

Learning to De-Center Myself

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Hands down, one of the most important and valuable things that I have learned during my time this summer is the importance of decentering oneself. I, of course, can only speak for myself, but I see a pattern, particularly in spaces of activism and within the nonprofit sector.

I think it was a mark of immaturity that, for so long, I sought a sense of self gratification and fulfillment from the work that I did. Many times, though, I did not realize it, the work that I was doing, while being valuable, only served to help me pursue my interests. This is especially obvious in high school. I threw myself into a myriad of organizations and clubs, claiming every position of leadership that I possibly could. And while I cared about the work being done within these

organizations, I was much more interested in how I could use my position to propel myself to my next position. I was concerned about how this work might reflect positively on me for future opportunities. By the time I began applying to colleges, I had a fully stacked resume of experiences that I half-heartedly cared about at best, and regretted at worst. So much time, energy, and resources wasted and places that only serve to make me “look good”. I felt deeply inauthentic writing about my experiences, because I had not developed the genuine bond with other organizers, supervisors, and more importantly, the people I claim to be serving. My work was equally as performative as many of my white counterparts who were involved in this work for self-fulfilling purposes.

I knew that my energy had to be redirected and focused in areas where that passion was needed, and where I felt truly passionate about. Authentic and intersectional advocacy work begins with decentering yourself, and recentering the impact that you want to have. This internship has truly given me that opportunity. The ability to work behind the scenes, and support work that was truly making a difference without fully giving myself the platform. I’ve had feelings of discomfort and confusion while tackling issues that I previously wouldn’t take the time to engage with, because understanding the fundamentals of reproductive justice was something that I prioritized during this time.

I have my supervisor, and role model, to be honest, LaKia Williams to thank. We have never had a discussion about this topic specifically, but just watching the work that she does, and admiring how she handles herself with such humility while being at the forefront a number of organizations that are doing incredible work was inspiring. And I’ll take what I’ve learned about decentering myself with me and every future position I hold, no matter how big or small.