

Cover Letter

Analyzing the topic of gender discrimination throughout various articles has been particularly enlightening because it's forced me to properly evaluate my current circumstances within society. Frequently I'm bombarded with the struggles associated with my status as a minority, but I'd never previously considered the magnitude of expectations placed on to me as an American male. In general, the project highlighted a few key aspects of my existence that I had taken for granted, or simply accepted as a portion of my fate. The most interesting realization occurred during the socratic seminar when all of the individuals who identified as male in our classroom entered the center of the circle and we were asked to converse.

The main difficulty for me was properly accounting for the topic of intersectionality. There are a variety of connections that could be associated with gender identity and analyzing the impact different backgrounds and cultures can have on an individual's gender properly is challenging. Unfortunately, I believe my writing could have targeted even stronger themes, but I was worried that attempting to mention intersectionality too much would detract from my overall analysis and synthesis rather than strengthen it.

Lastly, I'm curious about how people can alter some of these deeply rooted issues within society because they are nearly impossible to recognize unless someone explicitly explains the situation. It's a frustrating to recognize problems within a relatively powerful system or institution because the public is too content to blindly accept the facts that they've been presented by that corporation. However, the more I ponder the issues, I've begun to realize that the problems are too intense for a "quick fix."

Normal Exists in the Time You Live

As human beings, people have been programmed to craft their first impressions of others in nanoseconds. This mindset allows individuals to create quick judgements for any situation they encounter and place each instance into a predetermined category. Whenever this notion is challenged, people frequently retaliate negatively by ostracizing the anomaly and consider it to be “other” or as something beneath the accepted categories of society. This is especially prevalent in the current patriarchal society of America where men have been pressured into appearing dominant over everyone around them and are ridiculed if they refuse. These unrealistic standards get brutally examined by the articles “The Trouble with Normal” by Michael Warner and “Masculinity as Homophobia” by Michael Kimmel. Both authors successfully argue the dangers of conformity to societal norms and the lengths many males are willing to go in order to avoid getting “exposed” by their peers. Each presents solid evidence, or logos, to support their viewpoints. This analysis has caused me to reconsider my perspectives and scrutinize the behavior of other men around me.

To begin his argument, Warner exposes the misconception of “normal” in America. Although almost everyone in America desires to be treated as a unique individual, people still aspire to be considered regular rather than a radical. For example, Warner examines “of course people want individuality... but they want their individuality to be the normal kind” (Warner 53). This represents the clouded judgement many citizens have obtained due to the overbearing and narrow minded viewpoint of America. Unfortunately, this mindset plagues the vast majority of individuals which creates a false reality of “normal” in the United States. By continuing to

shroud its inhabitants in mystery through deception, America impedes its social progress and awareness. Warner supports this by arguing that “changes in human physiology over time... suggest that ‘the abnormality of today’ is ‘the normal of yesterday’”(Warner 57). This depicts the ridiculous notion of labeling something as “normal” because “normal” is not necessarily a constant. That term has the ability to rapidly change at a moment's notice.

The second author, Michael Kimmel, focuses on the “coding” that all men encounter throughout their lives. The term “man” immediately creates a mental image in America of an individual who is relatively well muscled, extremely successful, tall and handsome. However, the definition of a “man” in the United States is too shallow to fully grasp the wide variety of men that populate the nation. These assumptions cause many males to design a facade in which they allow their peers to believe they fulfill every expectation and are more dominant than the other men around them. For example, Kimmel argues “our real fear ‘is not of women but of being ashamed or humiliated in front of other men, or being dominated by stronger men’” (Kimmel 103). Almost all men are constantly pressured, or “coded,” from a young age to avoid that fear which creates a never ending, cutthroat environment that feels more dangerous than privileged.

Although the authors are advocating for the rights of two different groups, they both agree that attempting to blend in and to avoid discussing the issue only inhibits change. Currently, society is overwhelmingly comfortable with labeling everything as either normal, or abnormal which completely disregards the shades of grey in between. For example, Warner emphasizes “Nearly everyone, it seems, wants to be normal... [because] the alternative is being

abnormal, or deviant, or not being one of the rest of us. Especially... in America where normal probably outranks all other social aspirations” (Warner 53). This exhibits the corrupt nature of the country because it forces essentially everyone, especially men, to feel pressured into conforming to the expectations of their peers. Kimmel supports this by analyzing fear of being perceived as meek that paralyzes many men from vocalizing their pain and struggles. For instance, Kimmel declares “our fears are the sources of our silences, and men’s silence is what keeps the system running” (Kimmel 104). This explains the twisted situation many males are thrown into at birth. Although they are privileged because they are men living inside a patriarchal society, they are constantly being abused by, and in competition with, those who are considered “more dominant” and are too afraid to create positive change.

Furthermore, both authors masterfully manipulate logos to enhance their relating arguments. Many males suffer from loss of identity due to the oppressive nature of the requirements placed onto them, which can lead to drastic circumstances. For example, Kimmel illustrates “Men commit suicide three times as often as women... [and] it is ‘invariably because of perceived social humiliation,’ most often tied to failure in business” (Kimmel 105). By depicting the relationship between societal oppression and suicide rates for men, Kimmel effectively grasps his audience's attention and cause them to seriously consider his accusations. Similarly, Warner continues this sentiment by explaining the dangers of applying one statistical norm to the entirety of society. For instance, Warner establishes “people who are defined by a variant set of norms commit a kind of social suicide when they begin to measure the worth of their relations and their way of life by the yardstick of normalcy” (Warner 59). By exposing the

current system of blind acceptance by the majority of America's citizens, it allows the reader to think critically regarding their situation and contemplate a potential solution to the frightening pressure of conformity.

After analyzing both articles, the authors caused me to reevaluate the forms of oppression affecting myself and other men around me. As an African American male, I've focused more heavily on the racial discrimination that I'm forced to encounter on a daily basis, but these authors have reconstructed the idea of "normal" and how that applies to life in America. This became particularly noticeable to me when every male was placed in the center of the classroom to discuss Kimmel's argument. There were numerous occasions where we were silent and refused to vocalize our opinions because of the ingrained belief that dissecting the idea of male oppression and discussing our problems or fears together made us "unmanly." It created a difficult environment for anyone to produce something productive from our discussion because as a group we were determined to maintain our masculinity rather than admit there was a societal issue and attempting to provide a solution. Although each of us inside the center of the class was privileged males in a patriarchal society, the discomfort in the room was palpable because we felt constricted and unable to properly express our emotions due to the pressures from society since our birth.

Unfortunately, the American society continues to repeat its past mistakes by refusing to recognize and accept social progress in an attempt to maintain a particular hierarchy. Often times many minorities are opposed to acknowledging the discrimination affecting other groups because their particular concerns are somehow more "significant" than the other group's issues. And

Taylor Dinwiddie
Professor Aimee Suzara
Oakes 80A-20
November 12, 2015
Essay Project #3 Final Draft

Dinwiddie 6

while each discrete group's apprehensions have relevance, the challenge is to remain open minded to the reservations of others. These narrow minded perceptions continue to corrupt and impede progress within the nation.

Taylor Dinwiddie
Professor Aimee Suzara
Oakes 80A-20
November 12, 2015
Essay Project #3 Final Draft

Dinwiddie 7

Works Cited

Warner, Michael. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. New York: Free, 1999. Print.

Kimmel, Michael. *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004. Print.