception has been so limited, but it isn't unusual. It can be a shock that our perception has been so limited, but it isn't unusual. We all struggle to see things that do not impact us or someone about whom we care. A few largely subconscious processes increase this likelihood: filtering, confirmation bias, and identity reification.

Filtering is the process through which our brains decide what information or stimuli to give attention. Our brains are trained by confirmation bias, in which we tend to unconsciously seek out and give priority to those things that confirm our existing beliefs. Confirmation bias is encouraged by our desire for identity reification, which is the process of solidifying our positive self-perception by interpreting information in ways that make us feel good about ourselves.

As you can see, our epistemology (the way we create knowledge) is a largely subconscious process that has a lot to do with our positionality. Bucher (2014) describes it as an ongoing and nonlinear process.

As the diagram above illustrates, our positionality contributes to our limited perception, both of which lead to cultural encapsulation. Cultural encapsulation is when, through homogenous socialization (lack of exposure to other cultures and ideas), we begin to think that our culture represents the totality of reality, not just a piece of it. Cultural encapsulation leads to a skewed view of the world because it becomes exceedingly difficult to see beyond our own culture; this leads us to judge other cultures and individuals by our own cultural standards, which are not always applicable.

Our lack of exposure leads to a caricatured view of those who are different from us; our ideas of them are oversimplified and exaggerated. The tricky thing about them is that we may not know they are stereotypes, as they might really be all we have been exposed to (usually through the media) about people with whom we may differ. The stereotypes we have lead us to have gaps in perception in



Figure 0.2 Dorothy Counts. Copyright © Cesar (CC BY-SA 2.5) at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dorothy_Counts.jpg.

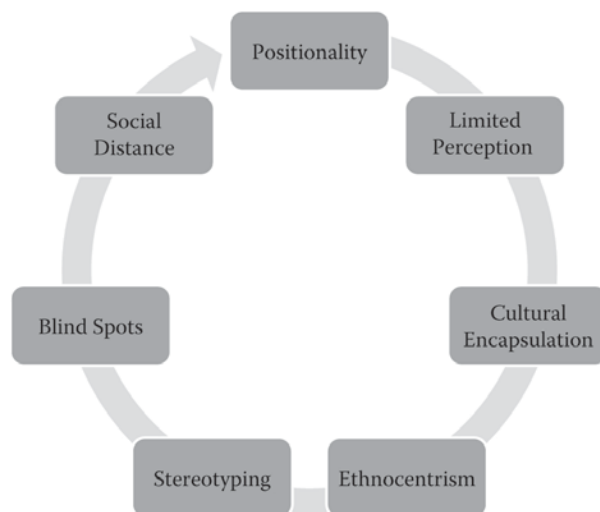


Figure 0.3 Positionality Loop. R. D. Bucher, from *Diversity Consciousness: Opening Our Minds to People, Cultures, and Opportunities*. Copyright © 2015 by Pearson Education, Inc.

which we make judgements without real evidence, but it is hard for us to see that this is what is happening. Those gaps in perception create social distance where, for a variety of reasons, we do not interact with the very people with whom we need to interact to get a more complete picture of the world around us, which perpetuates the cycle. This text and the activities that go with it are designed to help us disrupt this cycle so we can be informed and effective citizens and professionals. Also, personal vignettes are found throughout the text to support understanding through the eyes of the authors. The activities, and their relationship with each other, are discussed in the Activities chapter.

The artist who designed the cover of this book has some helpful insight into perspective and how we see things, and we thought it might be a great way to begin our conversations about how our identities influence our perspectives.

Learning How to See

Lysander Fyfe

As an artist, my eyes have always been an important part of my craft. Whether it's a still-life, using my eyes to observe the ways shadows and shapes interact on fruits and flowers, or animation work and looking at the ways the human figure moves and can be moved, eyes are oftentimes the keys to an artist's work. For lack of a better phrase, seeing is an action that is often overlooked (no pun intended)—something mindless that we all do every single day of our lives with little thought put behind it. It is in the moments when I shut off the lights though, or when I walk outside after a long day of staring at computer screens, that I'm reminded of the act of seeing. I feel my eyes adjust to the lack or abundance of light and realize the unconscious decision I take part in each day.

Our eyes, and by extension our brains, consume, process, and react to thousands of images daily. Moving pictures that help us navigate the ever-changing world around us. It is a unifying action among us all. But it was in taking a color theory class in college that I understood that even though this action was almost entirely universal, it was also entirely individual, entirely unique to each of us individually. How is this so?

The eyes are not only windows ...

When observing an object, situation, or experience, we see the light reflecting or bouncing off the world around us. Light then enters the eye. It is transformed via photoreceptor cells, which turn incoming light information into electrical signals. Transported to the brain via the optic nerve, this information is transformed into the hundreds of images we see daily. Think about it, varying intensities of wavelengths make up the hundreds of thousands of shades of colors we see each day. Combined with the shape and movement of these reflections, we can see the world around us. Thanks to light reflections, we can consume every image, every sight, we have ever seen, and will ever see.

Each experience of consumption is different. I'm sure you've heard this a thousand times, but the colors we observe from the world around us are entirely unique to us. If you're of a younger generation like me, I'm sure you remember the dress debate—you know, the one that circulated around schools and frustrated teachers? The one debating whether a particular dress in a grainy 2008 picture was blue and black or gold and white?

There was an uproar in my high school regarding what color everyone thought this dress was. And while inconsequential, a silly internet debate stacked on the hundreds of other silly internet debates, it revealed to a lot of us the differences we had in perception. The differences between what colors we perceived. The red of apples that I see likely doesn't match the same shade of red you see, and if you have certain kinds of color blindness, then it definitely doesn't match.

It doesn't seem all that important in the long run. While I think the dress is blue and black, and the red of my apples might be a little more saturated, surely it can't be that impactful?

... they are mirrors.

While the eyes give us the opportunity to observe our world, they also become a product of the world around them.

The act of seeing might be passive, an observation of the world around us, they also help us in understanding the world around us, and they help us adapt to the world around us. Our eyes adapt to our surroundings, and are, like every sensory organ, the basis of forming our perceptions of the world around us.

Daily interactions with the world around us are valuable information. With our eyes, we begin to understand how society functions. On a very basic level, it is with our eyes that we learn how to function. As children, we learn to walk, talk, and act, thanks to our eyes. We see how our parents do all of those actions; we want to mimic them. But on more complex levels, it is thanks to our eyes that we understand how we are treated differently. How society has perceived us, and as a result, we are forced to perceive.

Society places different expectations on us, based mostly on how we look. This difference in how society perceives us is oftentimes based on our race, our class, our gender identities, our sexuality, and our religion. The people around us act differently as a result. Racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia mostly rely on the idea that we look different. When we don't "fit" with the perceived masses we are surrounded by, people's eyes lock on us and see us as the black sheep, the odd one out.

As a result, we're treated differently. We're cat-called, looked at suspiciously when shopping, unable to go on dates with people we love, or are legislated out of existence. And whether we want to or not, we adapt. We see the way the world treats us and develop our perspectives of society, humanity, and the people around us. Our eyes help us see the ways in which we are discriminated against, and as such, we develop our instincts to survive the world around us.

Our eyes don't only let us see the world around us, they help us become mirrors of the world we live in as reflections of the society we inhabit.



IMG 0.1

Light Information

As an artist, trying to draw this phenomenon was something I wanted to do. Exemplifying the way in which we perceive and as a result, develop our perspectives was incredibly important for me. This piece, titled Light Information, was my attempt. The eye sees the world around us, from rolling hills to white-picket suburbs, city parks to skyscrapers, each environment we live in impacts our perspective on the world. A rainbow of colors created from pure white, and as a result, our entire identity and perspective formed. The passive action of seeing transformed into something foundational, something important to us all.

Reflection

How have your senses helped form your personal identity? In what ways have your senses previously fooled you? How can we retrain our senses in order to better empathize with a variety of perspectives? What experiences have you undergone that, thanks to your sensory organs, became foundational to your personal identity?

DIVERSITY AND PERSPECTIVE THINKING

Identity, Perspective, & Cultural Capital

Kelly Fishman

Key Terms

Identity: labels a person uses to describe themselves – these can include physical attributes, characteristics, behaviors, and experiences

Perspective: one attitude or way to view a person, situation, and/or idea

Cultural capital: A term introduced by Pierre Bourdieu to refer to the symbols, ideas, tastes, and preferences that can be strategically used as resources in social action (Oxford University Press, n.d.). For example, high cultural capital might mean you had opportunities to go to the theater, visit famous historical places, or travel to different parts of the United States or the world. This builds your connection to language, manners, and education among many other things. Essentially, you build access to more opportunities (Cairns, 2019).

Think About It

What are ways I identify? Think of it as a diamond with your name at the center and all the ways you might identify as the facets of the diamond. How can different parts of my identity influence my perspective on issues in my life and society? How is cultural capital gained? How is it used in society? Can you build it up from nothing, can you lose it, or do you have any control over it at all?

Introduction

Our identities play an important role in how we view and interact with the world around us. However, our identities are so ingrained in who we are, we often forget about the impact it has on us, our views, and how we are viewed. Likewise, sometimes certain parts of our identity are so surface level that it is hard to forget

that it is not the only part of who we are. As you will find in this reading, identity, perspective, and cultural capital are deeply intertwined in our everyday lives. When we can understand the interplay between these ideas and truly understand our identities, we are more likely to navigate the world with a focus on equity and inclusion.

BIG D DEAF – RACHEL BROWN

As a high school teacher of Deaf students, I often had conversations with my students around the experiences that shaped their identity; these topics were critical for them to find their place as young adults in a larger world. In Deaf culture, it is appropriate to identify as “big D Deaf” (Deaf) if you are part of the Deaf culture, as opposed to deaf, which refers to one with only a medical diagnosis without connection to a greater community. Teenage students were assimilating into the larger Deaf community and changing their identifiers from deaf to Deaf and using that identifier the same way they might use Black or tall. Several students used their disability identifier as their first descriptor! (“I am a Deaf girl, age 15, White”) These self-identifiers classified them into social circles of commonality and also allowed them to insert themselves into diverse groups where they enjoyed being different. – Rachel Brown

The Importance of Identity

Identity is multilayered with both evident and subtle or even invisible aspects. For example, our race, gender identity, body shape, hair color, and some abilities are surface level aspects of our identity. But our socioeconomic status, immigration status, language, religion, and education lay further below the surface. Then there are invisible parts of our identity. These are parts that are not evident when people look at us or talk to us. These include mental health, family histories, heritage, and sexual orientation.

Think of identity like an iceberg. There are parts that we see above the surface. Those are the prominent, visible parts of who we are. Then some parts are at the water line. How much we share with another person determines what they know about us. Finally, there are the parts below the water. The parts that no one sees unless we explicitly talk about them. We can think about culture the same way. My language, holidays, dress, and food can all be obvious parts of my cultural identity. However, my core values, gender roles, expectations, and personal space needs fall below the water line.

When we understand our identities, we start to understand that there are various parts to who we are. This is incredibly important in connecting with others and creating more inclusive and equitable environments for everyone. As someone who taught high school English for a long time, I am reminded of something Harper Lee wrote in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Atticus explains to his daughter Scout that “you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view ... until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.” That is our goal here. To understand our own skin so we can better understand those who interact with the world differently than we do.



Figure 1.11 The Iceberg Concept of Culture. Copyright © 2022 Depositphotos/joebite.

Who Am I?

One of the questions I posed to start the reading was about your identity. Understanding the aspects of who you are is important to understanding your perspectives and cultural capital. You may have heard the term intersectionality before. You may have thought of an intersection where cars meet. It is the same thing, but we use it to refer to identity. Our identities have intersections—areas where they meet and overlap. Much like the petals of a flower overlap, so do our identities within us and with others. When we understand that we are multifaceted, we can start to focus on similarities with others rather than differences.

As a former teacher and club advisor, I used to do an activity using colored beads. Students received an empty cup. Placed around the room were similar cups, each filled with a different color bead. In front of the cup was a list of questions associated with that bead. As the students walked around, they read the questions. If they could answer yes, they took a bead and added it to their cup. It is a powerful exercise for a few reasons:

1. No one's cup is ever empty at the end of the exercise.
2. Everyone has more than one color bead in their cups at the end.
3. Everyone comes to some big realizations.

These questions focused on integral parts of people's identities: race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, and health. While some of these are visible parts of our identities, others are invisible. This exercise helped students realize that they all had elements of power *and* elements of marginalization in their identities. For example, White students who struggled with mental health had privilege in their skin tone but marginalization in their health; African American students had power if they were male but marginalization because of their race. You can do this activity as well. Just search online for “global bead activity.” There are many examples online. It is a great way to gain perspective on your identity.

Which Leads Us to Perspective!

Sylvia Duckworth created a great image of power and privilege based on information from the Canadian Council for Refugees. It combines the idea of the bead exercise and identity as a flower into one great visual. The wheel helps us understand that we all have elements of power and privilege, *and* we all have elements of marginalization or oppression.

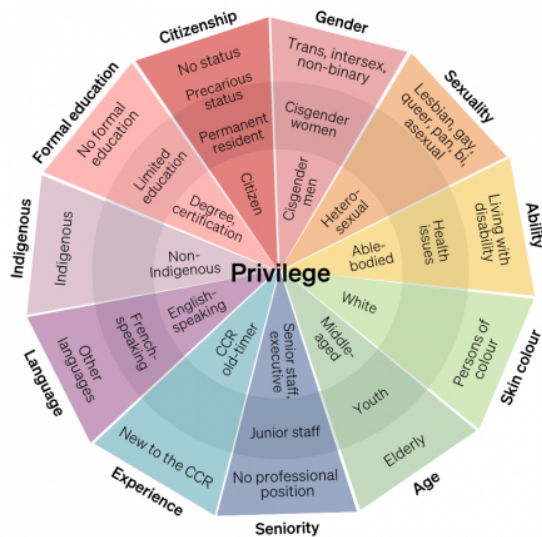


Figure 1.1.2 Wheel of Power, Privilege, and Marginalization by Sylvia Duckworth. Several versions of the wheel have been developed for various contexts. Canadian Council for Refugees, "Wheel of Power/Privilege," <https://ccrweb.ca/en/anti-oppression>. Copyright © by Canadian Council of Refugees.

The Wheel of Power, Privilege, and Marginalization (Figure 1.1.2) symbolizes the intersections of personal identity. Each piece of the wheel represents one identity marker. The outer ring of the circle represents the most marginalized of each identity marker—an important symbolic representation, as those identities are pushed to the margins of society just like they are pushed to the outer rim of the circle. The inner part of the circle represents those with the most power. It is the smallest part of the circle representing a small part of society. While the colors on the wheel are not symbolic of the identity markers they correspond to, the colors are symbolic of all the different parts of a person's identity, essentially representing a personal internal kaleidoscope. Different colors, or identity markers, are highlighted depending on the context in which they show up in society. Move to a new context, just like spinning a kaleidoscope, and a different part of one's identity is highlighted or brought to the forefront.

While some people have more elements of power and some have more elements of

oppression, very few fall into just one area. This is important in helping us gain perspective on how others identify. My perspective as a White woman is very different from that of a woman of color. However, we both know what it is like to go through the world as women. So even if our skin color is not the same, we can understand that intersection of gender. We can find common ground in our shared intersections. When we can do this, it allows us to have more authentic conversations around our differences to understand another person's perspective.

Throughout history, our differences have been used to divide us. The idea has been that if you are not squarely in the center of this wheel of power and privilege, you are less than others. So instead of trying to see another person's perspective, we have stomped on one another trying to get to the middle as best we can. This can come through insults such as body-shaming, racial or religious slurs, or transphobia. It is also why many folks with several dominant identities have struggled with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Let me explain.

My students never hesitated to share their thoughts with me—something I loved about teaching! We would have deep conversations around race, gender, religion, and other forms of identity. I tried to choose books for my students that reflected their myriad identities and life experiences. This also led to big feelings and big discussions. One student was vocal about his perception that there was too much emphasis on always being “politically correct” and making everyone feel good. Life was hard and it was better to go through adversity because it hardened you and made you ready for life’s realities. However, the more we had authentic conversations around our characters and themes, the more I understood that this student felt he was not being seen as someone who might also have real struggles. As a person with multiple dominant identity facets, he felt attacked. I listened closely to what he was sharing while trying not to force my ideas or perceptions onto the lens with which he viewed the world.

I told my students that we all have elements of power and elements of oppression. You can be a White, cis-gendered, heterosexual, middle-class, male who struggles with anxiety and depression or body-image issues or a disability. It changed perspectives when I could frame our discussions around the fact that we all had multiple intersections in our identity that give us different power in different situations. Now my student saw things differently and started sharing more about how anxiety can lead people to struggle with personal interactions. The student realized that our conversations were not an attack on those with dominant identities that provided more access to capital. We were merely discussing characters who were struggling based on different parts of their identities in their situations. When I could shift the narrative of identity, power, and privilege, students could shift perspectives on capital.

The other important part to note is that I was not a first-year teacher when this happened. I had years of experience practicing how to shift my perspectives to better understand my students’ perspectives. It takes a lot of practice, messing up, apologizing, and doing better as we learn. But being willing to try and to apologize when we inevitably get it wrong is vital to this work.

Cultural Capital and How It Impacts Our Perspectives

Understanding your perspectives is key to being able to connect authentically with others. One part of this is understanding your cultural capital. As I stated at the beginning of the reading, cultural capital is essentially your access and opportunity—that which allows you to move seamlessly through societal norms. We first must recognize that societal norms in the United States are White Eurocentric norms set by White European colonists. The people who had the power when forming America used these White Eurocentric identities to set the standards for society. What qualifies as privilege was set hundreds of years before any of us was here. Often access to cultural capital is seen as a negative thing, something to be ashamed of or to feel bad about. However, you have no control over what access you were born with. It is nothing of which you should be ashamed. It is something to recognize, though. When you understand your cultural capital, you can use that knowledge to support others who do not share that same access with you.

Cultural capital can be as simple as the language you speak. If you are a native English speaker or someone who speaks English fluently, this is cultural capital. English is the most common language spoken around the world, with many non-native speakers learning it because of its access to capital. This allows you to communicate with others in many contexts from daily life in the United States, and around the world, to various levels of education, politics, and banking. So even if you do not hold much access to other parts of the wheel, speaking English fluently, this is cultural capital. It adds to your cultural capital.

Likewise, as college students, you build your cultural capital by attending college. Having an education is a privilege, one we often take for granted in the United States. Pursuing and completing higher education is even more so a privilege. It builds your opportunities from jobs to socioeconomic status. People with a college education have more cultural capital than those who do not because they meet those societal norms set hundreds of years ago.

See, cultural capital has been used to create a hierarchy in society. If you are college educated, you have opened yourself up to higher paying jobs. This means you have more opportunities to advance economically. Now you can afford to buy a house. Even more, you can afford a house in a highly rated school district. Now your children have more educational opportunities. And those children will spend time with other children who are like them. Or our parents could afford a house in a good school district. So, while we can add to our cultural capital, much of it is set by our parents and grandparents. Long lines of ancestry built our cultural capital long before came into the picture.

This history of cultural capital leads to layers in society. And while America does not have a set caste system, some authors, such as Isabel Wilkerson (2020), argue that these striations in society lead to an artificial caste system that keeps people divided and “in their place” by limiting opportunities and advancements. Cultural capital is just a fancy way to say access. It gives people opportunities that they often do not earn on their own to continue to move up in society. Systemic racism, sexism, anti-LGBTQ+ policies, xenophobia, and religious oppression have all prevented different groups from building their cultural capital.

Looking back at the wheel of power, you can see how oppression has kept people from moving up in a society that bases its norms on who falls into the center of the wheel. So again, you do not have any control over most of your access on the wheel. You are born with it. This is why it is so important to use your access to support people who do not have the same. And people who have access that you do not will work to lift you in your areas of oppression.

Conclusion

Ultimately, we have a lot of work to do, but we are on the right track. This is an opportunity for everyone to understand identity, perspective, and cultural capital! There is more work to be done. Read on to discover more about the history of many of these topics and how they have played into one another to become the system we see today. A system that needs work. We are headed in the right direction. Students like you are standing up to racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, antisemitism, and extremism every day! Understanding your identity and cultural capital and how those things impact your perspective is vital to becoming an ally. When you understand how you perceive the world, you also start to understand how others might. It allows you to see things through their lens and have authentic conversations around change. Instead of being on the attack, you can work with others to help make this world more accepting of all identities.

Reflection

1. How did your understanding of your identity change, based on your reading?
2. Did your perspective of access to capital change after reading this reading? If so, how, and why?
3. How do your perspectives influence how you interact with people like yourself? Different than you?
4. Is cultural capital different in different parts of the world? If so, how? What influences cultural capital?

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