

## **Reflection Paper**

Hiyori Nishimura

Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling, AGSC Nyack College

GCN 603: Counseling and Human Development

Dr. George J Ramos

December 17, 2021

I have lived in dual situations between America and Japan in the past 5 years, so my privilege has been impacted differently depending on the country. Even though I have the privilege in some areas in Japan, I lose them in America for my non-citizenship status. I had

## REFLECTION PAPER

rarely thought about “privilege” based on my race before I came to the United States because there were no racial variations in Japan. However, all in all, I thought of myself as privileged to a great extent in terms of my family’s social class, education opportunity, health care, living environment, and access to services and resources.

I classified my family as upper middle class because of my father’s occupation as a professor (he used to be a dean too). I do not believe that our family lives luxurious, but at least I have never had financial difficulties in my life. My family are not those people who always want to possess the latest devices or technologies, so we do not own them. Rather, we buy what we think is reasonable and necessary for our daily lives after careful consideration, and if it is affordable, we buy it. Our neighbors are relatively upper class. The area in which we live is very safe, peaceful, accessible to transportation, and educated. There are plenty of extracurricular programs available for families who have children around our area. Thus, I have been able to make use of these advantages and opportunities throughout most of my life in Japan.

All my race, ethnicity, and culture belong to Japan. I was born in Japan and raised there until I turned 20, so my identity has been firmly found in that culture in addition to my spiritual identity in Christianity. Because of its single dominant race environment, I had never thought or felt about racial privilege in my country. The only factor that distinguishes each other in Japan is social class or financial gap, so race came to my daily consciousness after I

## REFLECTION PAPER

came to this country 5 years ago. In America, my name is rarely pronounced correctly because it contains difficult sounds for most English natives. I have heard from elder Japanese who have been in this country for over a half century that Japanese people used to be called “yellow” and face many discriminations, confrontation, and inequality in American society. Compared to that time, I think I am in a much better situation now. I have been yelled some curse words by people several times, especially during the lockdown of NYC from last year, because of my Asian appearance. However, most people show favor and appreciation for my country’s achievement, high skills, well discipline and order, good education, and unique culture. However, Japanese are still the minority even within Asian American society, so I always have a difficult time finding other Japanese in a school. I also feel that recently Japanese subculture such as Anime is stressed as a main representation of our culture more than other parts of it. That sometimes leads to a narrowly biased perspective of Japanese culture.

I own a citizenship in Japan, but not in America. Therefore, while I have no worries to access and receive any social services and benefits in my country, I am not provided the full benefit in America compared to its citizens. For example, even though I paid double as an international student compared to domestic students, I was not eligible to receive financial aid from the federal government in my previous public colleges (SUNY and CUNY). In addition, international students are not even allowed to work in off campus settings, which puts more

## REFLECTION PAPER

financial burdens on us. I do not have the right to vote and have limited job opportunities with little chance to get financial help to offer upgrading visa status. Especially, as a counseling student, I am concerned about the postgraduate two-year work experience because international students are allowed to stay in the United States for only one year after graduation. I heard that many students who came to America to study counseling had no choice but to give up getting their counselor's license here and returned to their countries with just a master's degree because of the limitations of the F-1 visa. In terms of that, I feel unfairness in this country.

I recognize myself as a female, which is identical to my sex at birth, so I have never had any conflicts or difficulties to live in a society in terms of sexual identity. However, especially in my country, Japan, I sometimes feel gender inequality. Japanese male politicians are often picked up for their male-dominated statements in the media, and female politicians are still in the minority. Many Japanese people also think of a woman's role as child bearer and housekeeper. Japan has many molester cases in addition to sexual harassment. I also had several experiences of being sexually harassed by men, especially middle aged or older. I feel that those things reflect Japan's gender problems.

About my ability and linguistic privilege, I do not find any difficulties in my physical ability but language as a non-native English speaker. I am privileged in terms of my physical condition. I am healthy and able to use my full physical ability to live independently.

## REFLECTION PAPER

I also speak Japanese, my first language, fluently, and I assume myself as using a higher level of Japanese language than average based on my vocabulary, wording, and sentence composition because of my reading and writing habits. However, I am not fully confident about using the English language. I can use it for daily activities and conversations, but it still requires me to use an excess amount of focus and energy compared to my native language. I also often find difficulty keeping up with and understanding fast conversation with many slang words. Besides, I still worry about if I can correctly or precisely use English and make no one uncomfortable with my wording. That sometimes discourages me from speaking in classes and in a crowd.

In conclusion, I believe I have a privilege in most aspects of my life in Japan except for gender inequality. I am very thankful to God for giving me such a blessing and plenty of opportunities to get educated with little financial concerns. In America, because of my immigrant status, I feel unfairness, financial burdens, and stress in language and cultural differences to some extent. However, most people in this country are very understanding and supportive of my native culture and my situation as an international student. Therefore, all in all, I am privileged to live in this society.