

Positionality & Identity in a Social Context

It's impossible to think of your own positionality without thinking about it in relation to the people around you and the spaces you inhabit with them. I guess it's not *impossible* to think of your positionality as this singular, isolated thing, but I think doing so is a disservice to yourself... It is also a disservice to the people you will inevitably work with in your research and the people you interact with on a daily basis, people who impact your life in ways you may not realize until later on in your life.

In his book *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008), Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson posits that "relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality" (Wilson, 2008, p. 7). This philosophy is integral to my life as a whole, but in the context of my research, it leaves a big imprint on both my theory of change *and* my positionality. When I first wrote a draft of this over a year ago, I had a completely different praxis project in motion, or in mind, rather. The project didn't gain much traction and I felt really stuck where I was for a number of reasons beyond some unfortunate personal issues I was working through *at* the time and *for* some time.

I think the way I want to talk about my positionality has changed drastically since I drafted this almost two years ago. It could be thought-provoking to include bits and pieces of what I had previously written for this, as a way to analyze and reflect on my growth in real time, synthesising it all right in front of you instead of just in my head, and maybe I'll do that, maybe not... but regardless, I think it's essential for me to talk about positionality in a way that feels wholly and utterly genuine to me right in this moment, which is something I'm still figuring out, and you're on that journey with me.

I think of quilts a lot as an art medium, but I mostly think about them as a metaphor for my life and how I relate to myself and others. And if you haven't realized it already, metaphors and stories are how I make sense of things, from the simplest ideas, to the most complex concepts. Anyway, one day in my notes app on my phone, I just wrote down "memory quilt" and I thought it was going to be one of many notes that I would go back to years later and delete because it didn't make any sense then or now... but that wasn't the case at all. If anything, these words only started to take on more meaning as more time passed, and I made more memories. I vividly remember going to an art exhibit at the American Folk Art Museum in New York City in October 2023, completely on a whim, because I needed a way to pass the time while my friend was at work. My grandma, who is seemingly all-knowing when it comes to museums anywhere and everywhere, told me that this museum was free. I like free things and I like art, so of course, I had to go. I adventured across the city from Brooklyn to Manhattan, bagel in hand, and after I ate my bagel and piqued the interest of some pigeons on a table next to me, I walked into the museum. It was smaller than I thought it would be, but the exhibit, on quilts throughout history, had no small impact on me.

Seeing people's memories and identities stitched and woven into every thread of these quilts really struck me, and made me rethink the way my identities relate to each other and those around me. How do our own memory quilts, identity quilts, tether to those around us? When we reckon with our identities, their consonance and dissonance, how does that reverberate to the people and environments we inhabit?