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Cover Page Footnote

Samantha Brown Fentress and Arielle Semmel are doctoral students, as well as instructors on record, for courses taught in the Communication Studies department at Southern Illinois University. Samantha and Arielle are the only two author's for this paper. Student quotes are used in the paper but they remain anonymous. This paper has been presented prior to publication at the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies conference at Southern Illinois University. This presentation took place on March 20, 2015.

“I Am More than That”: Exploring Betweenness through Experiential Activity

Samantha Brown Fentress and Arielle Semmel

In this paper we present a pedagogical tool that can be used in and out of classroom settings to explore Diversi and Moreira’s (2009) notion of betweenness, or liminal spaces within and among identities. Intricate Identities is an activity that invites discussion of the dynamics of identity and betweenness. In our paper, we share what we have learned through facilitating three variations of Intricate Identities with several introductory level classes. After providing a detailed description of each variation, we consider the students’ reactions to the identity activity. This consideration includes accounting for our own identities— facilitators rather than participants, instructors on record, women, a woman of color and a white woman – and how our own identities may relate to our students’ reactions. We conclude with comments on how this activity helps students explore the betweenness within their own identities and the betweenness among the many identities represented in our classrooms.

Our teaching philosophies include providing classroom instruction that stretches beyond delivering a lecture or reading a textbook. While those aspects are important to the learning process in order to gain fundamental knowledge of material and concepts, our pedagogical approach is to invite students to go further creatively than they think is “allowed” in a college classroom setting. Many students are surprised when we incorporate activities, performance, and group interaction in the classroom.

In this paper we present a pedagogical tool that can be used in and out of classroom settings to explore Diversi and Moreira’s (2009) notion of betweenness, or liminal spaces within and among identities. The pedagogical tool, which we call Intricate Identities, is an activity that invites discussion of the dynamics of identity and betweenness. Here, we share what we have learned through facilitating three variations of Intricate Identities with several introductory level classes. After providing a detailed description of each variation, we consider the students’ reactions to the identity activity. This consideration includes accounting for our own identities—as facilitators rather than participants, as instructors on record, as women, as a woman of color and as a white woman—and how our own identities may relate to our students’ reactions. We conclude with comments on how this activity helps students explore the betweenness within their own identities and the betweenness among the many identities represented in our classrooms and beyond.

As critical communication pedagogues, we are always working in partnership with our students to name our experiences, to critically reflect on those experiences, and to act for positive social change in and outside of the classroom (Wink, 2005).

One component of this work is to engage with the complexity of identity and how identity shapes and is shaped by the social contexts in which we live (Fassett & Warren, 2007). *Intricate Identities* is an activity that we have used in our classrooms to begin this conversation with our students. Here, we center the experiences of our students as we reflect upon the activity. By doing so, we hope to contribute a concrete example of praxis to the body of critical communication pedagogy scholarship.

Between-ness in the Classroom

Diversi and Moreira (2009) define the betweenness identity as “(un)conscious bodies experiencing life in and between two cultures” (p. 19). They claim this betweenness identity as means to describe “the socially constructed, fluid space” (p. 19) from which they interact with the world. That is, to be a betweenness is to reside between spaces or locations, to reside in betweenness. For our purposes, betweenness is not a physical location but an internal space based on varying identities. For some, this can mean experiencing life in and between two cultures; for others, it may involve struggling between certain privileges and oppressions. Fragmentation and ambiguity come from betweenness, especially when people are “in between position” (p. 174). For Diversi and Moreira, the value in teaching betweenness in the classroom lies in its potential to develop a more nuanced understanding of society. For them, teaching betweenness involves a mode of translation that brings the potential to produce an understanding of society as inherently multicultural. In addition, entering into the in-between spaces provides the environment for expanding students’ approaches to self-reflexivity, whether as a singular or communal conception. Betweenness can introduce new signs of identity and new ways of cooperation, as well as contestation, in the act of explicating socially constructed labels placed on identity (Rees & Pinto, 2013).

In the classroom, such a shift in personal understanding can be generated through an example or experiential activities that require students to involve themselves physically and/or psychologically in the instructional content (Beebe, Mottet, & Roach, 2004). As educators, we can work to involve students in activities that create inclusionary moments, which consist of disrupting students’ conceptualizations of the body, mind, and space in relation to identity (Diversi & Moreira, 2009). The disruptive moment provides an opening for students to re-conceptualize these elements of identity and apply these new meanings to their own understandings of themselves in order to establish comprehension (Rees & Pinto, 2013). For the learning to occur, students must be willing to trust the instruction and give up their reservations related to the activity or experience about to take place (Kidd, n.d.; Rees & Pinto, 2013). For many, it can be difficult to give themselves over to this unknown experience. While some contend that people are not afraid of the unknown when it comes to cultural differences (Johnson, 2006), in our experiences discussion of race and identity can be scary to students.

Many people struggle with embracing betweenness for a variety of reasons, often connected to their understanding of their own culture. For some, particularly students of color, there is little opportunity to learn about their culture because it

has not typically been included in the curricula in their classrooms (Yep, 2008). For others, particularly White students, their cultural heritage has been so prevalent that they do not understand it as an identity of interest at all (Kendall, 2006; McIntosh, 1995). For students in either position, learning the history of their own culture and its relationships with other cultures can be challenging. The in-between of those spaces can present itself as a place of conflict and change that can be difficult to grasp, particularly when trying to understand personal in-between spaces (Anzaldúa, 1999).

In order to overcome these obstacles, instructors must be prepared to implement an educational pedagogy that supports students as they work to attain awareness and comprehension for personal development (Illich, 1970). To begin, teaching betweenness is based on the open-ness of communication. There needs to be two-way communication with open dialogue (Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Rees & Pinto, 2013). Continuous self-reflexive discussions can create space for an experience of breaking through boundaries of identity that allows personal change to occur (Warren & Fassett, 2011). After establishing open communication, educators can work to create authentic moments (Kidd, n.d.) that help their students cross boundaries. In order to enter into betweenness, the educator must construct more authentic moments that search for and move toward meaning. Authentic moments create turning points that open the door for new ways of disclosure and self-understanding (Kidd, n.d.). In these ways, educators create classroom instruction that evokes an inspiring experience built from discussions that allow students to enter into in-betweenness.

Intricate Identities: Exploring Betweenness through Experiential Activity

Intricate Identities is the name we have given to our adaptation of an existing experiential activity that has been used in and outside the traditional classroom.¹ We incorporate the activity into our introduction to oral communication classes during our unit on identity and perception as a means to invite students to enter into betweenness. Warren and Fassett (2011) highlight the ways in which the layered identities of individuals are both constructed and expressed through communication. That is, identity can be understood as a communicative phenomenon, as a performance that we have learned through communication with others (Warren, 2008). As a means to deepen comprehension of this co-constructed nature of identity, we invite students to step into betweenness through an exploration of their own self-selected identity markers.

We begin Intricate Identities by inviting students to tear a blank piece of paper into five sections, leaving the purpose of the papers undefined as a means to build up anticipation of what is to come. Students are often immediately engaged, curiously asking us, as instructors, or fellow classmates for further direction. This back and forth discussion for a seemingly mundane task serves to lay the foundations for

1 Arielle has participated in several versions of this activity in a variety of settings. However, despite extensive research, we have been unable to ascertain its origins.

an open dialogue within the classroom (Rees & Pinto, 2013). Once the papers are torn, we invite students to engage in the more personal task of listing five ways they identify themselves, one per strip of paper. (Samantha projects written instructions, while Arielle relies on verbal explanation.) The identity markers can be anything, as long as the students feel the marker represents them. Many students list identity markers related to sex and/or gender (“male,” “woman”). Some list their faith affiliation (“Muslim,” “Christian”), while others include racial categories (“Black,” “Latina”). Some students emphasize their relationships with others (“daughter,” “brother”), while others focus on their primary occupations (“student,” “athlete”). Many also focus on personality characteristics (“funny,” “intelligent,” “honest”) that they want others to see in them.

This process usually takes about five to ten minutes for the students. Many struggle with the experience of naming oneself. Some have never been required to identify themselves; others have never been invited to do so. These students have difficulty in getting to the five, often throwing in something that feels less consequential to them, such as “likes dogs” or “blonde.” Other students have the opposite problem; for them, limiting their choices to just five presents a painful decision-making process. Some students find themselves grappling with betweenness from the start, wondering, for example, if they should separate “Asian” and “American,” and, if so, how? There are some students who have little trouble with the activity. They have grown accustomed to identifying themselves through demographic check boxes. Sometimes, one or two students have had the opportunity to consider their identity in other spaces and find naming the five that feels closest to their core self an easy task.

Once students complete their list of five identity markers, we begin the process of removing identities. That is, students are asked to “give up” their slips of paper, and the identities those slips represent, in waves. We have facilitated that “giving up” in different ways. Each variation has shaped the ways in which students engage with betweenness through this activity. Below we describe these variations and student responses to each. We then follow these descriptions with a consideration of our own identities, as the instructors in these classrooms, and how our identities may have impacted the betweenness we share with students. Finally, we offer a discussion of how these variations of *Intricate Identities* facilitated a sense of betweenness.

Variation 1: “You took away my man card”

Arielle

I begin the process of “giving up” by asking students to remove two of their identities. I describe this as “letting go” of two identities while holding on to the remaining three. After giving students a moment to make their selections, I ask them to share how this felt. There are mixed feelings. Some find this step very difficult. They were just asked to limit their choices to five identity markers, and now are being asked to limit themselves even further. Others console themselves

with the identities they are still holding. “It was hard, but it’s okay because these are the ones that really matter to me.” Some students are not bothered at all. “Well, those were just the ones I put in there because I couldn’t think of anything else.” At this stage, most students are not overly distressed with the decision-making process. This soon changes, however.

For the next stage, I ask students to consider their remaining three identities and remove one more. The room erupts into heavy sighs and nervous giggles. As I ask students how this round felt, it becomes clear that the stakes are getting higher. Some students begin to turn resentful at this whittling away of their identities. Some continue to console themselves. “This is getting harder because these are things that really matter to me, but at least I have these other two.” The ones who were most relaxed in the first round of removals are becoming less so; they are running out of “throw-away” identities. All the students seem a little more on edge. They seem to be guessing where this is going and anxiously look at the two remaining identities in their hands, wondering what they will have to give up next.

For the third round, the game changes. I ask the students to hold their two remaining identity cards up, facing out so I can read them. I then go to each student and, through random selection, a final identity is removed in one of three ways. One, I simply grab one of the slips of paper, throw it down on the desk, and move on. I do not look at the student or the paper as I do this. Two, occasionally I stop in front of a student and spend a few seconds staring hard between the student and his/her two slips of paper before pulling one and throwing it down. I do not actually read the papers as I do this and my choice is random. Three, for a very few students, I cheerfully and casually say “you pick,” and move on.

For this round, I invite each group of students to respond in turn. The ones who were subject to the most random selection are usually irritated with me. “You didn’t even look at me; how can you know what’s most important?” The students that I had paused in front of often waver between anxiety and anger. They report feeling that I had judged them and that I was trying to tell them something about how I saw them. A White, male student once yelled in exasperation, “You took away my man card!” Those that were given the opportunity to choose their own final selection express mixed reactions. Some felt a sense of relief wash over them. Others had been hoping I would make the choice because doing so on their own was too difficult. Importantly, we also discuss the students’ reactions to watching others’ experiences. Many report feeling very uncomfortable witnessing me “judge” their peers. They direct resentment toward those who were able to choose for themselves, wondering what made them so special. Overall, students express distress over how I choose who I would treat differently and what this choosing said about my thoughts regarding their capabilities and worthiness of my attention.

Before closing this conversation, I find it important to address any perceived violation of my students’ trust that may have occurred in the course of the activity. I am always careful to let students know that my selections were random, both in terms of the students I treated differently and the slips of paper I removed. While I understand that it may have been hurtful in that moment, I assure them that my

choices were not a reflection of my assessment of them as individuals and that I see each of them as more than what they had written on their papers. I thank them for their vulnerability.

I begin the formal debrief session by asking students to share how they are feeling in the moment, to review what happened during the activity, and to articulate connections they see between the activity and our text. Our discussion moves toward the layered nature of identity, how one identity may appear more salient in any given moment, but it is impossible to truly separate the different aspects of ourselves (Anzaldúa, 1999). We are never just the one identity, no matter what the remaining cards in our hands may say; we are also more than the five we wrote down at the beginning. In other words, we are always in a space of betweenness (Diversi & Moreira, 2009). We also discuss the difficulty of being asked to leave that betweenness. We compare the experiences of being forced to let go of a piece of ourselves, of having others make that choice against our will, of watching others either choose or have the choice made for them. While at times these different ways of stripping away identity can be a relief, they are more often painful experiences. We come to understand that, rather than the particulars of the identity markers we can claim, it is our betweenness among them that constitute who we are (Warren & Fassett, 2011).

Variation 2: “I hated when you took that away”

Samantha

I begin the process of removal by asking the students to remove two of their identifiers. The students look at me in shock, commenting, “What? Are you serious? I can’t do that,” or “this is hard.” I tell them to remove the two least important to help them with the decision. Some students vocalize how all the identifiers are important, but eventually remove two. I then tell the students I will walk around and remove one of their three remaining markers. At this point in the semester, I know the students’ personalities and interests somewhat. I look at each student’s identity markers and purposely remove the identifier that I guess to be the most important to that individual student, not to be mean or hurtful but to enhance the effect of the activity. For example, I try to remove religious, racial, or nationality identifiers if the option is available, as I assumed the students would be attached to those markers the most. I want the students to have a reaction to the loss of that particular identifier, to feel what it would be like to have someone take it away. Finally, I tell the students to remove one more of the final two, so they are left with only one identifying marker. When I provide this bit of information, the room fills with chatter among the students, to one another and to me. They do not want to remove another, only to be left with one identifier.

Once students have made their final selection, we begin to discuss the activity. I begin the debrief session by asking each student to go around the room and say the last two identifiers he/she had left, which one they ended up with, and how he/she felt when I removed an identifier. Student reactions are loud, emotionally strong,

and humorous. In addition to my directions, students often include commentary on the identifier I removed. For example, one student said, “You took away my ethnicity. Everything that I am is because I am a Latina. Why, Samantha, why would you take that away from me? I am very upset” Another student said, “I am a Black male and now all I am left with is male. I am more than that. I am proud of being Black. I hated when you took that away.” A woman shared, “You know I am a Christian. I wear my cross necklace everyday. I am mad. I am Christian. I don’t know why you took that away on purpose. Why didn’t you remove anything else?”

Some students see my removal as a violation of our relationship. One female student who had begun to cry when I pulled her slip of paper shared, “Samantha, why did you remove that I am Mexican? I thought you liked me. You know how important that is to me. That was cruel. I didn’t mean to react to it but I am picturing myself as having my Mexican heritage removed. I’m hurt.” Students often call me “mean” and say, with dismay, “I thought you liked me.”

They also express concern that I have left them to choose between what they perceive to be generic identifiers. For example, students often express their dislike of being left with the identifier “freshman.” They do not like that their only identifier was something that several thousand others could claim as well. As one Black, male, student-athlete said, “I was stuck with ‘I like pizza.’” The class laughed; he smiled and continued, “I am more than that. It was between that and freshman. I would rather be known as someone who really likes pizza than just another freshman.”

Some students begin to vocalize the experience of being in the space of betweenness. One White male student spoke out about my removal of his religion, which I had known would be hard for him because he spoke of his faith on a regular basis in class. “You took away Christian from me. You can’t do that. That is the most important thing about me. I am left with ‘conservative’ but my conservative beliefs are based from my religion. I am Christian first.” Here, this student is describing the layered nature, the betweenness of his own identity. Others highlight the betweenness in our relationship, as instructor and student. I had a male student speak up because I removed his paper that said “homosexual.” He said, “You took away my sexuality. It took me a long time to come out and now that is taken from me. But I am not mad. I get it. I understand that happens in real life; I am dismissed.” His explanation of the betweenness he experienced helped other students to see why I removed the strips I chose. In these moments, students begin to see I am not trying to be mean in my choice of identifiers to remove, but rather, as one student summarized, “your point all along [is] to take away something of importance so we would understand what people feel like when we stereotype their identity or struggle with ours.”

I close our debrief discussion by asking the students what they think the point of the activity is. Many say it is to better understand what makes up their identity, to understand they do not have only one identity marker that shapes who they are. Through the conversation I emphasize that each person had more than the five markers that shape his or her identity (Anzaldúa, 1999). We discuss how each

of us knows the feeling of having someone try to take away a part of our identity without having a voice to protest or explain. I add that others can try to take away aspects of our identity but, in reality, they cannot because identities are not so easily separated in that way.

Finally, I share with my students my own thinking during the activity to address the concerns about our relationship that they raise. I let them know that I have worked to get to know them throughout the semester and disclose that I purposely tried to take an identity that I thought was most important to them. I let them know that I do this not to be mean but to evoke an emotional response in the hopes that they will get more out of the activity. I also admit to when I struggle with this, either because I am unsure of which identity they feel more attached to or because there are some identities that I do not feel right taking away at all. The students respond with understanding, indicating that they suspected there must have been a reason for the change in my behavior and with appreciation for the activity. In some ways, our relationships are improved by working through this moment of tension and coming to the realization that we have shared enough of ourselves up to this point that I can pick the identities that they feel most connected to.

Variation 3: “Who cares? It’s just a game”

Samantha

As I am always looking for ways to improve my pedagogy, I once decided to experiment with the way I conduct the activity. I wanted to see how the reactions would be different and how the level of awareness the students gained would be impacted. This time, I did not look at each student’s three remaining identity markers. Instead, I purposely turned my head and chose one of the identifiers at random. I knew by the end of *Intricate Identities* students usually understood why I removed the important marker, but as a pedagogue I never want to cause my students any harm or hurt feelings. I wanted students to take away the same concepts, but thought I would appear less “mean” if I did not look at their strips of paper.

As I went around the room and removed the strip of paper, I received little reaction from students. Occasionally, I had students who said “oh no, you took the one I wanted.” But for the most part there was no reaction to the activity. Most students said they were not bothered or upset about what I removed because the one they wanted or the “good one” stayed. A Black female student said, “You didn’t take anything that was too important to me. You left me with all the good stuff, so I’m happy. I got to pick the one I wanted.” For some, the chance element presented some mild interest. An older White female student said, “You took away forestry, which is my major. I wanted that one to stay but honestly it would have been the next one I eliminated. I am a mother first, above all and that one is left. I would have been pissed off if you would have taken that one.” Meanwhile, one White male student said, “You took the one I wanted the most but I’m not mad. You didn’t do it on purpose but I was afraid that you were going to take it. But the surprise element was cool, though.” No student seemed to care about the identifiers I took.

As the students shared their experiences, one White male student said, “Who cares? It’s just a game in class. Why would anyone get upset if you took one of their pieces of paper. I wrote down things but you didn’t take anything I really liked, but I doubt I would’ve gotten mad if you did.” I knew in that moment this class did not get the point of *Intricate Identities* nor did anyone experience betweenness with his or her identity. Instead, students reported that the point of the activity was “to play a fun game,” “to teach something relating to identity,” and “so we would talk to you this early in the morning or to get us awake.” This version of the activity resulted in a total failure. By not looking at any of the papers, I did not spark any visceral reaction or emotion in the students. There may have been some students who understood the purpose of the activity, but he or she chose not to vocalize the understanding. Overall, the class appeared to not “get it” at all, meaning they did not grasp the concept of identity or draw a connection to the textbook information on identity markers. Without some semblance of assessment from me in ascribing identities to each student, there was no real connection made between the activity and the individual student. We certainly had not entered into betweenness together. For that reason, we do not recommend this variation of the *Intricate Identities* activity.

Betweenness and Our Instructor-Student Relationships

The betweenness we experience with students is impacted by who we are in the classroom (Diversi & Moreira, 2009). In *Intricate Identities*, we are facilitators rather than participants; in this relationship, we are asking our students to become vulnerable with us, to grapple with their identities, without offering the same in return. In addition, we are, in reality, more than facilitators; we are the instructors on record for this course, conferred with credentials and authority by the academic institution in which we are teaching (Illich, 1970). That is, we hold a certain power over students in that the title of instructor on record imbues us with the authority to assess these students and our assessments have the potential to impact their future academic and professional careers. In Variations 1 and 2, we were able to leverage that authority to increase the impact of the activity. However, because we recognize and honor the vulnerability of students in this power dynamic, we strive to create an environment of mutual respect through open dialogue in our classrooms (Kidd, n.d.; Rees & Pinto, 2013) before we conduct *Intricate Identities* with our students. When we explain to students that the identities we ascribed to them through the act of removing others did not reflect our true feelings about them, we will only be believed if we have established a certain level of trust with them beforehand.

The betweenness of our own, personal identities also impact our relationships with students. As we identify and are perceived as women, we are aware the students may react differently to our authority and caring in the classroom than to our colleagues who identify and are perceived as men. For example, Nadler, Berry, and Stockdale (2013) built off of research showing anti-woman bias toward faculty in college classrooms. In their study, they found that students demonstrated more interest in taking courses taught by men over women, with students even

reporting disappointment in having a professor who identifies as or is perceived as a woman. In addition, students tend to evaluate instructors who identify as and are perceived as women as less competent than their counterparts who identify as and are perceived as men, particularly as students became more familiar with the professors (Nadler, Berry, & Stockdale). That is, it would seem that when we develop our relationships with our students, by sharing more of our own identities with them, as women we risk our students losing confidence in our abilities as instructors. However, we are also able to leverage that vulnerability in *Intricate Identities*.

Samantha: “Does discrimination really happen any more?”

As a woman of color, I have experienced student resistance to my person in the classroom and take steps to address this early in the semester. I have already established credibility as an instructor when the time comes to facilitate *Intricate Identities* and am able to focus on the students’ identities rather than my own during the activity. However, I bring my personal experiences into the discussion following the activity. I provide personal examples of times someone has dismissed or ascribed an inaccurate identity to my person (Delgado & Stephancic, 2012). I explain what that feels like and how I react in those moments. Often the students are shocked and say, “Does discrimination really happen anymore?” or, “Do people really do or say that?” The majority of my students self-identify as White Americans and many have not experienced anyone taking away part of their identity. In such moments, I use my own body, my own experiences with identity, to dialogue with students about how a person can feel helpless and voiceless in the face of such oppression.

Arielle: “You pick”

As a White woman, I am conscious of how my whiteness manifests in the classroom. In a class of predominantly White students, my assessment appears more natural, the normality of White people assessing others having long been established through the curriculum (Yep, 2008). In a classroom of predominantly African American students, my whiteness brings an uncomfortable, though perhaps unnamed, reminder of this history (Kendall, 2006). Here, I must be mindful and adjust the activity to meet the needs of my students. For example, when I asked how it felt to remove an identity marker and be left with only two, one African American male student responded to the question with a closed expression, tight-lipped with a hard, unblinking stare. Recognizing that having a White woman remove a final piece of this young man’s identity risked touching on an experience that extends beyond the confines of this particular classroom activity, I did not “randomly select” this student for the final round. Rather, I looked him in the eye and said “you pick,” setting aside the casualness that usually accompanies this statement. As a White woman, I must recognize that the meaning of actions like me taking away a “man card” could shift for a White student and an African American student (Kendall, 2006).

Discussion

This Intricate Identities activity is important because it creates a moment of disruption when looking at oneself (Diversi & Moreira, 2009). Students must stop to reflect on their identities. According to Warren and Fassett (2011), identity is “the self or the answer to the question ‘who am I?’ with the added recognition that the ‘who’ is always emerging from the cultures we belong to” (p. 62). Students apply this definition as they place on the strips of paper the most significant markers that make up their identity. This process of reflection provides a stronger awareness of self.

The students also learn that their identity is not based on one thing alone, but rather is comprised of a variety of sources (Anzaldúa, 1999). Many students struggle to even begin the activity, to narrow down only five aspects that shape their identity. As the strips of paper are slowly removed, the students feel the impact of something sacred to them being taken away. They become aware that they are made up of more than five identity markers, to even place a hierarchy on identifiers is impossible, and to be asked to do so is unfair. As they come to understand that one identity marker does not define them, students enter into the betweenness of their own identities.

The discussion that is incorporated into Intricate Identities creates authentic moments (Kidd, n.d.) for exploring betweenness among identities in the classroom, as well. These moments occur through open dialogue where students may ask difficult questions of each other or of us as instructors that they may not otherwise have been comfortable enough to ask (Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Rees & Pinto, 2013). For example, one of Samantha’s students once asked, “How come all the minority students put their race on their strips? Why? I didn’t even think to write White down. Did any White students write White as one of their five?” Only two hands went up. Samantha turned the questions over to the other students in the class who were ready to respond. One minority female student said, “I didn’t even think about not putting my race down. It is part of me. I wouldn’t feel right not writing it down. It is part of my culture. I am who I am because of my race.” Not until that moment did the White student realize that race matters, and that part of her privilege was she had gone 18 years without knowing that it did (McIntosh, 1995). Through such exchanges with each other, the students engage in an intersectional exploration of their identities that also highlights both the privileges and oppressions within those intersections.

Indeed, students often come to learn about their own positionality through hearing about the experiences of their classmates. The students themselves tell each other what it feels like to have your identity dismissed or an identifier taken away. One shares that he has grown accustomed to being overlooked based on his sexuality or another shares her frustration in moments when others have trouble seeing her as a student because they only see her as Latina. In these moments, the students come to recognize the betweenness of each other and the intersecting privileges and oppressions that betweenness holds (Crenshaw, 1991). In recognizing each other’s layered identities, they begin to cross boundaries to connect to the betweenness among themselves (Diversi & Moreira, 2009).

An exploration of betweenness, or the liminal spaces within and among identities, allows students to understand the multifaceted nature of their own identities and shift toward an understanding of culture as inherently multicultural (Diversi & Moreira, 2009). *Intricate Identities* is an experiential activity that we, as instructors, use to enter into betweenness through authentic dialogue with our students in the classroom (Kidd, n.p.; Rees & Pinto, 2013). Our experiences have shown us that our facilitation is key in setting a context that encourages such an authentic dialogue. As we manipulate the borders between avowed and ascribed identities with our students in the course of the activity, we must be mindful of how our own identities impact student responses. It is those very responses that help us ascertain the success of the activity. We, as instructors, have the opportunity to listen as students express their shifting perception of the social world through the articulation of their own betweenness.

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