

You definitely exist in this world

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I had pretended that “I don’t exist in this world” for a long time. That was how I tried to protect myself from getting hurt, my only way to stay sane. Why did I come to this state? Let me tell you the past events I have experienced in Japan.

“Gaijin!” “Black scary” “Afro!” These are some of the remarks I’ve heard in my daily life since I was young, from schoolmates and even people I don’t know on the streets. They said these remarks while staring or giggling at my skin color and hairstyle as we passed each other. These words of discrimination gradually accumulated within me. They made me feel lonely.

I reached my breaking point one day in elementary school when I was drawing my self-portrait. I didn’t know what color I should use for my face. At that time, among my crayons, there was a color called “hadairo.” “Hadairo” means skin color. I thought that color is not my skin color, so I could not use it. I was afraid of criticism from my classmates, that they will say “you are darker than this.” In the end, I don’t remember what color I used, but I remember that I felt I am different from everyone else and it was my fault for being different. I lost confidence and started to hate myself. I didn’t like being discriminated against, but before I knew it, I started to discriminate against myself. That made me even more lonely.

So how did I cope? I thought, “If I don’t exist in this world, I wouldn’t feel lonely anymore.” I considered suicide and attempted to slit my wrist, but the fear of death held me back from the road of no return. Then I turned to emotional death. I decided to ‘kill’ my emotions, to feel nothing – neither joy nor grief, connectedness nor loneliness.

Fortunately, I later found a purpose to live. Through the lives and messages of my favorite musicians, I discovered my dreams. I want to become a world-renowned dancer-cum-actress and use my position to influence the elimination of racism. These dreams gave me great hope to live.

But enough is enough. I’m sure you all know the “Black Lives Matter” movement. Do you think racism is a problem only in America? I don’t think so. From my experiences, I can say that racism is rampant in Japan too. Biracial children born from Black and Japanese parents are discriminated against because they look like Blacks. Guns and brutal violence are not the only weapons racism uses to kill. Discriminatory gazes and remarks are as deadly. Because they kill people’s hearts, making them feel like they are worse off alive than dead, just like how I felt.

I want to say to everyone here, don’t look away from the truth. The gap in perception

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between those who are discriminated against and those who are not, is what lies at the root of the very discrimination. Recognize that there are people with different skin colors living among you, not to treat them as different, but to embrace them as fellow citizens. If you unknowingly cast a curious look on someone because they look different, please end that encounter by looking into their eyes with a smile. That smile will acknowledge their existence for being who they are. Words cannot be taken back once uttered, so be doubly thoughtful before saying a careless remark about someone's appearance.

To those who are suffering from discrimination because of your race, and I'm saying this to myself too, I want you to realize that you are beautiful as you are. By believing in yourself and loving yourself, you can be stronger. And having a dream can be a reason to live. So, look forward, and find your dream.

And now, I would like to say to myself in the past, "Thank you for staying alive" and "You definitely exist in this world."