

Identity Thief

Fundamentally, the outcome when something is stolen from someone is that it's either returned or never given back. In most cases, when we do not obtain our belongings, we either forget about the item or replace it with something of equal or greater value. During the short run, theft evokes feelings of regret, anger, and frustration as a person comes face to face with what was actually taken. People determine how useless or precious the item was to them in the first place, who took it, and how they can get it back. Unfortunately, what I thought would be a peaceful dinner turned into a full-blown robbery of the most valuable item of my existence.

On October 10th, around 7:30 pm I was asked to eat dinner with my friends Savi and Ryan at the dining hall. We grabbed our food and sat down at a table to the far right under an industrial blue light that illuminated our faces. It was a regular crowded night at College Eight dining hall, with a sea of indistinguishable students. When I walked to the soda machine, I noticed my friend David sitting alone, so I invited him to sit with us. After nonchalant conversation and sips of soda, David asked, "Are you guys all roommates? Because you seem like very close friends." Noting the fact that I was the only girl at the table and a freshman, it was pretty funny that he included me in the group. So I answered playfully "Yes we are, the best roommates ever! Except Ryan's loud snoring keeps us up at night." We all laughed at my corny joke. Once the laughter settles, Savi chuckled and added, "Yeah we are, but when we turn off the lights at night Danielle disappears! We can't find her! Where'd she go? The only way we know she's there is if she smiles." There was another uproar of laughter, but it was louder this time, more mocking.

A sudden change cracked the atmosphere, like a flick of a light switch. The air felt thinner and my heart rate slowed down. My bite of pizza became harder to swallow and my

blood rose in temperature. The genuine smile that was once on my face turned into a grimace. I looked around me and I began to notice the color *white*. Not the walls, but people's faces. I was sitting at a table with predominantly Caucasian males including my mixed "friend" Savi. This "friend", a fellow African American, sat there and belittled me by displaying colorism- the discrimination by which those with lighter skin tone are treated better than those with darker skin. I had been "othered" by someone I thought I trusted, with the immutable cultural bond of black brother and sisterhood snapping in two before my eyes. I felt uncomfortable, ridiculed, isolated, powerless, and most vitally angry. In silent fury I took my unfinished plate and abruptly left the dining hall.

Subsequently, I waited until the next day to confront Savi about it. I wanted to tell him how angry his joke made me feel, and ask him why turn such a casual conversation into some obscene joke by mentioning race? His response was an unheartfelt apology. "Aww come on. It was a joke! Oh well, uh I'm sorry I made you feel that way, it was seriously just a joke." It was obvious that he did not understand the blatant disrespect I felt because later that evening he sent me a disturbing picture message of a black man smiling in the dark, only showing teeth.

It did not matter if it was "just a joke." Trust me: I can take a joke as much as the next person. What mattered was the fact that I was robbed. My identity was snatched right in front of me effortlessly and he couldn't even give me the decency of realizing he took it. His "funny" comment racially identified me, by categorizing the color of my skin and excluding me from others at the table without me even defending what is rightfully mine. Instead of just being a friend at the table, I was now identified as just the *black* girl at the table, providing Savi a "color-blind way to state racial views without appearing to be irrational or rabidly racist" (Bonilla-Silva,

137). The joke was a derogatory statement that, in context, is considered racist. Yet, it was laughed upon and passed on without notice.

A robbery was in process and I was sitting there wondering if anyone else saw this happening. This thief had no mask to shield his face, so someone, anyone, help, and look! No one at that table acknowledged the fact that I was cast out by a discriminatory statement. This is how ghastly acts of discrimination will keep perpetuating within generations to come if “jokes” like these are still left unremarked, exemplifying that racism has become an institutionalized system in society where inequality has grown to be a numb sensation. Savi and the other white males at the table sat up on this pedestal where they felt privileged enough to laugh at jokes like these and not even consider how the joke affected me as a black female. The comment was not only offensive, but also irrelevant to the situation in which it occurred. However, race was brought up in the conversation and in the end treated as something as miniscule as a joke.

After leaving the dining hall I wanted to curse him out. A series of “fuck you’s,” “assholes” and “whys!” swept through my brain relentlessly. He has no right to commit theft and get away with it. At that moment, I felt a “killing rage” (hooks, 11). I wanted to gorge his eyes out with my fork, blinding him so that he could not see any color. I wanted to release my wrath and tell him how distasteful and unethical the remark was. In that moment, I realized that if I did so I may have done more harm than good. I would have been stereotyped as the typical “mad black woman” shouting about something as insignificant as a joke. At a table full of white students, my outrage would have been viewed as inappropriate and “hypersensitive” (Bonilla Silva 138). While I was forced to witness firsthand the willful ignorance of racism from Savi, I had to suppress my rage in order to repudiate these socially constructed stereotypes (hooks, 17). I was stuck in between a rock and a hard place. If I chose to defend myself I would be branded as

a “mad black woman,” and if I kept quiet I would be oppressed by the societal construction of race.

College is considered a place where people of all diversified ethnicities, social backgrounds, cultural or political beliefs, and sexual orientations are supposed to feel their safest and secure. Nevertheless, I was being burglarized and the worst of it all, no one cared to notice. Why is that? Seeing, understanding, and then learning is the only way for humans to prosper and still people of color are discreetly stuck in the discriminatory era of our ancestors when racism was formulated and built. In “Racial Formation in the United States,” Omi and Winant mention that we live in a society where racial awareness is pervasive (Omi and Winant, 60). That night I saw, understood, and perceived the social phenomena of racism in society and that it can happen at any place and time.

Me! My identity was pick-pocketed, like a piece of 99-cent gum at the corner store, on the basis of my skin complexion, a characteristic that I cannot change, nor would ever want to change. Gloria Anzaldua states, in “Haciendo Caras, Una Entrada,” “ethnic colored people in this country are not on an equal footing with other ethnic American groups. This pull to believe we can “belong,”... can seduce us into putting our energies into the wrong battles and picking allies who marginalize us further” (Anzaldua, 87). In other words, people of color do not share the same racial status, but what we do share is the same oppression. I am aware that we could never be equal because the unrelenting use of racial stigma in society is still alive and well today. As people of color we are different, and I declare that we should embrace it instead of conforming to what is perceived as conventional. I have always been taught to embody our heritage with empowering beliefs such as, “the darker the berry the sweeter the juice” and “black

is beautiful". We cannot belong in certain groups because we are, in various occasions, isolated throughout civilization and continuously trying will only set us back further as a cultural group.

All things considered, isn't outrage justifiable when a burglary occurs?!? Your identity is all that you have at the end of the day. Racial construction had stolen my identity before I could even claim it. My identity is a one of a kind, priceless, and an intangible item that is and only mine. It is my prerogative, as an individual, to claim what belongs to me. Therefore, at the University of California, Santa Cruz I am proud to say that I am part of the small group of people of color we have on campus. I am 5'10, with kinky medium length black hair, chestnut skin tone, dark brown eyes and weigh 145 pounds. My hometown is Long Beach, California and I was born March 31, 1995. I am a go-getter with a fiery and relentless attitude. Deep down I am a hopeless romantic and hope to find my one true love. My hips tend to sway back and forth when I walk and I tend to talk with a bit of sass when I know I am right. I am a strong, beautiful, tall, educated, blithe, African-American woman. I am Danielle Williams.



Savi's Picture Message

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