

I. Introduction

The most impactful stories come from people just like you and me. People living breathing, going to work and living their lives day to day like everyone else. Being able to look into that person's eyes and feel their burden, sadness or anger is what will make a lasting impact. I got the opportunity to meet with a group of incredible people. These people have had a tougher row to hoe than most. They are strong, intelligent, and determined. Please join me as I share their stories with you. Stories of identity, soul searching and overcoming obstacles.

II. Doing Justice to the 2009 Storyteller's and Their Stories

We did story circles at the Akron Urban League on May 27, 2009. Our circle included myself and another young female college student. We recorded the stories and transcribed them back at the university. On the basis of my evaluation of the stories in my story circle this paper will focus on culture shock and identity crisis and white authority and racial profiling, which highlight the importance of law enforcement, structure including public schools and the family, hopelessness and the influence of peers. In this section we will focus on identifying the themes in our stories, providing several quotes from the stories to explain our themes and elaborating on how organizing the stories according to these themes provides a solid foundation for the analysis in the following section.

We asked each participant to respond to the same prompt: Please share a personal story from your life that involves race and racial conflict. Some chose to tell a story that as a minority, the individual was suppressed and lacked opportunity; while others told stories where they were given the opportunity to thrive as minorities, however did not receive the support they needed from their peer groups. I will explain this below in the presentation of the stories.

Culture Shock and Identity Crisis

Culture Shock and Identity Crisis is a radical change in an individual's beliefs or ideas. Someone is walking along as they always do until something comes in to their past that challenges their way of thinking. In these stories it is all negative. Going through situations that involve race and racial conflict has shown our story tellers a deeper side or layer of racism. Let's look at this story from a black woman in her late 30s. This must have really impacted her because she remembers it from when she was 5 or 6 years old.

When I was younger, I would always receive white baby dolls. About the age of six, I might have been five, by the age of five years old I finally looked at my mother and my sister I said, "Don't buy me another white baby doll, I'm black!"

And I think at that point I was starting to realize that we had, (inaudible) basically moved into a predominately white neighborhood and things of that nature. And I was grasping for who I was even at that age, I didn't even realize it. I didn't want another white baby doll because my skin was brown. And I wanted brown babies. I wasn't gonna have white babies and I already knew that, so real. You know but I didn't treat my white babies any different than my black babies.

This story was sparked by a conversation about the Tyra Bank's show and the study she did with baby dolls and black female children. She found that all the black female children picked out the white baby doll to be the most beautiful. This means, white is the norm and we should strive and be like them. White privilege is seen here. The white baby doll is seen as of greater quality and esteem than black. The storyteller's mother and sister were contributing to this idea of white privilege or white supremacy by repeatedly giving this black child white baby dolls. She is experiencing an identity crisis at this age because she looking at white baby dolls and seeing that her skin is not white, it is black.

She says that she was grasping for who she was even at that age. It is not easy growing up. Who do we as people look to as models as we go through this process? During the first years of our lives, we look to our primary care takers or providers. This is parents, parent, aunts or uncles, grandparents or in some cases siblings. In this case we see toys teaching young girls what is beautiful. Toys also are gender based. Pink and dolls usually means girls, and blue and cars usually means boy.

A key tactic used by advertisers today is that there is something bigger and better. They want you to think that whatever you have is not good enough. If you have a 2008 car, it is now 2009 and there is a newer model that is more comfortable and spacious, or sporty or has slightly better gas mileage. Technology is developing and changing so rapidly that if you want to keep on the latest programs for your computer, you need to be updating almost constantly. Imagine seeing all of these things and desiring to have them but having no way of obtaining any of them. Let's talk about the American dream. The house with the yard and the white picketed fence, two and a half kids, a dog, two cars in the garage and a nine to five job. For many African Americans this is unobtainable. If it is not unobtainable, it takes years and years of hard work. An older black gentleman in his eighties my story circle explains what this feels like,

We're e locked into a situation in seeing that we can't escape. That situation is racism that interrupts our total being. One of the things we are discovering is how this is not an accident or is an incident. It started the day we go to school or go to church and this something else we go have to discuss tonight as we go around is the freedom or liberation from being Christianized or either slavery.

He [storyteller 1] describes hopelessness like being in a deep pit with no means of escape. Story 1 calls it the crab syndrome. You put them all in a barrel and "you can't get none of them out." Every time one gets out, the others pull him back in. You can hear the hurt and frustration in his voice. He is saying that he cannot escape racism as a black man. He can not change his clothes and be treated differently. He is treated differently because of the color of his skin. He says that this is not an accident. In this course we are learning about the laws and enforcement of these laws that use implicit racism. This is racism that is not right on the surface so that you can see it, but it is most definitely there. This same gentleman shares with us about the information he found, studying this issue out for himself. His tone is very serious and his eyes very kind. It is easy for anyone to see that he is very passionate about the subject and his experiences.

Do you realize that there was a guy by the name of Willy Lynch. That was taught to separate the so called Negroes at that time. And he said the ideas that he would have would work for a thousand years he said three hundred years it will work longer than that. He said turn the tall against the short, the dark skin against the light skin, the females against the male the ignorant against the educated. That was planning when you see, when you step out of a so called place that been built for you then your peers will come down on you.

In this story we see the deliberate separating of people groups. I see identity crisis where an individual is seeing white is good all around them and then they look at their own skin and it is black. Well now what? I want to be successful but I will never have white skin.

We all have many influences in our lives. One of the most influential of these voices is that of our peers. Everyone has a need to feel accepted and loved. Many of the people we associate ourselves with identify with us in one area or another. Our next story is from a black woman who was born here in Akron, but then moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma. The year they moved was 1979.

And when we moved we lived and moved to a completely all white neighborhood. I was the only black child in my class until the fourth grade there were two black teachers in my school and there were for black children, and I was one. And the other set were sisters and brothers of one of the black teachers. Umm my racial conflict more so came after the third forth grade when I actually started going to a magnet school with black children. At that point I learned that we lived on the wrong side of town because Oklahoma was still very segregated. We didn't even think it was that many blacks there because all the blacks stayed on one side of town which was the north side and the whites migrated to the south side of town which is were we lived.

Her identity crisis began here. She was one of very few black children in her school and really, whole sphere of influence. Living in Akron she had the experience of living around other black children and then she moves to this area where there are very few other black children. She knew that she was different from all of the other white kids. Could you imagine? All this time she thought she was one of very few black people in the whole town, come to find out that there are many other blacks, they just live on the other side of town. However, finding out that other black families and children live near by did not help the problem. She was not accepted by her black peers. She was actually treated completely opposite of being accepted.

I got a lot of flack from the black children at school you know they pulled my hair they umm always interjected that I talked too proper and that we lived on the wrong side of school of town; and that I thought I was better than everybody. 6

It was easy for her to see that she was more accepted and treated more kindly by her white peers than her black peers. Story teller 6 says that this was the major head or climax of her identity crisis. Like she has previously stated, she knew she was black and did not want to change that. From the fourth grade up till the eighth grade she tried to gain acceptance from her black friends. She says that she was able to regain this in high school, however that is a lot of years to be fighting this battle. As a young child dealing with self-esteem issues by themselves is not easy.

Another young lady in our story circle went through a similar situation. This young woman is black and she was raised as an “upper class rich girl.” Her father owned a Mr. Hero store and made a large salary. Her father allowed family members to come in and work for him. Unfortunately they stole cash out of the cash register and gave away free food. This eventually led to her father loosing the Mr. Hero. Without his income to support the family, she was forced to move to the ghetto. She said that she became poor and began to see a different side of the world.

So race has changed me because sometimes the blacks are looked down at when they are poor, so race has affected me in a negative way because whites would look down at me in a negative way, then when I was rich. My family and I could not get as much benefits as we used to get when we were rich. This is saddening. Now I see how the blacks interact with the whites now.

As this story teller spoke with such compassion you could feel her pain and frustration. The theme is seen here because she was treated differently because of her economic status. Although she still had black skin when her family was wealthy she was treated very differently than when she became poor. She did not see the mistreatment due to race until she was brought down to this level, now it is seen very clear for her.

White Authority and Racial Profiling

The next theme is white authority and racial profiling. The next stories show a strong sense of white authority and then being treated differently because of the color of their skin or their race, racial profiling.

To begin this theme is a black mother raising two black male children. She says that she now sees a whole different side of racism. As a mother she is going to be on the defensive but she says she is defending her black sons constantly. This is happening with no way to tell if either of her sons has been involved in any criminal activity. They are simply marked as trouble because they are black and male. This is racial profiling.

Now we do live a neighborhood that is not predominantly white that is the majority white. So we are still minorities in that area and there are several black children in that area as well. But I do notice that nobody wants to come to my house because they don't want to hit Miller Road, because of the police it's like they know you are automatically in that neighborhood my children don't get taunted with as much but they've had cousins come visit and they have literally been walking down the street or going to the park the cousins have gotten stooped and harassed by the police officers in Fairlawn you know where “you don't live in this area” you know they've actually had to come get and I had explain to them these are my nephews, what's the problem, what where they doing? were they loitering you know what exactly was the problem? and I think my horizon has really been broadened once again being a mother of two black males because they're so many instances that didn't pertain to me as a black woman because I guess they weren't so intimidated by me so it was easier for me to get into place maybe that my son's were not able to get into. And I didn't realize that that was such an issues and I've actually have gotten jobs...I've actually been told by you know my white employers that I've gotten a job at how articulate I was so basically it was like wow here's this black girl right here and she's actually educated you know and so I've had many instances with it especially growing up and not being excepted by one race and then becoming a black adult and not

realizing that you know that nobody really cared either way the I was gonna have to find my own way and find out who I was.

Storyteller 2's story continues to talk about police officers and their biases towards people with dark skin. Storyteller 2 is a young black male, age 19. He says when the police forces bring more police officers onto the streets, they send most of them to black neighborhoods. When this happens he just wants to get out of town. His mom lived outside the city, he goes there when there are a large number of cops around so that he will not be bothered by them. He says that black people are just outside and driving around, creating no harm and they are always being harassed by the police. White people are in their houses making bombs and not being smart, riding around drunk and swerving on the roads. The cops do not pull them over. The police pull you over according to which race you are.

This is proven in the *Racial Typification* article. The article is saying when we talk about crime, we are talking about the blacks, in particular black men. The quotes at the beginning of the article say it best and prove what this young man is trying to say and voice his frustration about. He feels that his hands are tied and he doesn't know how to untie them, much like the crab syndrome.

There are certain code words that allow you to never have to say "race" but everybody know that's what you mean, and "crime" is one of those... So when we talk about locking up more and more people, what we are really talking about is locking up more and more black men. (Racial Typification, p 1-2)

Crime is typified or stereotyped as a black phenomenon. When there is talk of building more prisons and structures to facilitate crime, it is pointing at the blacks (p.2) In the next story, we will see that law enforcement did not even take the time to check and see if the black man was the criminal. In this case, the man, who was a black man, was shot and killed, and he was on the one who called the police in the first place. Did the policeman see the black man and just assume he was the problem? The policemen are white. This is racial profiling in the context of white authority.

It's about 4 in the morning, you know what I'm sayin so a fight break out, my cousin and one of his friends, they get to fightin. My uncle, they call the police, they the ones who call the police. But the dude come back before the police show up and he just come down to the house with a gun talkin about he's gonna do this and that. He gets to shootin in the air and all that, runnin down the street. So my uncle he leaves the house, he's running down the street to catch up with the dude before the police get there so he don't get away so they can let them know where he's at. The police coming down the street with my uncle running down. They meet up at the corner but remind you they called them to come to the house and they never even showed up at the house, they stopped at the corner where my uncle was at and hoped out pulled out the guns on him. And they said they are telling him stop, get down on the ground. He's yelling, he's trying to tell them like it aint me, I'm the one who called ya'all. They get to runnin their mouth then the cops, they start shootin. They told my cousin to cover his and to put his head down, my cousin that was fightin cuz he ran down the street too. But they told him to get on the ground, cover up his head you know what I'm sayin. And then they shot his dad up, they shot him 22 times.

In this story there are two people fighting. The one person took things way too far and actually left, got a gun and came back. The black man who called the police was fearful for his life. If he can't depend on the police to come and protect him who can he depend on? The black people in our communities need to be able to receive the same safety precautions as everyone else. In the event something does happen, they need to have someone to depend on for assistance.

And then like when it all boiled down the next day my dad was telling me everything and he told me about the cop that did it. I remember that name when he told me the cop that did it because he killed the dude Demetrius Vincent too, he killed somebody else. After a certain amount of time you don't even see black cops out on the street. So it's like real odd if we walkin around in the day time to see a white cop riding down the street. It is odd cuz we usually see all black cops out in the day time though as soon as third shift, whatever shift they come in, nothing but white cops out there and they don't want to do nothing but jump out and harass people. That is all basically they do. So it was just a big racist thing, the whole thing was racist to me.

The story goes on to say that not only can this black man not depend on the police, they turned out to be his enemy. It seems that no steps have been taken to help this issue. The exact same person who shot and killed story teller number 2's uncle, also killed another black man. You can hear the frustration in the storyteller's voice. He is not sure how to help the problem but he knows that something must be done. There are black men being murdered in the street right before people of the community's eyes. The next story, told by storyteller number 3, a middle aged black man, is also about white police officers that abused their authority. This abuse was towards a black family, a family with little children.

The story takes place when Akron had a local cable access station, channel 15. Our story teller used to do programming here. He got a phone call to go and look into something that was happening on the East side of Akron. We he and the man he was working with get there they find out that the police are at this apartment looking for a gentleman they had warrants to arrest. He says when the police got there, this gentleman surrendered willingly. In side the apartment there was a family gathering with people playing cards and having some drinks. One of the men inside made the comment

And the police got angry with him. Then they stormed the door and mind you they already had the fugitive in hand cuffs. He was taken away. They stormed into the apartment and began masing everyone in there including the children. And there was a young ten year old um boy who um was caught in the cross fire of the maze and the wells of his eyes were full of maze and umm he could have very well of lost his sight and they proceeded to beat the young men who made the statement to not let the police in and then handcuffed him, put him in the wagon. His sister comes outside. This is right over off of Laffer on the East side. The sister comes outside and she is wantin to know what is happening with her brother. You know naturally she is concerned. They throw her on the car. They threw her on the hood of the car two plain clothed policemen calling her bitches and hoes and things like that, literally. And umm slam her so hard on the hood of the car that she urinated herself and proceeded to put her in the back of the police car and take her away while her brother is yet in the patty wagon and he got so much maze in his system and down his throat in his nostrils he cant hardly breath.

This is a very powerful and moving story. Hatred is seen very clearly. This hatred comes from deep within. It comes from years and years of feeding itself. No one treats another human being this way just because. The white policemen did not know these black people. They put them in a category simply because of their skin color (race). Hatred and fear create a vicious cycle. The people who are hated fear the people they are hated by. Below the story teller makes the comment that there were many witnesses because this story happened on a Saturday afternoon. However, these people are too fearful to say anything about it. Why are they so fearful? The story goes on to explain about a girl named Sarah who did speak up. There is constant harassment to the point where she just tries to avoid them and stay out of the way. That is so sad.

Again it is 4 o'clock in the afternoon on the Saturday and people witnessed all of this but the police understood that no one would testify against them because people in that neighborhood are too afraid. And when the young sister who did tell us her story who owned the apartment, her name was Sarah, she began to get harassed by the Akron Police Department. And one day they saw her when she had moved, she switched locations and they said "There's that bitch Sarah, right there." She has been trying to this day to ubh stay out of the way so to speak because they recognize her or they see her and they notice that she is the one who quote, "told on them." But that incident helped me to really see just danger our young man are in. and that our people in particular, our young girls also are really in a lot of danger, because not only those who work on the force but certainly there is an element there that is reckless and dangerous and they do not have any regard for the human being, in particular the black human beings. And they will kill and we've seen proof of that.

In this story we see the sister being put in the police car and taken off for no viable reason. This connects to our prison's being over populated. Are black people being unjustly sentenced for crimes they did or did not commit?

Tonry talks about one potential explanation of the explosion of incarceration rates is the increase control of the government, in particular the federal government. If you have a bunch of "old white men" making all the decisions for the government, the black man is not going to be defended. He will be persecuted against. In the *Mark of a Criminal Record*, we see that having a criminal record decreases your chances of finding a quality and reliable job, thus causing the revolving door affect in the prisons. The effect of race on these findings is strikingly large. "Among blacks without criminal records, only 14% received callbacks, relative to 34% of white noncriminals (P<.01). In fact, even whites with criminal records received more favorable treatment (17%) than blacks without criminal records (14%).... The effect of a criminal record is thus 40% larger for blacks than for whites" (953-4).

Our next story teller gives us her firsthand account of someone getting into trouble with the law as a young man and having a lot of trouble "getting out of the system." She is a young black woman, talking about her black brother.

Well my brother is 27 years old he's been in trouble with the law since he was 20 years in old. He's been in jail; he spent some in jail for about three years. So among getting g out of jail he basically got his self into some more trouble. Which is why they say don't go into the system because it will be very hard to get yourself out of the system. This is very true. So he's been in the system ever since he was 20. So he keeps going back into jail and back out he's back into jail now. Last time he went to jail

is because he was doing 30 down a 25mph speed zone. You understand what I'm saying so if that's not racial profiling then I don't know what is.

Is it right to send someone to jail for going 5 miles per hour over the speed limit? How many people drive that way on a regular basis? I know plenty of people who think driving 5 miles per hour over the speed limit is ok. Do you think if that person was a white man he would have still gotten pulled over? Chances are probably not.

The last story does not have to do with white policemen as authority figures but takes place in a public school. In this school there is white authority. This man was clearly racially profiled. This is from a middle aged black man, recalling his sophomore year of high school. He went to Kenmore and was a basketball player. He recalls going to school early and staying late on game and practice days. Getting there early the boys would usually stop in the bathroom first. On the red brick wall "Niggers Go Home" was written several times.

And this was 1983 and so we had heard about incidence that had happening cus in Akron they had just began busting I think in 1981 or 82; busting the students from the seat side out to Ellet and Kenmore. And so that introduction to those comminutes was not a welcome one we were treated umm... and this was mainly from the residents in the neighborhood we were treated as though we were very un-welcomed. And I remembered seeing that on the bathroom wall and I didn't like hurt me my feelings weren't; hurt I wasn't like affected mostly. But certainly some damaged was done and it began to mold and shape how I would act and how I would interact with the teachers and the students. So it was kinda like an unspoken line you can't talk to that person and there were other little settles that I... I think back on the experience now on sophomore year of high school that were stemming from you know overt and covert racism. So but that niggers go home on the bathroom wall is an experience that I remember very vivid.

Final Reflections on Stories, Data, and Understanding Racial Conflict

Walking into the Urban League that Wednesday afternoon in May, I must admit, I really did not know what to expect. I had been sitting in Dr. Lyons class for about a week now and learning a lot about the inequalities in our country due to the subject of race. When I walked into the Urban League I felt like I was walking into a fancy hotel. There was a pleasant smell. Before the evening started I noticed one woman getting anxious because it was after 6 p.m. and the meeting didn't start yet. Our meetings were supposed to start at 6 p.m. Ironically, when we met in our groups we started out with 5 and had 2 others join us. As a white young woman I did feel out of place. I was not expecting that to happen. I was one of the only white people in the room. That thought did not cross my mind before actually going to the league. I went through many emotions but most of it was sadness. These people were not being treated fairly. They seemed like strong individuals who did not need my sympathy but needed to stop being taken advantage of. Although I was the only white person in our group I did not feel anyone was condescending. Like I said I did feel out of place but not mistreated. Before this night I did not know the intensity of how black people are being mistreated right where I live my everyday life. Previously, when I thought of the race issue, I thought of the past and Martin Luther King and Jim Crow Laws.

I have learned of the realness of this issue. I will be more aware of what is going on around me. One of the men in our story circles talked about in court when the police officers are testifying against a black man, he says they lie! They lie all the time! I will keep this in mind if I find myself in a court room in the future. I will be aware of people having biases that cause them to be not honest and trustworthy.

References

Storytellers 1-6

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