

# The Ethnicity of Non-Ethnicity: The Ethnic Autobiography of the Dominate Culture

Jacob Campbell  
Eastern Washington University

A self reflective paper looking at myself as a part of the dominant culture.

## **Ethnicity, the Unnoticed Trait**

As a white protestant male, I am a member of the dominate culture in the United State. Growing up I never had to question if somebody was doing certain actions because of my ethnicity. I never had any difficulty finding people who looked like me, and being able to be accepted into a group. I never really thought about my skin color or my racial background. My mom never had to explain about my Germanic heritage, or did I ever wonder about cultural practices. All of these where vary far removed from my growing up experiences growing up.

Going thought the school of social work, there is often discussion about diversity and cultural competence (sensitivity). These topics are relatively new to my knowledge base. Growing up, I did have many Latino and black friends, but never thought much about it. Due to being a part of the dominant culture, my culture did not seem that important to me. When we were sitting in class an hearing some people of color saying that dislike it when people say that they are color blind or when people say they don't care about their ethnicity I thought that they were just taking the comments wrong. It wasn't until later when I thought about it, that I realized that it was their ethnicity had become a major portion of their life. This was also one of the first time that I really realized that I did not see my ethnicity as a major determining factor in my life.

All of this could be explained in an analogy. In America, having running water is something that pretty much everybody has access to. It would be very uncommon for an American to even question having the running water, they have always had it. I went on a mission trip to Africa, and there where places that the people had to go to great lengths to obtain water. The places that did have running water, it was brown and smelled bad. They knew the importance of working to obtain water that is necessary for life. I have al-

ways had my white skin and never thought about it. For some they have had to deal with discrimination and overt / covert forms of oppression because of their skin color. With this, they have realized the importance of their ethnicity.

## **Oppression – Overt & Covert**

In the past I also used to mostly only think about racial oppression as something happened more in the past. I knew there were some groups that still practiced overt oppression, but I thought those experiences where far and few in-between. Shen (2003) describes the effects of this oppression as;

Injustice is pervasive in our society. The sociopolitical framework that compartmentalizes difference creates identity groups that are targeted with oppression and identity groups that are the agents of that oppression, e.g., People of Color and White people. Injustice is then maintained by the unequal power dynamics that result. The agents of oppression appear to benefit from this system, and the targets of the oppression suffer noticeably. All people are affected by these power dynamics dictated by difference. (p. 65)

These pieces of oppression have to deal with both the overt and the covert forms of oppression. The covert aspects of oppression are by definition more difficult to notice. Before coming face to face with various stories about covert oppression, I did not know it existed nor had a real impact on people's life. During the African American panel in my Diversity class, George talked about going to different stores and always having the store employees follow him around every where he went (personal communication, April 16, 2007).

## **Roadmap to the Future**

The human experience is very personal and individual. None of us can fully understand what it is like to be another person or fully realize the impact that various events have on

---

This article was written for either Jacob's BASW or MSW program while at Eastern Washington University. It is being self-published at his website, <http://jacobrcampbell.com/resources> to help other social work students in their practice and give ideas.

that person's life. That is what empathy is for, that we should attempt to understand where that individual is coming from. We can modify our own behavior and try to act in culturally sensitive ways. We can work on removing biases and overt & covert forms of oppression from our lives.

The funny thing about the ethnicity of non-ethnicity is that, with-out recognizing it my ethnicity has been very important in my life. I am thankful for having learned how

much I've taken my own ethnicity for granted.

#### References

Shen, I. (2003). Talking with adolescents about race and ethnicity: What a group worker needs. *Social Work with Groups*, 26(3), 61.