
Imagined “DEI Infinite Semiosis Assignment”

This imagined “DEI Infinite Semiosis Assignment” is a constrained variant of a real “Infinite Semiosis Assignment” that I task students with doing in the cognitive semiotics course (Cog444). Without getting into the details of C. S. Peirce’s concept of sign and the equation of one part of a sign (the interpretant) with another part (representamen) of a related sign **on repeat** (infinite semiosis), the basic idea is simply to associate one idea with another idea that falls within the same conceptual sphere. The example that I provided to my students last year when I presented the assignment actually was DEI related, and it went something like this:

Colin Kaepernick → taking a knee at halftime → Black Lives Matter → Black Power
→ John Carlos and Tommy Smith gesture on the medal stand → the 1968 Mexico City Olympics → the 1960 Olympics in Rome → Muhammad Ali → Conscientious Objection
→ Vietnam War → World War II → Japanese Internment Camps → bias against Asian Americans → Covid-19 → Covid-19 and the Black Community → ...

By actually placing a DEI constraint on the infinite semiosis assignment, students will generate a wealth of different DEI oriented threads that are worth analyzing in class. As a student presents their thread, they would be expected to talk just a little about some of the signs that make up their thread, from a semiotic perspective, and entertain a few questions as well. The infinite semiosis assignment has never failed to engage students in meaningful discussions about phenomena surrounding the signs on the threads. With the DEI constraint, meaningful discussions with a decidedly DEI orientation are bound to occur.

It is worth noting that any number of other assignments in the course, for example, one pertaining to firstness, secondness, and thirdness, or another focusing on iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity, could also be constrained to focus on DEI considerations.