Assignment Sheet: Positionality Narrative

Due Thursday, 9/26

Assignment Goals
- Analyze and apply knowledge of what makes narrative persuasive (rhetorical)
- Develop written rhetorical ethos (credibility, trustworthiness) through use of narrative, detailed descriptions, and style

Elements of the Positionality Narrative

The idea of positionality comes from feminist philosophy. It’s a loaded concept, but a good summary is that a theory of positionality recognizes that who we are (facets of our identity—see below) affects how we perceive, move, act, and speak in the world. Positionality narratives value lived experience as evidence.

The reading that we did by Jim Corder, “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” also emphasizes how we are narratives. He believes that when we come into contact with people who are different than us we become arguments. He contends that the traditional way we think about argumentation—as display, presentation, and competition—is not healthy and needs to be reconsidered.

The key to continued communication with those who may disagree with us is to share and make others know our narratives, our identity. As Corder writes, “[r]hetoric is love, and it must speak a commodious language, creating a world full of space and time that will hold our diversities” (31). How do we practice and perform a commodious language? How do we get others to listen to us, especially those who have differing life experiences and may have differing beliefs?

One way these questions are addressed is through an emphasis on rhetorical ethos—we need to somehow translate our living space and time into our writing. A positionality narrative tries to accomplish this through a reflection on facets of our identity through storytelling, detailed descriptions, and narrative style. Your positionality statement WILL make an argument, but not one that is aggressive or antagonistic. Rather, the argument should be modeled through the narrative.

Assignment Overview

For this assignment, you will be choosing two facets of your identity that you wish to highlight and reflect upon: race, gender, sexuality, body type, class, religious affiliation, future professional affiliation, and other groups of people with which you identify. Your essay needs to make an argument about what it is like to have this positionality (subjectivity). You will include a narrative (story) that shows how these aspects of your

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1 With thanks to Rosanne Carlo for suggestions and ideas
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Identity affect how you perceive, move, act, and/or speak in the world. Your essay also needs to comment on society’s dominant perception of your identity.

Remember the aspects of narrative that will be essential to your storytelling: Point of View of the narrator (you!), Time, Order or Sequencing, and Description.

Writing a positionality narrative means telling a good story, with plenty of vivid, specific, concrete detail about how your identity has shaped you. You are encouraged to use dialogue as a storytelling technique. Your writing should also express some larger idea or point (argument) that emerges as you brainstorm, work through invention strategies, and draft the essay. It should eventually emerge as an exploratory claim, or speculation about the functions, purposes, or social importance of identity in our society.

Here are some possible ways to approach this assignment:

- Look at some significant event(s) from your life
- Discuss early lessons you learned from family members
- Discuss the ways you perceive masculinity and femininity in our society. What lessons were you taught about the way men and women should act?
- Reflect on the neighborhood where you grew up
- Look at cultural and societal attitudes toward people with your identity. You can explore how you have navigated some of those for better or for worse.
- Have you ever judged someone because of an aspect of his or her identity? There is a story lurking beneath that judgment.
- Imagine having a discussion with someone who may be discriminatory against you because of your identity
- Talk about joining some subculture or group, learning the lingo, and gaining membership

We will workshop the essays for both effective “evidence” and “focus” or controlling idea. The main object, after all, is to share your experience of writing, and having our class as your audience is a great opportunity to do so.

Completing this essay is meant to help you develop a framework from which to analyze ideologies always already embedded in authorized forms of knowing and being.

The Technical Stuff
Length 4-6 pages, 12 pt, Times New Roman, MLA format