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How Racism Affects Cathy Park Hong's Perception of her Identity as an Asian American

Cathy Park Hong's memoir *Minor Feelings* reveals the crisis she feels within her own identity as a Korean-American. Racism directly influences her identity. The discrimination she experiences results in self-hatred and the invalidation of her own identity.

Racial self-hatred affects identity in such drastic ways. Not only does it distort minorities' perceptions of themselves, but also their experiences. Park Hong describes it as "seeing yourself the way the whites see you, which turns you into your own worst enemy" (9). This is extremely dangerous, as minorities are letting their identity be defined by white people, people who will never truly understand their experiences. Experiences are a crucial part of how Park Hong feels as a person, as they shape her way of thinking. Park Hong identifies so strongly to self-hatred that she even projected it onto other Asians. For instance, her visit to a nail salon ends up being defined by race. She ends up being served by a young Vietnamese teenager. She claims that the boy hurts her foot. However, because of her self-hatred, she is not so sure anymore if her experience and feelings are valid, and is enough to make her question the reality of her situation. She claims she "can't even recall if she actually felt that pain or imagined it" (12). Being unsure of physical sensation such as pain, showcases the intensity of her inner hatred. This condition that she describes as uniquely Asian is something that eats her up and makes her insecure.

Family also influences Park Hong's experiences. Park Hong's identity insecurities stem from her father. Her father is constantly made aware of his race, and this ends up fueling that mentality to his daughter. She describes him as "highly sensitive about his own racial identity to the point everything came down to race" (15). He must always make sure that Park Hong knows how to be a "model citizen" like himself. He tells her not to make U-turns, specifically because she is Asian. This pressure of always being on her and his best behavior comes from being a "model minority", which comes from how the American government only let highly educated Asians into the country in the 60s. Children of Asian immigrants feel this pressure, which affects their already confused identity even more. They must "behave" because of these internalized expectations that fuel these stereotypes even more.

External validation is necessary to Park Hong's identity. Being invalidated constantly ends up damaging her perception of herself. Park Hong has her identity invalidated by her peers and by people who are not educated on her experiences, or the experiences of other Asian Americans, nor do they understand them. A prime example of this ignorance is when they accuse Asians of not being enough of a minority. At a gallery, a man tells her that his racial awareness mediator said "Asians are next in line to be white" (18). This is a claim that does not even understand what being a minority is about. Even when Asians share their invisibility, how they are not seen nor acknowledged enough, they are dismissed. This once again invalidates "being Asian". Systemic racism also plays a big part in this invalidation. The system has this invisibility imbedded into every aspect of the author's life. Park Hong states that if Hollywood does include an Asian extra into a film, it is usually accompanied by a racist joke or stereotype. This media presence makes Asians feel like a joke, which demeans their identity and prevents the validation she desires.

Park Hong's journey of identity is relatable to a lot of Asians. She experiences self-hatred which she projects onto others. Her own father experiences the pressure of being a model minority and constantly reminds his daughter of their race. Invalidation is also a big part of the discrimination she experiences as white people do not acknowledge Asians as being a minority or the discrimination she experiences, which nourishes invisibility and systemic racism.

Works Cited

Park Hong, Cathy. *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*. One World Books, 2020.