

In sociology, the most significant and pressing aspect of society and its social interactions is intersectionality. At the same time, it is also the most confusing. It seems as if everything is connected and significant, yet also independent influences.

The micro level describes our personal preferences and is what makes our identity unique; this includes our daily activities and needs. One particular influence that stands out to me are my family dynamics and customs. Less than three years ago, my family was living in poverty and it was only by a string of luck that we are now able to claim the comfortable status of “middle class”. Despite our luck, my parents have little faith in the system, and oftentimes contradictory opinions about it. In many cases, hard work doesn’t pay off. In turn, my parents actively live by the phrase “it’s a survivor’s world” and by traditional views of the world. For instance, mental health is a concept that is quickly dismissed because it seems like an “lazy excuse” or simply “incomprehensible”. Like many matters in my life, their attitudes leave me feeling like the black sheep of my family, since my brother shares very similar ideas and values. And, it certainly doesn’t help that I attended a liberal arts college, major in sociology and minor in social work, and am in a relationship with a white person. As the black sheep, I turned to other sources to feel loved, empowered, or heard. Sadly, as my mental health shows, I often felt unloved, weak (even more so, since my body was already biologically disadvantaged), and unheard. I spent much of my time outside of our family apartment, away from my family, with friends and volunteering, so much of my identity can be traced by to the influences I’ve had on the meso level.

When I look back on my upbringing and the cultures, ideas, shows, and communities I’ve instilled in my identity, I identify two key categories: (1) empowerment and (2) nature/animals. On the micro level, empowerment came from growing up in a largely Hispanic neighborhood, spending years attending church without ever pledging Christianity as my faith, and years improving my crafting abilities.

Living in a Hispanic neighborhood never felt like a hinderance; while I could not comprehend the nooks and crannies of the culture or language as a child, I felt the essence of family and energy or passion. There was a fire-like element to their culture that I craved in my own. I spent long days with my neighbors and, eventually, I learned everyday phrases in Spanish and saw myself as Asian-born, and Asian-Hispanic raised—although, it’s not how I would describe myself anymore.

Similarly, at church, I did not fully comprehend religion or Christianity itself, but I loved attending gospel sessions, Bible lessons, and church events. I saw them as moments of joy, storytelling, and familial bonding. I even spent many of my Christmas Eves at church, since my family did not take the holiday as seriously as I seemed to. It was here, at church, that I was exposed to the harsh realities of the world through soup kitchens, hearing about our own struggling church programs, and recollections in the Bible. I began to realize that my home life wasn’t all too bad, especially compared to “what could be” and this marked the beginning of a new goal that seven-year-old me would carry into high school—to get my parents to understand me.

Ultimately, I never felt like an outsider in places where I would identify as an outsider—nowhere except in my own home. And, the one relationship I could bestow that didn’t confuse me was

with animals. I spent time working with horses and in zoo educational volunteer programs because it was mentally rewarding and, in hindsight, the easiest way for me to solve my problems. Animals didn't judge me and I knew how to make the relationship work. I easily understood an animal's body language and quickly picked up animal care routines. All these experiences and pinpoints of my life set me up to be charitable, urban dwellings and culture, animal-lover, and—generally speaking—hopefully naïve.

It really wasn't until my early college experience that the prominence of social institutions and socially constructed concepts really took hold of mine and my family's lives. On the macro level, there is one institution I would like to focus on—education. Especially as an Asian-American, education creates a duality that both benefits and hinders us. Asian-Americans are not in the minority when it comes to education. There's no way around that statistical truth. However, what I want to focus on is why this is the case. My experience with Asian-Americans in the public educational system is that Asian families—even if they're low-income—will contribute a generous portion of their earnings to education; in other words, education is a priority for many Asian families and finding beneficial resources is our specialty. And, that educational trend is limiting. Many academic resources, such as tutoring programs, focus on the specialized tests and grading criteria. There's very little discussion in these programs and it's why I never returned to the program after my one-class trial. I despised the rigidity and the classroom culture; in that aspect, I was fortunate my parents were more “modern” or “open-minded” because, while they have always judged me, they have never made decisions for me. These very programs guided their students towards STEM schools, programs, and careers. I cannot make a claim about how many kids are unhappy with how their paths turned out, but I can assert that this kind of flow led to self-fulfilling prophecies. Maybe I can credit my distaste for such guidelines or programs in my early childhood forms of engagement and learning; while other kids started prepping for specialized elementary school “honors” programs, I was attempting to salsa or playing success. Ultimately, I believe that was the ultimate privilege of my circumstances—autonomy—and that is something that I believe dictates social location and, more importantly, happiness.

On the next page, I have decided to write a low-budget, make-shift screenplay about the depiction of social institutions and their intersectionality. It was inspired by a slew of silent films I've enjoyed throughout the years and a scene from the live-action remake of *Lady and the Tramp*.

[Opening Text]

"Sometimes I felt as if I straddled cultures and belonged on neither side. I would grind my teeth at what I knew was my family's unquestioning racism but still take pride in their pragmatic endurance, but more and more as I grew older what I truly felt was a deep estrangement from the way they saw the world, and gradually a sense of shame that would have been completely incomprehensible to them." Dorothy Allison's A Question of Class (1993)

[Opening Narration]

Narrator: The story of a first-generation American is the story of identity. How much do we lose when we yearn for a better life?

[Transitional Text]

"I simply do not know my body any other way... For many of us, privacy is simply not an option." Eli Clare's Body Shame, Body Pride (2013)

[Scene A]

Eerie Background Voice: Family. Education. Economy. Marriage.

A timeline—depicted as a storybook—appears on the screen. As the background voice reads off each word, video clips from the narrator's life appears.

Narrator: Timelines. Whether they're biologically-set timelines or the result of socialization, we all have one—sometimes even multiple.

The screen flashes up old vintage film. The song of an old music box plays in the background. It's a lighthearted theme, referencing the 'good old days'.

Narrator: Traditionally, we are all born with an identity. This identity is preestablished by medical terms—sex—and our parents—gender. When we are no longer considered helpless infants, we start to work on our mental development. Many children were expected to get a decent education—academic or vocational. Once they reached adulthood, namely post-education or at the age of eighteen, they were expected to marry. However, the assumption of a married person was that they could support their family in some way—a stable career, a useful set of skills, and comfortable means of living.

A visual of gloved hands begins to stick more pages into each section of the storybook, or timeline. Each page is blurry, but its clear that there are a lot more words on each page. These pages are more worn-out, despite being new additions to the already aging storybook.

Narrator: Nowadays, the timeline itself has not changed, but rather the time span seems to have expanded. As people's life expectancy increases, people are working longer and seemingly spending more time at each life phase.

The music fades out as a black-and-white video is revealed in one of the storybook pages. The video showcases a person walking. The video does not show the person's face because the face is cut off.

The person in the video is wearing thick slacks and a tucked in shirt. The top of the shirt is not visible. The shoes are heeled combat boots. The hands are covered by medium-sized rubber gloves. The left hand is holding onto an umbrella, tapping it against the concrete sidewalk as they walk in a wobbly pattern. Sometimes the umbrella misses the concrete sidewalk, but nonetheless the attempt is there.

[End of Scene A]

The screen turns into static.

[Scene B]

The video starts playing happier music. Birds start to chirp in the distant auditory background. A colored-video replaces the former video. With every step the person takes, one more part of their clothing is colored.

Slowly, the frame of the video pans up and reveals a long neck. A little hairy.

As the frame of the video zooms out, the full image is in front of us: a well-groomed poodle dressed up in its owners' clothing.

As the frame of the video stops moving, the poodle drops down onto all four feet.

A person with long red hair enters the frame from the right, reaching out to the poodle.

Red: Pluto!

Random Stranger 1: Miss, who's this gorgeous gal accompanying you, darling?

Red raises an eyebrow at the stranger.

A bell rings.

Red: Pluto is a male poodle. I rescued him from an alley outside of a butcher's shop. Although, he certainly didn't look much like a poodle back then.

Random Stranger 1: My bad. Poodles all look female. My, Pluto looks great now! You two must be doing well for yourself. He looks like quite the businessman.

Red raises an eyebrow at the stranger.

A bell rings.

Red: A businessman?

Random Stranger: Yes, the slacks, button-down shirt and boots are a classic 'businessman outfit'.

Cut to a random wall of polaroid photos of Red, dressed in similar outfits. In these photos, Red is with friends, Butch, and family members.

A bell rings.

Red: How strange.

[End of Scene B]

Something that always intrigued me about silent films is how they were perceived in the early 1900s—at the height of silent filmmaking—and how we see them today, having experience visual and auditory spectacles like Marvel or Star Wars. The very short screenplay that I visualize is a series of visuals or sound cues that may invoke certain assumptions or thoughts in our minds, oftentimes varying because of our identity. With many people these days, black-and-white visuals are not a commonality and often a visual director's choice; darker tones generally depict somber moods, danger, suspense or night.

Scene A puts the viewer/reader in the same position as, for instance, a bystander on the street. This idea is specifically based off a game my dad and I used to play. People watching—that's what he called it. We would sit on the lawn in the park or on the sand in the beach, and try to work out people's lives. While my father often had more realistic stories than I did, I learned a lot from those experiences. If you had to cast one person in the park as a CEO, it would be the man with the most rigid and professional clothing, usually a collared shirt or wing-tip shoes. If you had to cast another person as a mother, you would look for a woman walking at a leisurely pace, wearing light colored clothing, and attentive to their surroundings.

And, that's what I began to view my identities as—casting calls. There was a particular character that I needed to play at different times, at different places. At school, I had to excel academically—only because I was Asian. At home, I was expected to be well-mannered and tolerant of my younger brother's behavior because I was a girl; while his rebellious and rude behavior was played off as a "boys' experience", my refusal to simply sit properly on the couch was simply unforgivable. When I entered high school and was encouraged to dictate my own philosophy, I had played so many roles that I didn't know who I was. It was a matter of trial and error, thus my long track record of activities. I never stayed in one activity for too long and I dedicated all of my energy to the few that retained my interest.