

Writing a statement on diversity, equity, inclusion, and what it looks like in practice is very interesting to me. In order to answer fully, I feel like I need to offer a good amount more of self-disclosure than is generally expected in the “resume, cover letter, references” phase of applying to a job. A short version of my personal bio is that I identify as Queer, bi-racial (Puerto Rican and Jewish), was a person of size until my mid 20s, have a significant learning disability in the form of dysgraphia, and grew up extremely impoverished but attended an extremely affluent school district (just to give an example, my family was homeless twice before I graduated high school, and the daughter of the head of the Screen Actor’s Guild was in the grade below me).

All of the experiences that came with being part of these worlds, as well as many others, provided me with an amazing matrix of strengths, skills, and challenges. This all has formed so much of my core in adapting to the dominant culture where needed, changing it where I could, and blazing my own trail when that was the best option. With this experience and understanding, the practice for me has been meeting people where they are in their life, teaming up with them to discover boons and difficulties, both hidden and obvious, that their personal bios have provided, and helping them develop the skills, knowledge, confidence, support, or whatever else they need to engage with their own internal world, and the world around them, to achieve their goals to the greatest extent that they can.

The majority of my clients identify as being people of color, LGBTQIAA+, on the autism spectrum / otherwise neuro-divergant, having medical needs or are differently physically-abled, low SES, or as having intellectual / developmental / learning disabilities (and many times, some combination of the above). Truth be told, I’m known for working with “weird kids / young adults” and I love it. Weird encompasses amazing, creative, novel, and often exceptionally-accurate ways of viewing and being in the world. Inclusion is helping them see and own this, and helping them figure out how to celebrate it. It’s offering a balance between learning how to navigate systems that were not designed for them, and also how to work to change them: between being as weird as feels good to them, while also learning how to play the game as much as they want or are able to so they can meet their goals within typical society. Equity and inclusion is helping and empower people to be strong enough to have a voice, and also allowing everyone to have a seat at the table. Concretely, beyond the emotional work of therapy, this has taken so many forms:

- role-playing conversations with authority figures to help people practice important conversations,
- turning people on to cartoons (i.e., Steven Universe, Gravity Falls, X-Men), movies (Mad Max: Fury Road, Get Out, Addams Family Values), and music (Against Me!, Notorious B.I.G., Sufjan Stevens) that celebrate unique people and diverse perspectives on the universe
- having deep philosophical conversations where the people I work with essentially quote Foucault, Angela Davis and Deleuze without ever having read them, and where I get the honor of pointing them towards their writings
- Helping people make sense of local government and NGO webpages so they can peruse and pursue greater supports

and so many other forms over time. I feel that writing the essay has been so interesting for me because the question is real about the core aim of the work I have done for my entire life and I have not had to make this implicit information explicit for quite a while, and the processes always shows me new facets each time. In all honesty, thank you for asking for this essay. I hope you’ve enjoyed it and that it’s given you some insights in to my perspectives and I hope they align with you and your team.

-Michael Reisner