

A Self Reflection Paper

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Before high school, I had very little interaction or knowledge of the social work profession. I believe I was first introduced to the discipline of social work through Netflix. The Netflix show *Life Unexpected* portrayed the life of a young girl in foster care who had found her birth parents. Throughout this show, the viewers were able to see the interactive role of the social worker in the young girl's life; this is what first sparked my curiosity in the profession. During my freshman year of high school, I became ill. It would be two years before anyone could give me a proper diagnosis of POTS or Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome. I spent many days going back and forth from specialist to specialist throughout this time and entered many children's hospitals' patient files. Throughout this time, I was able to see many different professions in action nurses, doctors, therapists, and medical social workers. I have always strived to help people from a young age, and jobs such as these were always of interest to me. The turning point for me was at Fair Oaks hospital in a hospital bed and gown, crying my eyes out because doctors again told me that they believed I was faking my symptoms and seeking attention.

I had already been in the hospital for three days getting numerous tests done when a therapist at the hospital came into our room and introduced herself. This was our first interaction with her, and within minutes of the exchange, I began to cry, and my parents and I told her I was not faking it as she had assumed. As if in a movie, the world went into slow motion for a few seconds, and in came my social worker assigned to me through the hospital because of the duration and circumstances of my stay at the hospital. She had heard the conversation and commanded the room advocated for myself and my parents with the therapist. Who would not believe anything other than what she had already pre-determined before even meeting us. The slow-motion stopped and reflecting on this moment later, and I realized I wanted to be who that

social worker was in my life for someone else's. My goal is to become a medical social worker in the hospital setting, working with children and young adults from birth to age 23 and their families. I believe my greatest asset within this specific profession would be that I have been in the client's position, and this will give me a better perspective of what they are going through and how I might best be able to help. In addition to my POTS, I have Cystic Fibrosis which also put me in and out of the hospital setting at a young age as my lungs collapsing and weak immune system caused many stays at the hospital. Because of this, I grew up at a very young age and was able to see how my illness affected my family and parents. I believe this is another advantage of mine because I will recognize that as much as we need to help the client or child, we must also help their support system or family. My family had been my most incredible support system throughout my life, especially during high school when I first got sick with POTS.

My grandfather began his career in service as a paratrooper in the military. He continued becoming a policeman on horse riding throughout Washington D.C. However, his service truly instilled into my family the importance of helping others and being an excellent person to influence others positively. My grandfather and parents have been the most positive impacts on my motivation to help people. Even though their current occupations do not directly affect helping others, they still find ways to help others in their daily lives. It may be by buying an extra meal to go to a restaurant to give to a homeless man on the street or delivering baked goods to the fire station.

I believe my social identity can strongly relate to what I have experienced medically and socially. When I became sick and could no longer be as socially active as I once was, I quickly found out who my friends indeed were. I believe this installed in me loyalty in the relationships I've made and my self-worth, and who I want to be as a person. Additional points of

intersectionality within myself are as a sister, daughter, girlfriend, fighter, helper, and friend. A very prominent part of my social identity is a white female in the upper-middle-class, as this privilege has given me many opportunities. Unlike many other peers from NOVA or the Chantilly area, I believe I am very aware of my privileges as a white female and my socioeconomic status. I have been awarded many opportunities through these statuses, such as traveling for soccer and field hockey. And work with many high-status trainers for the goal of eventually playing collegiate level soccer. Additionally, I am thankfully not having to worry about finance related to receiving my education and meeting my daily needs.

I believe my social identity and the many aspects of my intersectionality will help me as a social worker in a few ways. For example, I have had to be a fighter throughout my life, especially during high school, and I persevere a lot. A few of my favorite quotes are “Nevertheless she persisted” and “She Believed She Could So She Did.” I think this fighting spirit is a strength of mine that can be relayed in my practice as if there is anything to count on in this profession, and there will be tough days where you will just want to give up. And my ability to persevere will be a crucial asset in this, in addition to being very self-aware. I became very self-aware of my physical state for almost two years, and I would have to keep a running log of my daily symptoms and reactions to various medications. Allowing me to become very self-aware of my mental health as well and the importance of self-care. I believe this awareness will help me as a social worker avoid burnout, and I plan to prevent burnout through self-care and taking moments to reflect on what happens throughout my days and what I need to do to take care of myself to best help my clients.

I believe my limitations can also relate to my social identity and socioeconomic status as I have fortunately never had to feel the concern of where will my next check or meal will come

from. And I think this will be a limitation because many of the clients may have those concerns, and I will know how to help them from a professional standpoint but will not be able to connect with the client. I believe I have a good sense of cultural competence for the stage in my academic career I am currently at. However, I have much more to learn as cultural competence is a continuing learning process. An additional limitation of mine is my understanding and experience with the LGBTQ+ community. I have concerns over accidentally offending a member of the LGBTQ+ community regarding pronouns and the change process for a transgender man or woman. I've taken steps to understand better the use of terminology for the LGBTQ+ community, such as in the proper context. I have practiced using the vocabulary in different sentence formats, such as what my notes after a session with a community client might look like with pronouns such as they or them. Furthermore, through research, I have better understood biologically to transition as a transgender woman or man. My goal is to learn as much as possible about the process to be aware of the potential challenges that may arise. I would like to do this so I can be better prepared to help clients through these conflicts, as this will help me with the social work code of ethic service and dignity and worth of a person.

I believe my biggest insecurity will know if I am ready to enter the field after graduation, I will take all I have learned and use it correctly in practice. I have had this insecurity in my educational abilities in every transition of my academic career from high school to college and the subsequent college stage to the real world. However, I believe this insecurity will disappear as I get closer to graduation because I will gain all the field experience over the next two years. My greatest strength would be my dedication to my education as I realize what I do now and learn now will reflect in my future career. All through high school, I memorized what I needed to

get an A in the class; however, at Longwood, I have learned and implemented what I have learned into my life and course load.

My aspirations as a social worker would be to become a medical social worker and help a client the way I was once allowed. The point in which the hospital social worker advocated for myself, and my family was a life-altering point for me because, after almost two years, I felt like I had never been heard by someone other than my mother until then. It was a point in time when I was at my lowest, and her simple act had such a ripple effect in my life that I want to repeat that for a client. To live out these high expectations, I need to continue to dedicate myself to my education and do the work I need to become more competent with the LGBTQ+ community. I would like to make a difference in someone's life for the better, specifically in the medical social work setting, as was done for me to inspire another person the way I was.