

I was moved to tears when watching the TED talk given by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian author. She eloquently and confidently speaks truth in talking about the impact a single story has on society as a whole while specifically on the narrator telling the story, the subject of the story, and the audience receiving the story. A single story, as Adichie stresses, provides an incomplete perspective on the subject. It is important to listen to many stories given by different sources in order to be well educated and informed about the subject being told about; not to accept and believe a single story and the insufficient stereotypes it produces. Adichie presents the recipe to create a single story: “show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become.”¹² I believe we all have witnessed this at least once in our lifetimes and could even be at fault for believing various single stories while growing up.

I find that, from my life, a single story could be formed about me, for I was adopted from an orphanage in the middle of the tundra. I was born in Kurgan, Siberia in Russia. I am proud of this part of my identity, but not all people see being an orphan as a positive asset. I embrace being adopted as a miracle, not as something to be ashamed of. I have never spent time pondering the reasons as to why my biological parents gave me up for adoption; rather I am thankful and feel beyond blessed that my biological mother chose life and gave me a chance to find a home where I would be loved and taken care of. I have never carried this as baggage. However, it seems to me that people have a single story about orphans that differs from the way I have seen this aspect of my character.

¹ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," October 7, 2009. TED video, 9:36, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=630&v=D9Ihs241zeg&feature=emb_logo.

² Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," October 7, 2009. TED video, 19:16, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=630&v=D9Ihs241zeg&feature=emb_logo.

The Igbo word “nkali,” as Adichie mentions in her TED talk, means “to be greater than another.”³ If the story of an orphan is told by a person who was raised by their biological parents and grew up in a home where they felt treasured and welcomed, then the narrator has power over the subject of the story, or the orphan in this case; by telling a single story about an orphan that only consists of negatives, the narrator uses this story as a self-esteem booster, for he or she feels much more fortunate than the orphan, just because he or she did not end up in that kind of situation. By making this story the “definitive story,”⁴ as Adichie put it, of the orphan being told about, the narrator is using his or her power to his or her advantage, whether or not it incorrectly and harmfully taints the image of the subject.

My sister and I, whenever seen in public together, are constantly being asked, “are you girls twins?” My sister was also adopted from the same baby home as I was in Siberia, but she is three months older than me. She is so close to me in age that I consider her to be a twin, even though she sees me as a little sister. We witness to our story whenever we can to other people, so we do take joy in saying “no, we are not twins.” The next question is always “who is older?” I point to my sister and she adds, “only by three months, though.” The reaction on the listener’s face is priceless. We respond with a big smile and say, “we are both adopted!” This is where the reactions tend to vary. Some people’s faces gleam when we say this. Other times we only receive an “Oh, I see” along with a perplexed facial expression. Occasionally, the conversation is dropped, but sometimes the person is intrigued and presses for more details. We are normally

³ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," October 7, 2009. TED video, 10:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=630&v=D9Ihs241zeg&feature=emb_logo.

⁴ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," October 7, 2009. TED video, 10:19, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=630&v=D9Ihs241zeg&feature=emb_logo.

then asked, “when did your parents tell you when you were adopted/when did you find out that you were adopted?” I realize at this moment the reason for the perplexed facial expression. There are saddening stories about adopted children who rebel against their family after finding out they were adopted; they become anxious and restless and find difficulty placing trust in other people. These anecdotes form a single story about orphans growing up to be troubled and insecure individuals who see themselves as outsiders and misfits. My sister and I bear testament to others that these stereotypes are not always true. My sister and I know that we are unconditionally loved and that although we are adopted, we are not any less worthy of feeling belonged. Yes, sadly, perhaps our biological parents were not able to raise us, but for whatever reasons, this led us to being raised by two incredible parents in a country that has provided us with a healthy life and a loving home.

Bibliography

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story," October 7, 2009. TED video,

19:16,

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