

Racial Autobiography

As a young Black girl from Charlotte, NC, I have always known that I was Black. I do not recall a moment where I was shocked about my race or shocked that people were treated differently because of their skin. As referenced in *Teaching Tolerance with Robin DiAngelo*, I knew at a young age that being perceived as White and not Black was better. (Teaching Tolerance, 2019) My definition of race was limited to “being conditioned to viewing human races as natural and separate divisions within the human species based on visible physical differences,” as stated by the American Anthropological Association. (AAA Statement on Race, 1998) In my home, many conversations started with “because you are Black or because we are Black,” as the rationale for why we did or did not do things. I did not have an understand of the concept of racial groupings. Finding out that I have a higher chance of my genetic make-up being different from Black people than White people, as further explained by the American Anthropological Association has been one of the biggest revelations. (AAA Statement on Race, 1998) The emphasis put on race in this country as well as even in my own family caused me to believe that I was different on the inside and outside from White people and more closely aligned to Black people inside and outside.

My first memory of racism was as a 3rd grader with lighter skin and a huge birthmark that was across my face. I was used to being picked on about by birthmark by kids, but this time it was different. A White boy came to me and boldly declared that I was the type of Black person that was like Michael Jackson, sometimes Black on the outside and sometimes White on the outside. I was stunned. I did not fully understand, but I knew it was wrong and hurtful. After the teacher dismissed my emotions behind the racist incident at school, I told my mother what transpired, and she declared that “No matter what anyone said I was 100% Black and proud.” Fast forward to many years later, I believed my mother so much that it was not until college that

I understood that what she told me as a young child was to help build my confidence and that I am not 100% of African descent!

David Gillborn references *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* report when he defines a racist incident as “any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.” (Gillborn, 2006, p.95) Over the years, I have had several incidents with racism, but believe they have become more identifiable in my technology consulting career where I am one of the few Black female leaders in an underrepresented space. I have had comments made directly to me about how I do not fit the “angry Black woman” narrative from White colleagues to being underpaid and not being promoted for not being a “culture fit.” Richard Rothstein in *The Color of Law* describes the policies that are put in place by our federal government that practice structural racism that impacts generations for years to come. (Family Action Network, 2018) I thought that I had a good understanding of the impacts of redlining on the Black community, but I have never made the connection that redlining has impacts on other barriers that people of Color face; including the gender pay gap and the disproportionate impacts on women of Color.

I have also witnessed many of my family, friends, and colleagues endure racist treatment at the hands of the police or educators in the classroom. David Gillborn shared studies from the 1980s that show that White teachers hold Black and other minority students to lower standards; even going as far as placing Black students in lower-level classes with no opportunity to advance or to get a passing grade. (Gillborn, 2006, p.90) This causes me great pause as I think about my brother who matriculated through elementary school in the 1980s.

My brother was held back in the 4th grade and the 6th grade in Charlotte-Mecklenburg School systems. I do not recall him having a Black teacher or a male teacher throughout his elementary school experience. His White female teachers would often speak to and about my brother as less than and unable to learn. My parents would be puzzled about the bright, young man we saw and did not really know how to challenge the teacher or advocate for their son. My

brother needed his version of Vivian Sanders from *Raising Bertie Countie* (Byrne, 2017). Vivian Sanders had a strong affinity for young Black men in the public-school system and worked tirelessly to help meet their social and emotional learning needs before trying to address their academic needs. She understood that her role as a teacher was to create dream makers. (Byrne, 2017).

In my experience, the impacts of being on the receiving end of racism or witnessing racism against someone who looks like you will shape your viewpoint for a lifetime causing an inherent implicit bias. It is why I agree with the headline of the New York Times article that the Black Lives Matter Movement is the Largest Movement in the U.S. The state sanctioned murder of George Floyd was horrific, and 15 to 26 million people were able to express the emotions of the racism they have experienced or witnessed into the demonstrations that have taken place since May 26. (Buchanan, Bui, & Patel, 2020). No matter the role you play as a person who experiences, witness, or perpetrates it, if we are not all equally a confronter and dismantler of racism we are in our own ways contributing to the advancement of the racists ideology that this country has been founded on. (AAA Statement on Race, 1998)

Throughout the course, I have not found a view that differs from my view on racism. In fact, I have found that the course materials have equipped me with the tools to articulate my perspective on racism in a way that compliments my passion with facts and evidence. I have resonated with every article and documentary that we have read and have felt represented in my philosophies and beliefs.

Although, I am not a classroom educator, I am a published children's book author. I have an increased awareness that my passion for making reading fun for young Black boys in their early childhood years may be fueled from the challenges I saw within my own family as my brother struggled through school. Prior to this course, I thought that my passion was sparked by the birth of my 3-year old son, when in fact the spark may have been ignited when I was a

young girl. It underscores that the sum of the racial incidents that I experienced and witnessed has motivated me to help Black boys in the education system and within our community. I believe my role will be in the form of a diversity curriculum coach for educators or a parent advocate for Title 1 schools. I have started an organization called the *Me3 Project*. The Me3 Project is focused on changing the narrative of Black boys in America through positive images, expressive stories, and deliberate advocacy.

As a result of this module, I believe that I will be better equipped with the tools and research to coach teachers and advocate with parents on the historical treatment of Black boys in the education system. I have done several speaking engagements where I relied solely on anecdotal evidence. The research is a major differentiating point as I continue to develop my programming. I can help teachers and parents shift from dismissing single racial incidents that are occurring in our classrooms by providing evidence of the broader impact that occurs when those incidents are combined. This will enable me to move from being a person who experiences and witness's racism against Black boys in America to a person who helps to dismantles it.

References

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