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IES Dialogues on Differences

Journal Entry 2

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**What is it like labeling all of the different ways you identify? Write about an experience where multiple identities were affected, or write about one where you were either part of an advantaged or targeted group.**

If we recall journal entry one, I identify as an upper-middle class, privileged young-adult, and well-educated white male. From my own understanding and personal experience, this identity is meeting increased hostility by an emerging “PC” (politically correct) culture, where followers implement language filters intended to avoid offense to disadvantaged societal groups. The new PC culture craze that’s began in the past few years has morphed from a well-intentioned movement to an unfriendly, and sometimes hostile ideology that scrutinizes some advantaged or privileged groups as means for condemnation.

I would like to be careful and note that not all PC friendly peoples misappropriate the movement, but there are many clear instances of disadvantaged groups using the movement to unfairly reflect upon my identity. If we look at the Black Lives Matter movement, specifically an incident in Dallas, Texas 9 months ago in July of 2016, we see a supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement take the lives of five targeted white officers, his motive being killing whites. I understand that the gunman’s actions don’t represent the movement’s goals and aspirations, but this moment was a real eye-opener for me because of the brutality towards what many would call my most impactful aspect of my identity, my skin color.

The thought that some people exist with so much hate in them because we identify differently and that this same hate could lead to pre-meditated murder is bewildering and infuriating. Because I’m white, that makes some people hate me so much that they could plan my murder and execute me. It’s pathetic and shameful. Labels and identity shouldn’t matter nearly to the extent that they matter today. If you are going to judge my character and weigh my merit, no outside analysis of my cultural and socio-economic background is going to tell you anything of worth about me. Instead people need not be so quick to judge and instead gain a sincere and personal understanding of others. Compassion is a virtue that many people seem to lack whether you are part of the advantaged group or the disadvantaged group.

**How has your understanding of your identity changed over time? What were some of the key experiences that have shaped your identity and your understanding of the concept of identity?**

Since coming to South Africa, I’ve noticed my identity is almost sought after. It’s weird to put that way and is difficult to say because I feel like I lose all sense of my humility. There were a few moments where this realization was reinforced. During a visit to Langa, many of the township’s children would run up to our tour group and yell “umulungu” which roughly translates to white-people in Xhosa. It was as if their experience with white people was extremely limited and their uninterrupted determination to become my friend made me popular. I felt somehow better than them because they were putting me on an imaginary pedestal because of their affection towards me. They were innocent children who already at their young age had some sort of sweeping generalization of white people that made them drop whatever games they were playing, so they could fight amongst themselves for our attention. It was something I had never experienced before and was extremely powerful to witness a younger generation’s perception of one defining aspect of my identity. A separate incident was in a taxi when the driver commented on my accent after a brief conversation. It eventually lead to something about American’s being naturally wealthier than people of other nationalities and how he wishes to one day visit America, but travel visas are entirely too expensive. He admitted to me that he wanted my ability to travel as I’m doing now, which I’m only able to do with support of my family back home, whom I strongly consider part of my identity.

Its also interesting to note that the younger children in Langa first spoke about my skin color while the older man instead spoke about my nationality and wealth. Is it perhaps that the most unusual aspect of my identity was my skin color for the township children and the most unusual aspect of my identity was my nationality and wealth for the taxi driver? Something interesting to think about…

**Where are you with your comfort zones and learning edges up to this point in class? What’s been intellectually/emotionally/socially challenging or easy, and why?**

There’s no humility in being part of the privileged group. Talking about how you have privilege and others don’t is a challenge that puts you in an awkward position. It makes you feel like an awful person because, as part of the advantaged group you have never had the same struggles as many others in the disadvantaged group. And often times, you feel like you never really do enough to either combat the societal influences that make the disadvantaged group disadvantaged, regardless of how much charity work and good deeds you do.