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Who Am I Ethnically and Racially?

Family Background

I looked the same as everyone else in high school. While growing up, I lived in a town with a population of about 13,000 people. It wasn't necessarily considered a big town, but there were no other towns within forty-five minutes that were of the same size. It was definitely a rural community. Specifically, I grew up in the country with four neighbors, so it was very quiet around my home. In my town, the majority was White. There were very few kids in my class who were of color. I come from a family of all White people. My ancestors all came to America from different parts of Europe. Coming over from Europe, my ancestors brought their Catholic faith with them. This is an important part of the culture that I grew up in. For example, we celebrate Christmas and Easter which are very important holidays because of our faith tradition. Growing up in a White family, in a nondiverse community, I have had little experience with people of races different from my own.

Cultural Values Around School

From a young age, I had always valued education and intelligence. I have always been taught that one needed to get an education in order to go far in life. I am aware that for some, school comes easy. I am one of those students. I also know that for others, they have to work much harder to get good grades. I think this idea stems from a variety of places. I believe that the origin of our intelligence is in our DNA. By this, I mean that some people were born to excel in

school and others were born with the natural gift of athletics or the arts. I do believe that this does not make one person better than another. I also truly believe that although school may not be someone's thing, it does not mean that they aren't capable of reaching extraordinary heights academically. We all start at different places with our intelligence level, but depending on how hard we work, determines how much we will grow and how far we will go. These messages that I believe likely came from multiple places. This includes my parents and the values they instilled in me, my teachers who played a role in shaping my intelligence, and from my own personal experiences in and out of school.

Identity Construction

As someone who was born White with an all-White family, there were definitely privileges I had that were subconscious. For example, I never had to worry about how I was going to be treated at my place of work. I never had to worry that I would be singled out because of my skin color. If I were to identify myself, I would first think of things like gender, religion, language, followed then by race. Because I never had to worry about being treated differently due to my race, I rarely focus my identity on my race. I don't think this is necessarily a good or bad thing, but I think it is important that if I don't use my race as something that I label myself as, I should not label people of other races, solely by their race and ethnicity. Just as I identify myself as being more than a White person, they too are more than their race.

Experiences with Racial/Ethnic Diversity

I really haven't had many experiences with people whose race differs from mine because I grew up in a town as part of the majority. However, the one experience that I think of the most is actually about a close friend of mine. I met this girl in second grade, and she was Black. To my second-grade brain though, that wasn't what I saw. I saw a good friend. I saw a kind person.

Over the years, we got to know each other more. Our friendship was never super strong, but we always knew we had each other in our lives. Throughout the last few years of high school, I got to know her a little bit more through church and our faith experiences. Surprisingly enough, we both chose the same college. For me, I was ecstatic that she was going to the same school as me because as someone that gets homesick easily, it was nice knowing I would have a little piece of home with me. To this day, we are not the best of friends, but we still have the bond that we created ten years ago in that second-grade classroom. The cool thing is, I never once saw her skin color as a reason to not be her friend. She is a good person with a welcoming heart. She has a lot of love for other people. This experience shows me over and over again, that skin color means nothing. It is what is inside a person's heart that matters. They are more than their race. They are a person full of love and should be treated as such. Sometimes we hear messages about Black people and how they may be "dangerous." This friend of mine is an example of why that is false. Not all people of one skin color can be classified by one word. Not all people of one skin color should be classified together as one word because they all are so unique and different. They all are so much more than just their race.

Implications for Future Teaching/Career

I think as a future educator, it is important to know that we will come in contact with many races besides our own. I also believe that the biggest thing to do is to treat all students the same. Am I saying that we should take away their culture? No. What I am saying is that regardless of race and ethnicity, we are all humans created in the image of God and we all were created perfectly. That being said, each of us deserves the utmost love and respect. As a teacher, I want to build relationships with my students based on who they are as people, not based on the color of their skin. Will I still recognize them for their race and culture? Yes, because that is

where they are from. That doesn't mean they deserve to be treated differently than anyone else. My ultimate goal as a teacher is to make all my students feel loved regardless of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or gender. While here at CSB/SJU, there are multiple things that I can do to push myself beyond my current cultural comfort zone. First, I am already partaking in a homework help program that works solely with kids from the Somali community. This is a community that I know very little about, so spending time with them and getting to know their culture is one step that I am already taking. Another thing that I can do is continue to get to know people from cultures other than my own. It can be as simple as getting dinner with them just to learn more about where they are from and how that has shaped them as a person. Third, when in different classrooms shadowing and teaching, I can make it a goal to pay attention to how students of different races interact. Coming from a predominantly white school, it is important that I continue to learn about different cultures to better understand my future students. In general, I think the best thing that any future educator can do is to continue to learn. Our education never stops and if we truly understand where our students are coming from, it will make our job of building relationships and educating them a whole lot more impactful.