

Diversity Statement

My personal background and education have repeatedly put me in situations where I am surrounded by people with differing world views, which challenges me to constantly examine, question, and refine my own perspectives and beliefs. I value hearing the voices and studying the work of people from different backgrounds and seek to incorporate this emphasis on diversity into my teaching.

Personal Background:

I grew up in a rural Appalachian town. However, while my classmates could trace their roots back multiple generations within the same county, I was a “new arrival” at age two. I grew up sharing some but not all of the predominant values of my classmates at school. Navigating the disparate cultural values at school and at home lead me down a path to study social interaction. At times, I felt like an “outsider” in my childhood social world, but this feeling also encouraged me to understand belief systems as socially determined. This understanding still resonates with me today, and I strive to recognize that people’s experiences and world views are shaped by the communities in which they formed their understandings of the world. We all hold expectations for ourselves and others based around gender, class, race, sexuality, and physical ability and recognizing that people’s experiences are structured by these factors is critical to understanding the world.

Interdisciplinary Education:

I am incredibly privileged to come from a family that greatly values and encourages education. Pursuing a college degree did not remove this feeling of being an outsider, but instead brought me in contact with even more diversity in worldviews. As an undergraduate at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, my major incorporated classes from multiple disciplines including philosophy, political science, economics, environmental studies, and international studies in addition to sociology to create a cohesive course of study called *Ethics and Social Institutions*. Through my four years as a college student, I was often the only student in the classroom who was *not* majoring in the course topic. This “perpetual outsider” perspective forced me to become fluent in multiple vocabularies, approaches, and ways of thinking about a substantive topic. This multidisciplinary major gave me the perspective to retain and build on the role I played in my home community by allowing me once again to navigate disparate ways of thinking. At the University of Georgia, I have continued to work across disciplines, taking courses in the Human Development and Family Science department and attending transdisciplinary conferences related to my research on the transition to adulthood. I am comfortable in educational settings that incorporate viewpoints from diverse disciplines.

Valuing Diversity & Incorporating Multiple Perspectives in my Classroom:

I love being in a classroom surrounded by people whose viewpoints differ from my own. I strive to integrate academic work from scholars with diverse backgrounds into my research and teaching material. In my sociological theory course, I incorporate important foundational sociological theorists who have contributed greatly to shaping the discipline who are often not included in classic theory classes. For example, I assign students to read work by Harriett Martineau, whose accessible writings laid out clear rules for social methodology before Durkheim, Marx, and Weber began to study the social world. Another example is requiring students to compare and contrast Anna Julia Cooper’s work on intersectionality with functionalism and symbolic interactionism. Incorporating the work of minority and female scholars sends a clear message to students about valuing diverse viewpoints even while studying classical theory. Our perspectives are shaped by our gender, class, race, sexuality, and physical ability and, as an instructor of sociology, I am in a unique position to encourage students to understand the value of including minority voices as a part of the conversation.