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From Connecticut to Philly

Intersectionality plays a huge part in how individual identity is formed. In many cases, an individual experiences discrimination from multiple facets of their identity, as well as a privilege in many regards. My current client is a heterosexual black man by the name of Paul Stevens. In this essay, I will be presenting the narrative of his life from the lens of multiculturalism and intersectionality. The goal is to explore how Paul's race, gender, and sexual orientation have shaped his life as a whole.

Paul Stevens spent his childhood growing up in a small town called Norwalk, Connecticut, with only his mother taking care of him. He describes his little town and the schools he went to as very multicultural, with many white, black, and other ethnicities living amongst each other. In his earlier years, he lived in a more predominantly white part of the town, though as he reached adolescence, he began walking to the other side of the tracks, and interacted with more black people. He grew up with his mother cooking and taking care of him; dinner was usually steak and potatoes, sometimes fried chicken, and TV dinners. Very basic things that you could cheaply get at a local grocery store. When asked who he could relate to, as a black male growing up in Connecticut, he described being able to relate to everyone his age; white, black, or other. While he did have other black friends, Paul spent a lot of time around white people, until he reached adolescence and decided to branch out and find his people. Branching out was a bit difficult at first; he describes the other black kids as being kind of tough, hinting at

a noticeable shift in culture from one side of the tracks to the other. Still, it did not seem to take long for him to become more comfortable with these new people.

When he was just a kid, Paul had an experience that caused him to first come into contact with racism. His mother took him to dinner once, and he saw that some money had fallen out of an old white man's pocket. Trying to do the right thing, Paul rushed over, grabbed the money, and gave it back to him. At first, he was very proud of himself; a young white couple looked at him and smiled when he gave back that money. But then, this old man looked at him and decided to throw the money back out again, and Paul would pick it up and give it back to him. It became almost like a game; this man throwing money, and the little black boy rushing to grab it; the younger white couple began to laugh, and Paul's mother looked on in disapproval. It was later when he realized that he was being treated like a pet monkey; his mother talked with him, letting him know that he didn't have to do these things to gain approval.

As a boy, Paul didn't have any strong opinions towards women in general, though he did have a sense of respect for them; he grew up in a single-parent household, in which he watched his mother do all the childcare herself. He therefore couldn't hold men to a higher prestige than women. As far as interacting with females his age, he would act shy around the girls he liked, and he would talk to any other girl as an equal.

When asked how he felt about same-sex attracted people growing up, he admittedly responded with, "Not favorably." Paul Stevens grew up in the '70s; a time when being called a homosexual was one of the worst insults a man could receive. He didn't have as much of a problem with same-sex attracted women; as a teenager, he used to go to a record store that was run by a lesbian couple. He said that he didn't have much of a problem with them, but found the fact that they were "kinda butch" to be strange. After his mother died, however, Paul moved in

with his Uncle Bob, who was an openly gay male. Uncle Bob was the opposite of what he would call a gay stereotype; he was very masculine, he taught Paul the value of responsibility, how to be a man, and most of all, he taught him respect.

Nowadays as an adult, he describes his view on homosexual people as "way more tolerant than I once was". Like many people, Paul seems to have learned a lot and has grown more comfortable with LGBT people as he's gotten older. Still, he was rather hesitant to say much on the subject as an adult; he simply believes that people's lives are their business and that they should not be discriminated against for any reason. Paul now lives in a nice house, with a wife, two kids, and a little cat. He expresses being glad that he has a bit of money now because growing up, his family was poor. Despite his circumstances, he still acknowledges that there's discrimination in this world.

Paul's view on women hasn't changed much since childhood; He still feels a sense of respect for them, but he also feels, interestingly enough, that women are inherently better than men. "not saying that all women are geniuses," he states in the interview, "but I feel as though, generally speaking, that women tend to be the backbones in society, and are usually smarter than men,". As far as the workplace goes, he has seen sexism played out firsthand. Before his current job, Paul recalls a time in which he worked at an office that was full of right-wingers and bigots. These people were very open about their politics, and they did not see people like him, or women, for that matter, as equals. He speaks of this one woman in particular, who had been promoted to a supervisor role; "people would be terrible to her," he says, thinking back on the memory. They would say horrible things behind her back, including joking about her menstrual cycle whenever she would call in sick. Paul thought it was abysmal that she was being treated

with such vitriol, but didn't do anything proactive to stop it. His current place of work is at the Philadelphia Water Department. A black female coworker recently got promoted to a similar position, and as a higher-up, Paul does what he can to help her succeed in the workplace. As far as racism goes, he has a lot more thoughts regarding it, as an adult. At the same office that treated the female supervisor unfairly, he also witnessed racism; not particularly directed at him, but still spoken out loud and very openly. As stated before, the people at this workplace were very conservative and saw black people as lesser than, however, they still respected Paul; they would make watermelon jokes, but not directly to his face. And so, instead of confronting and arguing with his coworkers, he simply studied them. Overall, he feels a lot more comfortable working at his current job, though he still sometimes gets mistreated. At one point, he was up for a position against another worker; this person had barely the amount of experience or skill as Paul did, yet his boss strongly considered hiring him instead, seemingly based on the fact that he was white. "Fortunately," he says, "common sense won over, and I was able to get the promotion."

When asked how he feels about the black community, he states that he loves his people. Phaul is very invested in politics and has always gone his way to research black history. Though he is proud of the gains we've made, he sometimes feels dismayed by the things within our community; the way many black men treat their women and children, black men being abusive and neglectful to their households, and the fact that black people get frustrated by the police killing them when they also kill each other. "We have great conversations about the things being done to us, but I think, not enough is being talked about when it comes to the things we do have control over." He also mentions the current president and his supporters; Paul expresses concern that there are so many people who follow him. He has fears regarding the militia groups and the

racial right-wing population. When asked whether he felt as though he had any privileges in society, he said he couldn't think of anything.

Interviewing Pau Stevens was a very eye-opening experience for me; although I've known him very personally as my next door neighbor I have never heard of many situations that he's brought up. Despite being both straight and male, he seemed to show immense respect, not just for the women in his life, but for women in general. This may have something to do with his upbringing; being raised in a single-parent household, with just the mother running things, must have caused him to have an appreciation for the work that so many women have to do. He appears to have a complicated relationship with the idea of same-sex relationships; like many people, he grew up with the idea that homosexuality was wrong. That being said, his experiences went on to sway his opinion, and he ultimately feels as though people have the right to love who they love. As far as multiculturalism goes, his race is probably the biggest part of his identity; even though he is a heterosexual male, Paul says that he does not feel a sense of privilege, and that is solely because he is a black man in America. Although I disagree with the notion that he is not privileged, I cannot say that I blame him for feeling this way. I believe that as we evaluate ourselves and others more thoroughly, we will begin to understand the nuances of what it means to have privilege and power in this world.