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IES Dialogues on Differences

Journal Entry 1

29 March 2017

**What are some of the stereotypes of Africa or South Africa that you understood before coming here? Where did these stereotypes come from?**

Before coming here, I was a believer of the starving African and now I feel a little ashamed and even fooled for believing in it. I’m sure that many parts of Africa have food shortages and many people go hungry, but I was told it’s still very common. There are those “Sarah McLachlan”-esque commercials that play on late night television where a sad song is played over the faces of emaciated children and crying faces and then they ask you to donate to help save these poor souls. They then use phrases like “help these Africans” that really generalize all of Africa, not just treating it as one country, but also as an area of people who are identical in their plights, ideologies, cultures, etc.. Outside of television commercials, I honestly don’t read much fiction or adventure books that contribute to many of Africa’s stereotypes.

**When did you first start noticing messages about your identity? What were those messages and from where were they coming?**

Identity means so little to a child, at least when there are other things on the mind. All you want to do is get ice cream and play games at the local park. Not once did I think that my skin tone or families economic status meant that I would live a different life than other kids. Children have innocence and that makes them ignorant to many of the world’s truth. Age may have been the only aspect of my identity that really struck me when I was younger. Most kids want to be older because “adults can do what ever they want.” Adults have authority that most kids crave, but eventually you grow up and lose that aspect of identity where you feel inferior because you’re just a “dumb kid.”

There was a really popular show that I used to watch on Nickelodeon when I was in grade school that everyone in our class has for sure heard of and most likely seen themselves. The show, *The Fairly Odd Parents*,is an animated television series following the misadventures of Timmy Turner and his two fairy godparents whom grant his every wish. Timmy was just a misunderstood child whose naïve parents neglected and crazy babysitter tortured daily. It was media like this that really planted in my head that age plays a big part in your identity and with the freedoms you have i.e. legal age to drive, to give consent, to smoke, to drink, to gamble, etc.

Nowadays, its weird to think about my identity. In many people’s eyes, I’m the privileged upper-middle class, white male. My identity has always been that way and I’ve never felt estranged or targeted in society because of what makes me who I am. Its not until just recently that I’ve begun even questioning the benefits and privileges I have from being born into this identity. At the start of the *Black Lives Matter Movement,* there was a real eye-opener for me that skin color itself was enough to warrant a police officer’s decision on whether or not to “pull the trigger.” This realization was reinforced when we visited the township of Langa. Children were running around barefoot on broken glass and that really made me uncomfortable.

**What do other people think about your identity? Where do their opinions come from/what informs these opinions? Are they accurate? How do you feel about them?**

It has become fact in the United States that race is an increasingly controversial and heated topic. Many people believe that my identity gives me an unfair advantage over “less fortunate” identities. I feel like others would consider my identity like going to the casino and pulling a slot machine’s handle and having it stop on triple 7’s. I’m white, first 7. I’m male, second 7. I’m upper-middle class, third 7 and jackpot. And because you’ve hit the jackpot, life gets easier for you. I think some of these beliefs originate from the intense discrimination against Black people or minorities in general before the United States even declared independence. If you look back through American history, no major aspect of my identity has ever been persecuted by law. A basic understanding of United States history shows that these beliefs have accuracy too them and are justified. As long as I’m not attacked by people with these beliefs, then I have no problem with them voicing their opinion. Their voice should matter just as much as mine.