Values and Identity

(Original)

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At 14, I began to develop individuality and observe the world from a different perspective. Shredding innocence as I gradually step into the real world can be exciting and full of adventures but also dangerous and frustrating. At a vulnerable age when things influence you easily, it can be easy to forget who you are and be lost amongst the crowd. The teenage years are crucial to a person's identity-forming process and worldview. It is their first time being outside the cocoon, lacking knowledge and experience. To me, my values are like reflections and lessons I gained from learning and communicating with others. As if I am an incomplete puzzle, I need to collect the missing pieces from society through media, family/friends, and books. However, a pre-condition or requirement is essential to find the right part: open-mindedness.

At the start of middle school, it was the first time I realized the diversity of people and the different stories everyone has. If I was not open to meeting new people, I would have never known my best friends. Even when people have contradicting beliefs, being open-minded provides new perspectives and opportunities too. The first step to not judge can be the start of a strong bond, and it enables empathy. Only through communication and sharing can humans understand each other, therefore it leads to my second value: empathy before judging. Empathy is very different from sympathy or pity, it is being a listener and being them. Harper Lee cleverly defines empathy in *To Kill a Mockingbird* as to "climb inside of [one's] skin and walk around in it." It takes courage and being vulnerable to open up, but it also takes effort to know someone. However, when you can conquer the obstacles and fear, you realize "Most people are [nice]... when you finally see them" (Lee).

Accepting and understanding others help to form your values and parts of yourself. Refusing to explore is equivalent to choosing ignorance and prejudice. One's bias can often put others

in a box, diminishing individuality and empathy. Stereotypes are then formed because it is a simpler way to judge others. A society without empathy and open-mindedness breed hatred and misunderstanding. An extreme example would be the Ku Klux Klan, a white supremacist terrorist and hate group. The group used terror and violence because they believe that one race is superior to another. On the other hand, a society with mutual understanding and acceptance of diversity can initiate teamwork and awareness. Instead of categorizing and discriminating against others based on their differences, society should view all its citizens as humans. Sounds possible in words but impossible to achieve in actions since humans cannot be perfect. Sometimes, demanding fair treatment for all means abandoning privileges for some. Nevertheless, society today is imperfect but certainly has room for improvement.

In my life, I try my best to listen to others when they have something to say. Because knowing how being marginalized or down feels, I would try my best to comfort or at least be with those who need support. Because there was a kind person who helped me, I want to carry on the kindness to others. Compassion and empathy can make small changes in someone's mood and make big changes like fighting for justice and equality.

Still exploring the world, my identity puzzle is not completed. However, I will continue to gain meaningful connections and knowledge as I meet new people. Facing the negative is not the worst part but becoming it. To conclude with Mahatma Gandhi, "Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny."