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“I think, therefore I am,” by Descartes is one of the my favorites quotes relating to identity. It is the concept that we develop ourselves throughout the course of our lives. An identity is one of the most important things that a person has because it characterizes his/her gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, age, religion, culture, and many other attributes, which describe our being. We make choices and decisions based on what we believe in, and what we think is the norm in our own culture and religion. Each of us has our own unique identity that we project to the public. We demonstrate a snippet of our identity through what we wear, how we celebrate holidays and special occasions, and how we converse and socialize with other people. In today’s society, unfortunately, these aspects of our identities constrain our freedom — our freedom to exercise our religious beliefs and the way we worship our god(s), our freedom to marry whomever we want, and our freedom to dress based on our religion, culture, and what we’re comfortable with. As an Asian-American, I have been stereotyped and experienced discrimination and inequalities just because my ethnic background is Filipino and I have a Filipino accent and a swarthy complexion. This paper talks about how my ethnicity and gender and sex roles shaped my identity by cultural and societal influences within the contexts of inequality. I chose to talk about these two aspects because they impacted my identity the most.

My ethnicity has brought me a tremendous tension to deciding what field I should major in college. Most Filipino students are coerced to pursue fields that have something to with healthcare, such as nursing, being a doctor, or any other healthcare field. This is true because Filipino parents force their children to do so. For instance, my parents forced me to enroll in a medical school and wanted me to major in Chemistry as my pre-medicine degree. There was so much pressure coming from my family to pursue medicine; my grandmother said, “your aunties are nurses, and your uncles are doctors, then you should be a doctor too!” Most of my non-Filipino high school friends think that I now work as a nurse. Because of this experience, I was puzzled by why people stereotype and “simplify and manage information by organizing it into categories” (Tomaskovic-Devey, 38). I was somewhat hurt because I felt like I was unfairly judged based on my ethnic background and viewed as a “typical” Filipino. According to Tomaskovic-Devey, “once people are racially categorized, stereotypes automatically, and often unconsciously, become activated and influence behavior” (Tomaskovic-Devey, 39). Growing up, my family planted in my head that I can only pursue a healthcare field, which has brought me difficulty to follow what I want really I want to do.

In Filipino culture, being male and the oldest in the family have some advantages and disadvantages. Just like other cultures, patriarchy is also evident in Filipino culture, where males get privileges, such as inheritance, and male opinions matters more, among other things. However, in my experience, when my parents passed early, I was forced to take over and carry out the responsibilities that they left behind. I had no choice but to grow up early and be the father of my siblings. I had to quit school for a while so I could work two jobs to pay the bills, provide food for my siblings, pay their school tuition fees, and other daily and monthly bills. I was forced to take responsibility that I was not ready to tackle. For this reason, I had to change myself and evolve into a different person, which essentially shaped and transformed my identity. It is true that being male and the oldest in the family comes with more privileges than for females in Filipino culture and also in our current society. However, in my case, I acquired more responsibility than privileges. There were many times I questioned why I had to inherit this responsibility. Why does the male in the family take over when parents are gone? Why do sex roles in my culture exists? “Are sex roles a good thing?” “Should society enforce sex roles?” (Trebilcot, 251). That being said, I don’t regret taking these responsibilities because they shaped my identity into a stronger, harder working, resourceful, and more capable person.

Religion, gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, and age are the main aspects that describes one’s identity. There have been many inequality experiences that I have experienced in my culture and society, but the aspects that shaped my identity the most are my ethnicity and gender. Family pressure has shaped my identity and influenced my views on what I must do in life, and what field I must major in college. Gender and sex roles have shaped my identity not because of the the privileges I have acquired but more so because of the responsibilities that I had to shoulder.

References

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