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### The Danger of a Single Story

Underappreciated. Underwhelmed. Unenthused. I hate to say it, but these were all the feelings I felt sitting in the upper cafeteria with my group of friends in the morning. Two of them I considered to be my closest friends; we had all been friends since middle school. I considered them to be practically family. I was used to the silly and carefree laughs and giggles we would share. Those moments relieved me of my stress and worries and reminded me how lucky I am to have friends as fun and goofy as mine were. Even though it took up just an ounce of my day, I looked forward to spending this time with them every morning.

Gradually over time, things started to change. Every time I spoke I felt as though they would exchange glances, and I felt an overall aura of judgment. I felt it in my gut and I tried to ignore it because they were my beloved friends and I wanted to believe the best in them. My cheerful energy and enthusiasm was never returned like it used to be, or like it was when I was hanging out with them individually, and not together. I wanted to brush it off as maybe one of them was dealing with problems at home. This went on and I felt as though they were intentionally trying to exclude me and make me feel ashamed of who I am by putting me down or the things I like down in subtle ways; Ways that

were so subtle I could not be sure whether they were intentional. I have no problem with my friends bonding and I have no fear of my friends getting closer without me, simply because I don't compare my friendships and relationships since I believe every bond is unique in a special way. There became a problem when I felt like they were purposely trying to exclude me to make me feel left out. I didn't understand why they would do that since they were my friends, and I wasn't even sure if they were trying to. But my intuition was screaming at me that something was iffy, and that I had to get out of that environment.

I felt judged and like they were trying to make me feel ashamed of who I was, and what I enjoyed. That hurt because they were my friends who were supposed to know me better than anyone. They were supposed to know there's more to a person than their likes or interests, especially since they were my closest friends. I wasn't as angry as I was disappointed. I wasn't going to tolerate this treatment because I was and still am proud of who I am, and I will never hide my likes or interests to be accepted or liked. I accepted myself and that's all that mattered, but it still hurt that my closest friends couldn't. I had become a single story to my best friends. I decided to go my separate way.

One day, as I walked past the cafeteria and on the way to homeroom since I didn't have anywhere else to go, I ran into my friend Abby and she immediately began chattering about a K pop group she loved and how much she loved it. It warmed me to see her enthusiasm and passionate energy when she talked about the thing she loved. It made me think no one should be made to feel

ashamed and judged for being happy about something they are passionate about. I started going there every morning and I felt so much happiness in the morning because I made many close friends who always brightened my day. I liked how weird, genuine, and accepting everyone was; it made me happy that everyone was being themselves. I felt free. I still loved and cared for these two friends of mine, so I would act natural as if nothing happened when I encountered them. I still was distant from them because I didn't want that negative energy to weigh me down. Towards the end of the year my friend admitted how they would talk negatively about me a majority of the time when I wasn't there, which hurt but I wasn't shocked since I picked up on the signs earlier on. She told me how sorry she was and how she was following the other's footsteps. I didn't like that excuse because she is her own person and is capable of making her own decisions and judgments. I told her how disappointed I was that they judged me and how there is a lot more to a person than their likes and interests. That they are not defined by those things and how there is much more to a person. I told her how I am not a single story.

One of the reasons why this was such an important story to me, is because I moved around so much growing up, and I rarely got the opportunity to connect with people and make friends. This experience had a great significance in my life, because it taught me to value myself even if no one else does. As much as it may be experience that is reminiscent of high school drama, to me it meant a lot more. I was familiar with the harsh climate of the world we live in, but this hands-on experience of a disappointing ending of what I believed was going to be a life-

long friendship, led to a lot of reflection about understanding others and understanding the person I want to be. I don't want to make hast judgements or decision without having substantial evidence to increase my confidence in them. I became very interested in epistemology, the study of knowledge, and questioning my own beliefs and prejudice. I also learned not to take everything personally, as a lot of people project their own personal feelings and experiences onto others. I learned what qualities and values are the most important to me in connections, and what traits and attitudes I want to embody myself. I learned to observe and not react, and that the most important thing to me is the truth.