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Diary of a Black Jamaican Immigrant

Media influences our entire being in the present day without us intentionally setting out to be that way, but how exactly does media correlates with our identity. Printed or audial media often time interferes with our subconscious, be it social media in the palms of our hands, radio interviews and advertisement, ginormous billboards with messages we may or may not relate to and tv programs to name a few, by creating narratives and targeting groups with perfectly curated content. Being a part of a digital age, where one can create a social media identity, pretending to be a person they're not, amass thousands of followers through this facade, makes one question themselves, their self-worth and where exactly do they belong, creating an identity exploration.

Being an immigrant from Jamaica, moving to New York City whose population is the most diverse per capita in the entire United States, often makes me question who I am, and where do I belong among 9 million people. My nationality and culture, relationships, and sexual orientation has all inspired how I see myself, and as such influenced my identity. All these factors influence what community I settle in, where I go for leisure, the people I meet, entertainment preferences etc.

Firstly, my nationality and culture has always been a source of pride for me. Being a Jamaican immigrant, has made me aspire far beyond the limitations of the American society. Limitations set out by the fact that I'm a black man, and even being an immigrant, falling into a deeper minority group, when racial identity has shaped the American culture. My nation of origin and my ancestral stories all play a part in who I am and where I want to be. My ancestors

who have overcome slavery and dislocation has pushed me to be resilient, and mentally tough. This is my identity and a part of me that I'm very proud of. Being a part of a community, internationally known, having made contribution on a world stage, despite being a population of only 3 million makes your aspiration soar beyond the scale of stereotypes. Stereotypes of immigrants being dependent on the government for assistance, and that we are counter-productive to the American values. This negative generalized connotation of my people has invoked in me, a self-sufficient mindset, that as heightened my drive to be the opposite of this stereotype. I am truly proud to be Jamaican, so much that I tend to introduce myself as that, a Jamaican man.

Secondly, relationships are a core part of my being. Coming from a household of 3 siblings living with my parents created a bond that we all cherish. Maybe it's the fact that my siblings and I shared such a small living space, I learned how to live well with others and treat people kindly. We grew up in third world poverty, a few going to bed hungry days, however in hindsight, those were some of the happiest days of my life. Fast forward to present day, we get together most Sundays, while my mother makes Sunday dinner, a ritual in my culture, my siblings and I play boardgames. We are surrounded by true happiness and some good laughs. Making memories as the years go by. Celebrating each other's wins and comforting during the losses. Being the eldest has also pushed me farther, setting the example for my siblings to follow. I've done so by being the first to migrate to the U.S. I had to toil the late-night shifts cleaning hotel toilets and public spaces so I would be able to send money back home. Pushing myself to go to school, finishing my degree, enlisting in the army, staying out of trouble, so my siblings can have a role model in me. Sharing my struggles with them so they can take away from my mistakes along the way and hopefully not repeat my misgivings.

Lastly, my sexual orientation has been the greatest factor in my identity. Growing up in a homophobic community, and by extension society I learned how to conceal my true self. Trying to live a free life in Jamaica would possibly come at public ridicule and in some cases fatalities. I had to adjust the way I speak, the way I walked, and who I had conversation with. This repression of who I am had caused me great trauma, the ultimate fear of getting outed. It made me live a life that wasn't my authentic self. Fortunately, I migrated to the land of the free. I now live a life of freedom, a life filled with love and openness. Before migrating I never imagined I'd be able to be expressive in my choices to love who I please, being able to walk down the street hand in hand with my partner, having been brainwashed into a negative perspective on my sexuality, by many people that were in my circle by default. This circle included family and associates.

My identity revolves around these three factors. My nationality and culture, relationships, specifically familial and my sexual orientation. These three factors have all played a part in how I see myself and is mostly based on life experiences and situations. Media has subconsciously contributed to these factors. Though not the primary influence on my identity, I have always been exposed to different views and dynamics through media. My sexual orientation is largely taboo in my home country, it wasn't until media that I saw that regular gay people were able to live in freedom and have the freedom to choose. The freedom to declare who they are and who they are attracted to. Media made me aspire for that freedom. In my relationships as well, media has made me appreciate my family more. Having watched the news, the melancholic headlines in families. The good and the tragic makes me hug my family a little tighter. Media has also influenced how I express my love to my family. Growing up in a household that didn't express I love you, then through media, seeing expressed love makes me in return, express my love.

So, despite not being the main driving force on my identity, media has however, made me aspire for more, has reinforced my family value, has contributed positively to my self-esteem and has made me selective. Selective in the content I continue to read, watch, view and has molded my identity. My identity of being a gay, black, Jamaican who's entire being is intertwined with being a family man.