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Unity Does Not Mean Uniformity

I am invisible, while simultaneously everyone sees me, I am a paradox of inequality. I have overcome anxiety and battled my own mind to quell the concealed forces of obsessive compulsive disorder. A mental difficulty that has, for most of my life, abandoned me to obscurity and desperate loneliness, especially in a society that denounces the problems of the mind. These issues with my mind however, were only the unabated coping mechanisms that emerged as I was unwillingly socialized as a boy. As a teenager I struggled to break free from the shackles of hegemonic uniformity, and soon I exploded outward embracing myself. In attempts to escape the thoughts of self-harm resulting from the internalized oppression that has been so skillfully taught to me by this society of conformity I chose life at all costs. I am Daphne Shaed, and I am an intersexed transwoman, I am hijra, a hindu, a heterosexual lesbian, a social justice advocate, and most importantly a human being.

I would not let the bullies control me and I would not let the institutions, like my school, coerce me into repression, so I quit school in grade 9. Not only was I being beaten by the bullies but the school participated in victim blaming. I was punished for being victim to the intolerance of others. However, the working world was no kinder to me and I found prejudice and ignorance everywhere I travelled. I became part of social movements to confront social inequalities, like sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, victim blaming, rape culture, and more in efforts to help myself and others. Although I quickly discovered that these communities all too often developed discourses of hate and oppressive ideologies toward those whom they viewed as they oppressors. I do not subscribe to the ideas of fighting fire with fire, I cannot be free by oppressing others, nor do I condone violent acts or the use of fear. I realized that social inequality will be overcome through academic advancement and through quiet revolutions. I returned to school unsure of my academic path, only with the thought that education would give me the tools to improve the systems that imprisoned me, so that others will not know them.

In my second semester at Camosun College I took a sociology course and discovered a platform for my passions. Sociology has given to me the words and concepts to articulate my abstract ideas into form, and to understand the more complicated forces and ideologies within social movements. With new found confidence in myself I ran in my student society elections for the position of Pride Director. An experience that was both powerful and difficult. My first political campaign was against a group of people running for numerous positions, and their tactics were aggressive and, in my opinion, bordering on unethical. Thankfully it was the support of many of my peers that helped me to win my bid for Pride Director. For three years now I have sat on the Camosun College Student Society board of directors, currently I am the Women's Director at Camosun College.

In my three years on the Camosun College Student Society board of directors I have organized numerous events, lectures, and workshops to address inequality, specifically intersectional marginalization around gender and sex. I have also written motions and advocated for change that have altered policy and procedure at my college, as well as within the Provincial and National Canadian Federation of Students. Utilizing my board position and the powerful platform of the student society to reach out to the local community as well and invite discussion from various other organizations. My strong position as a student advocate in tandem with my studies in sociology has allowed me to affect more change than I could have imagined. I have also found a community of acceptance as well.

Referring back to intersectional marginalization, I would like to briefly expand on this discourse. In the classroom I am constantly confronted with various ideas and language, that are problematic at best and exclusionary at worst. For example, on more than one occasion I have been the only voice in my class to stand up against misogynistic language or archaic ideologies from both my fellow students and teachers alike. I believe that institutions of academia must hold themselves to a higher standard in our society as they are one of the instruments of social change. But if their pedagogy is disconnected from current social nuances than how and what they teach can slow social growth.

In many of my classes sex is taught as a binary and immutable fact and is further conflated with

terms of gender. The irony is that we are taught to be exhaustive in our academic research, and yet the very notion of a binary sex model completely erases my body, and the bodies of others, from the discussion. As I have secondary female sexual characteristics and the genital geometry similar to males. As an advocate I must stand up and demand of my institution that people such as myself be discussed. Especially since current medical paradigms favour alternative methods to the barbarous genital mutilations of decades past used to disguise the true diversity of sex. The absence of intersexed and transgender persons in the classroom and within the bureaucratic paperwork of the administration is equally as barbarous in my opinion. Now imagine compounding an intersexed or transgender student with ethnic or racial differences, perceived or real, from hegemonic forces. Or perhaps a visible disability as it intersects gender, sexuality, and other identities. I cannot simply sit and repeat what I am told in class without being critical of how knowledge is not only privilege, but so are its origins in modern academia.

My focus then, in the interest of equality, is to not only be a student, but to be a voice for all those like me that are confronted with the benign inequalities that covertly strip us of our identities. This is not altruistic however, it is simply in the interest of my own survival. In freeing myself others will be free. Is not the purpose of higher education to make us critical of knowledge itself, and to construct new epistemologies? Knowledge is a social force and it can create as much inequality as it claims to solve. If there is one thing that I can teach to others is that unity does not mean uniformity, therefore the path to equality is empathy informed by knowledge.