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### Political Literacy

In order to understand others, we have to understand ourselves. There are many aspects of ourselves that remain undeciphered, but these same aspects have an immense impact on who we are and how others see us. Psychology has always appealed to me for this very reason. I had always wanted to have this understanding. My desire to become a psychologist felt very instinctive; it was something that did not take a second thought. Once I entered high school and recognized that I was only moving closer to achieving my goals, I was beginning to be exposed to several new areas of psychology, specifically within how we as a society engage in politics. Through my freshman year history class, I was introduced to the world of politics, both old and new, and saw how socio-political climates affect the members of a given society. I was able to correlate this to the study of human behavior and found much interest in delving into the topic. Once I started becoming politically literate, I recognized the importance of this literacy. I internalized this as a newfound opportunity to learn and listen to others, as well as gain confidence in my stances and ensure my feelings are heard and that I am never silenced for my identity, nor are others silenced.

In my family, politics has always been a taboo subject. On one side of the family are Democratic supporters and on the other, those on the side of the Republican party. With this, I was introduced to the heated nature of politics and was intrigued by who was on either side of

the spectrum. My father, in particular, intrigued me, by stating he had no interest in politics and that he chose to stay away from the political world. I was shocked that there was a third option of having no involvement at all. I thought that maybe I would take that route, choosing neither side and allowing the politics to be discussed with my elders, who must know more than I did on the matter. I was able to get by for several years with this mindset, nobody ever taking into account my opinion anyway. Once I started my more challenging highschool courses, however, I was not being ignored as I thought I would be.

My history teacher opened his class by saying he was a Democrat, a bold choice for a public school history teacher, but something he felt comfortable to share. Everyone in the class sat shocked that an adult was willing to bring up the topic of politics with such naive children, but our teacher did not view it in this way. He began to discuss the significance of us as the youth having a voice, and that our perspective would be the one to move us unto the future. I had never considered this before. I had not yet considered that I would one day be amongst the elders with my own political views. After coming home from school that day, I asked my parents more about politics, especially, what it all meant.

My mother discussed with me, as unbiased as she could manage, the differences between Democrats and Republicans. She was a Democrat raised in a Republican household, my father also coming from a Republican background but never sharing those views. I asked my mother if I had to be a Democrat if she was; she looked at me with sincerity in her eyes and asked, "What do you believe in?". I sat with her question for a moment, not knowing how to go about my answer. The only thing I ever knew was that I wanted to make people happy, and see people happy. I responded with this; "I believe in people finding joy." She looked at me with concern as

if I had chosen the wrong answer, as if she'd hoped for me to say anything but that. I felt silly for responding with such dreams of hope but did not correct myself. I let my statement hang there, but she'd hoped I would reel it back in. She finally responded to me with this; "It's impossible to combine happiness and politics". I knew I wanted to change that.

I had not been explicitly "taught" how to engage in political conversations and to comprehend the varying perspectives of politics but, over time, I began to experience situations that had sparked a desire for understanding, such as how individuals' political views impacted their behavior, as well as, their reasoning behind their political stance. I began to notice the judgment that I faced in the name of political freedom. Every insult to my identity was protected by freedom of speech. Every man that yelled from their car on my walk home from school. Every family member who winced at my relationships with women. All of the feelings of ridicule as I left the church during their talk about why God would hate the women who decided to abort; I was an oddity for not respecting the treatments I received. The only place I was educated as opposed to dismissed was in the several classes that engaged me in political thought and emphasized the importance of my voice. I started to understand the views of others and what these views meant for how they perceived the world. I recognized that I had freedom. I could not afford to let political conversations happen around me without my voice being heard.

At the beginning of my junior year of high school, I had decided on a college and career path for myself. At a family gathering in my grandmother's home, filled with cigarette smoke and a taste of judgement, I was asked what I wanted for my future and explained that I wanted to receive my master's degree in psychology. I heard a slight scoff from my grandmother, who claimed that this path was not best suited for me as "girls as too sensitive for that type of field". I

was taken aback by the boldness of her stance, the blatant disregard for a life that was not hers to control, I choked back a sip from a cold glass of water with a shaky grip. I tried to explain that sensitivity is a necessary component of working with others and that it was not merely a complication of my gender. I recall my father interjected, asking me to respect the opinions around me. He had equated respect with silence, as my grandmother equated femininity with sensitivity. This is when everything became too much. The aspects of my life that I had control over were continuously belittled. The one thing I never allowed to be taken from me was my passion for psychology and my desire to make a career for myself in this field. I had begun to learn of others' political views, as well as the importance of my voice, but never dared to create a stance for myself. After this incident, where I was brutally met with not only an insult to my gender but to my capabilities, I took my new found literacy of politics and turned this into the fuel I needed to ensure my opinions were heard and my identities were respected.

After leaving her house and escaping her words, I headed for my room with a determination I could feel in my fingertips. All I knew was that I didn't know what I wanted to. I felt cheated and lied to, as though I was not given a second glance because my path was already laid out for me. I was given my expectations and my only task was to bite my tongue and follow through. I needed to learn how to be myself unapologetically. I scoured the internet for articles and research papers, watched the news and remained up to date with current events, something I had never done before and something that very much brought to light the political climate I was in. It was unfortunately understandable why I was viewed as a sensitive young girl. Most stories I read regarded women as attention seekers and men as powerful and entitled to my body. Climate change was viewed as being fake, and the pride parade was ridiculed for being

non-inclusive to heterosexual people. I realized then that not being involved in politics was a privilege not many can afford. It was important for me to understand how others were viewing my identity to know what to expect when I walked out into the world. I knew it was close to impossible to change the minds of many who viewed me as lesser than, but I recognized that my opinions were not meant to change others, only to have the power to prove that I was taking a stance as well. As a young woman in the LGBTQ community, I now do not shudder at the words of those who degrade me, only laugh at the ignorance and provide them with knowledge. Holding power in such an important discussion is an unparalleled feeling of relief and gratitude. No matter how an individual identifies they can have a voice. There is no wrong way to have an opinion.