

Intersecting Paths: Exploration of Intersectionality in ZZ Packer's "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere"

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Submitted to Dr. Michelle Parke for ENGL-102



Summary

This essay analyzes intersectionality as it appears within ZZ Packer's short story "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere." I identify and break down the various layers of identity within the main characters, Dina and Heidi, examining the figurative language Packer employs at significant points in the story. The primary focus is on Dina and Heidi's racial, economic, familial, sexual, physical, and age identities. Furthermore, this essay explores how these identities conflict and intersect with Dina and Heidi, arguing that any singular identity can serve as a basis for a community or for isolation upon its intersection with another aspect of identity. Ultimately, this recognition of the effects of intersectionality is broadened to include the whole of postmodern society. This essay posits that experiencing one form of identity-based discrimination does not automatically create sympathy for others experiencing different forms of discrimination, concluding with the idea that recognizing intersectionality will not benefit minority groups if the groups use differing identities amongst their own communities for divisive purposes.

General Education Connection

Communicate ideas in written, oral, and other modes as appropriate to a situation and audience. | Employ various thinking strategies to develop well-reasoned judgments. | Evaluate sources of information for accuracy, relevance, and reliability | Identify their roles as global citizens in a multicultural country and world. |

Through reading and analyzing "Drinking Coffee Elsewhere," I encountered the realization that even within marginalized groups there is discrimination against other marginalized groups. This required a recalibration of my views of both the country and the world. In America, in this century, when it seems that injustices are most often perpetrated by older, white, straight men, it can be jarring to remember that even someone part of many marginalized groups can refuse to understand or be intolerant of other groups of people. Moreover, it was enlightening to realize that discrimination and intolerance are not only detrimental because they harm people both physically and mentally, but because they cause rifts between communities that result in the loss of all that each group might have been able to teach the other. The loss of the good that could be done by two communities working together was a result of discrimination that I had not previously considered.

Furthermore, the in-depth analysis required by this assignment forced me to develop my planning and outlining skills, as well as my ability to formulate an argument. I read through the text multiple times before I even developed my thesis, and then combed through it a few more times afterwards to pick out pieces of evidence. I then went through several stages of plans and rough drafts before creating my final draft, all of which honed my skills in written communication.

Challenges

One of the most difficult parts of writing this analysis was determining the categories of identity to address within the essay. This essay could easily be extended a few more pages if I were to broaden my scope and address categories beyond the six that I chose within the story, such as mental health, which played a large role with the scenes including the psychologist Dr. Raeburn. Yet, for these additional categories, I could not find suitable supporting quotes that fit with my thesis as it stands. It would have been detrimental to the structural integrity of my essay to attempt to fit more into it than the text truly offered. The longest struggle I encountered with this essay was writing my conclusion. It required leaving the essay for a few days and returning to it with fresh eyes for me to find the words to articulate my ideas. The conclusion involved the broadest, most nebulous idea of the essay, unbound to text evidence as it was, and I needed to write multiple versions of it before I could figure out how to phrase my ideas.

Application

The process of completing this assignment — from the planning to the outlining to the drafting and final revision process — has forever changed the way I view literary analysis. Far from the dull, necessary evil I thought it to be during my high school years, I discovered through this essay that literary analysis can be just as creative and have just as much impact on one's view of the world as narrative writing. I have learned that the spark that sets a positive writing experience apart from a negative writing experience comes from personal and intellectual investment in the thesis, as well as considering why the thesis is important and relevant to the world outside the text. Regardless of where the future may take me, I know that the ability to make powerful, logical connections between myself, the outside world, and literature will be beneficial.