

FOREWORD

It is my privilege to pen the foreword for a book that I needed 22 years ago when I was an assistant professor starting out. In my first academic post, I taught public relations (among other things) and was always having to supplement the standard textbooks with readings about gender and race. In time, I added some on sexual orientation, but there was really very little on any of the central markers of identity in the early 1990s for those of us who took a critical approach to our teaching. I bet others, too, have needed this book in years since.

Fortunately, Donnalyn Pompper has written the first comprehensive text addressing the full range of diversity issues – or, as she calls them, differences – in organizations. While there have been articles to emerge here and there over the years addressing one or more of the various signifiers of difference, her text is the first to unify these elements into a single well-theorized, well-researched, and well-organized book.

Thus, the book immediately fills a gap and represents a model for teaching texts in organizational communication, public relations, and other strands of communications studies. It will be useful to those teaching at both introductory and more advanced levels.

Pompper places her examination of organizations and their people within a framework of social identity theory, which states that we humans form our identities – our senses of self – through our interactions with others with whom we most feel akin. Interactions take place in a variety of modes and settings, including face-to-face and mediated. How we come to feel akin to someone, however, has much to do with our knowledge and understanding of them. Pompper's book, from beginning to end, offers a roadmap for students to consider all of the aspects of themselves and others they will meet in this identity-building process, and to use this learning to function more humanely and effectively in those organizations.

Human beings, after all, are the essential building block of any organization. If organizations are to be strong and fulfill their purposes, those within them will ideally understand and appreciate each other, and find ways to work across their various differences, be those racial, ethnic, gender, age, physical ability, sexual orientation, or otherwise. In this way, the

book recognizes the intersectionality of identity, that is, the complex aspects of ourselves marked by our genetic heritage (e.g., skin color, male or femaleness) but also other characteristics, such as our social class, our religious or spiritual practices, our psychological abilities, etc.

Pompper has organized the book's 12 chapters thematically. The chapters contain subsections on how a particular identity concern relates to both the self and to the organization. Chapters end with summary discussions, key terms, and self-reflection questions, and discussion questions. The book's final chapter suggests "enabling people to reach their full potential" as a principle of managing diversity within the organizational setting. The book is at once practical and probing, straightforward, and deeply thoughtful in its undertaking.

I congratulate the author for bringing forth this long-awaited book, which will benefit generations of professors and students to come.

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