

NARRATIVE REPORT **IDENTIFYING IDENTITY**

1. Title of the Project: Identifying Identity

Project Conducted by: Ad Lucem Foundation in collaboration with Vibha Lakhera, Knowledge Partner. (Managing Trustee Reachout Foundation)

- Summary of the Report

- Identifying Identity, a project to explore the multitudes of identity and understand its correlation with stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination, was initiated on the 5th of May 10th June 2021, in collaboration with Ad Lucem Foundation and Vibha Lakhera, Managing Trustee Reachout Foundation, knowledge partner; with Apala Naithani as a research person.

- "I as one of the core members in Reachout Foundation, have been closely working to create awareness about diversity and discrimination in schools, through roundtable conferences, discussions and public discourses. It was in the year 2016, I worked on a qualitative research project: Building Harmony: Accepting Multicultural Diversity. This was a project aimed to find out the level of acceptance of multicultural diversity in Delhi and NCR schools in India. Based on the findings of this research we in Reachout Foundation initiated our school project, THE INDIA PROJECT: Say No to Discrimination in Alok Bharti Public School, Delhi. This project was to address discrimination in the arena of schools, the way it manifests as negative teasing, bullying, favouritism and silent treatment.

- During the course of this project we realized that the dominant identities students carry play a crucial role in the way they behave towards each other. These identities could be caste, cultural, community, religious, class or even achievers and underachievers. The correlation of identity with stereotypes and discrimination, was highlighted through this project.

- With this background, it was in Nov. 2020, during the pandemic that I started working on the idea to bring alive the concept of identity through a research project. In my view, research is one of the most powerful ways to come closer to a topic or an issue and find out the newness and breakthroughs on your own.

- The insights that one draws through research become a part of your experience and stays with you. This may many times steer you towards increased awareness and subsequently a transformation to some degree." Vibha Lakhera

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2. Progress of activities

Objectives:

The main objective of the project was to help the students explore and understand the nuances of identity and its impact on their day to day lives. Broadly the objectives could be summarised as follows:

1. Critically understanding the correlation between Identity and Discrimination. 2. To make people realise that identity is a spectrum and cannot be defined in watertight compartments.
3. To find the correlation between identity and empathy.
4. To see discrimination as something that is ingrained in our behaviour and try to become a cycle breaker.
5. To be able to pin-point how we carry discrimination in our daily lives.

Activities

There were three activities designed for the students to complete in three weeks to arrive at a report about the project.

- Identity Portrait- An activity to create a self portrait in which half of it resembled the student and on the other half the layers of identity had to be written along with the most empowering and most disempowering parts of themselves.
- Perspective taking: This was an activity in which the students had to research about the migrant, women, refugees and members from the LGBTQI+ community, subsequently collecting data from them about their experiences in Poland. This was followed by a story of the chosen identity. This task was designed for the students to get a perspective of groups of people who are different from them.
- Questionnaire: There was a set of five questions to determine what the students thought about racial slurs and their impact, politics and identity, self portrayal and social media and mocking someone as a way to expose one's own insecurities.

Methodology:

- The activities were shared on a weekly basis in the form of elaborate planners. · Students had a week's time to complete the task at hand.
- Each of the activity had a separate objective hence it entailed research work, critical thinking, journaling, data collection and acquiring understanding about concepts like prejudices, biases, discrimination, in-group out-group dynamics and so on.
- The execution of the activities was done by Ad Lucem Foundation with doubts being cleared through the mails.
- A translated version in English language, of the activities, was shared by Ad Lucem Foundation.
- At no point there was any connection with the students directly, with the project Head, Vibha Lakhera, due to language variance and difference in time zones.

3. Key achievements

- The most important achievement of the project was that it was successful in injecting the students with awareness and curiosity about identity and its correlation with discrimination, empathy, inclusion, exclusion and so on. This was despite the language barrier, difference in time zones and a mere digital connection over mails. It was primarily a result of a will to co-create and address discrimination through the lens of identity, beyond borders.

- There was a keen interest in the students to complete the given tasks even though they found the second activity quite tedious.
- The painstaking process of translating all the work of the students in English language was executed with utmost sincerity by Agnieszka from Ad Lucem Foundation.

4. Tracking progress

Sr. no.	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
1	Identity Portrait	The students created an identity portrait with the layers of identities that they are conscious of.	The activity oriented the students regarding the multiple identities that they all have and how it affected either empowering or disempowering them.
2	Perspective taking	In this activity the students had to understand the perspective of migrants, refugees, women and members from LGBTQI+ community.	It was an activity that helped the students realise the kind of struggles members from the mentioned communities faced on a day to day basis in Poland.
3	Questionnaire	This was a set of 5 questions with the aim of finding out what the students thought about identity and social media, politics and identity, mockery as a way to reveal one's own weaknesses and racial and ethnic slurs in the conversations.	The questionnaire was well received and the students were able to share their views on each of them.

5. Challenges and obstacles

The most challenging part of the project was that it had to be delivered on a digital platform, only through mails. There was no conversation with the students directly as there was a language barrier and the variance of time zones. Due to these reasons an opportunity to

explore cultural diversity at each end was lost.

An interaction with the students would have added to the insights regarding identity as understood by them in Poland. It would have helped in finding parallels and dissimilarities in the viewpoints held by students in India, better.

6. Lessons learned and insight

Despite the time and space distance we realised that projects of such kind could be initiated. The collaboration presented us with a unique way of operating to work on projects, which required sincerity and dedication to make things work on both the ends.

The most important aspect was the smooth coordination between Ad Lucem and us in India. There was a deep sense of understanding and respect at both the ends. This was instrumental in making the project a success in terms of delivering the right message to the students.

7. Any other observations and comments

An individual's beliefs, outlook, personality traits and expression are some of the ways we assess a

person and their Identity. Identity is not a word that ascertains a person's character, it gives us a holistic and nuanced perspective to look at an individual's actions too. We embarked on the project, Identifying Identity with Ad Lucem Foundation of Poland. The world has been ravaged with discriminatory politics and glaring instances can be witnessed in countries such as India and Poland itself. Wherein India various drafts and laws have been passed that has been perpetuated to scapegoat a particular set of people of the nation and curb the muscle of dissent in the form of Citizenship Amendment Act, simmering hate against a community by employing phrases like Love jihad and urban-naxals. A similar wave of prejudice can be gauged in the context of Poland where we observe relentless endorsement of ethnic and racial discrimination, where people from the LGBTQIA+ communities have faced the bigotry when many towns and cities in Poland declared themselves free of "LGBTQ ideology".

It was hence very necessary to collaborate with Ad Lucem that works towards tackling issues of discrimination and racism. Inequity and bigotry are also the internalized facets of Identity. We pursued activities such as Identity portraits and questionnaires which helped the students to ruminate and ponder on various questions of identity. The geo-political relationships and the historical narrative of any country has major implications as to how contemporary politics plays out. Identity of an individual is often the summation of these curves as well.

Students profile:

Participants for the project:

1. Konrad
2. Paweł
3. Mateusz
4. Wojciech

5. Marek
6. Daniel
7. Bartek
8. Pawel
9. Pawel
10. Patryk

All aged 17-18

School:

Technical Crafts Schools Małopolska

Background: both parents are only educated to secondary school level, no university education. **Economic background-** lower middle class, parents work.

School background : Polish school do not discuss discrimination anymore. Since 2015 the subject is considered controversial and considered unwelcome.

Teachers discussing human rights are considered to be preaching ideology to youth and often face disciplinary punishment.

Polish education since the change of government in 2015 is forcibly nationalist. There is a very strong emphasis on Polish tradition (with exclusion of other cultures) and values such as patriotism, Christianity and national pride.

Participants were chosen because according to statistics it is precisely young men in Poland that are most conservative and drawn to extreme right wing parties.

Due to RODO regulations that are a must in Europe all personal data and its use requires an official permit from each participant and I will also need to know how their data will be used. (it is just mandatory regulations).

An overview: Identity Portrait

- The project only involved 10 Cis-Het male participants.
- Most of them belong to the Catholic church(9 out of 10). Two participants who belonged to the church did not identify with their faith.
- All of them mention they are Cis-Het men which can help in understanding the political, social and cultural context of the gender Identity- importance of gender identity.
- All of them value family life and some of them yearn to have a healthy and happy family in future.
- Most of them identify with their social identity- example playing football and most of them mention that they look “attractive”.
- As many of them mention that their faith gives them strength- it also signifies how important is their religious identity for them.
- One of the participants, Pawel is well read and does mention that he wants to refrain from answering about his gender identity- his roots aren't polish and talks about freedom and wants to have a future without fear. Of all the participants he makes an interesting subject.
- The responses of the students indicate a strong affiliation towards the Church, religion and faith. One of the students responded by saying 'ofcourse heterosexual', points at

the discomfort towards being identified with any other sexual orientation than being a heterosexual. This coming from a young person may be an indicator towards the level of non acceptance of the LGBTQI+ community in the country.

- Family plays a strong role in all of their view. The conventional setup seems to be suitable for most of them, as their sense of overall comfort and wellbeing is dependent on it. Dissent or questioning traditions does not seem at the fore, in their minds. This may also point towards an education system that does not make them critical thinkers towards the regressive belief systems that need to go. Even as young people, who are rebellious and idealistic, who love to challenge anything that curtails their freedom, the students are contented with the existing social norms.
- They are quite well acquainted with their personal identities. The focus on family life and a sense of happiness derived from it, may indicate close bonds in the society too, specially so in the stark capitalistic and materialistic world that we inhabit.
- As there are no girls in the group it is difficult to define gender roles and how far patriarchy influences the society.

Perspective Taking: An overview

This activity was designed to meditate on the idea of diversity, inclusion and dominant identities that decide the trajectory of our lives. Majority of students worked on migrant and refugee identities.

Poland has been an area of conflict in the modern world. European expansionism had a severe effect

on the history of Poland. Majority of the students who chose to take a perspective of a migrant and refugee's identity found how the participants were aware of the atrocities that are perpetuated by the governmental regimes of Belarus, Syria and Ukraine. Where a student put forth the story of young Ihor, a Ukrainian migrant, who has been learning Polish language, a young boy who has also been part of the discrimination perpetuated in schools by his mates and Ihor's attempt to create a niche for himself.

Many have come to Poland as refugees because of the crisis in Ukraine.

Many students have mentioned how young activists of the age of 17 and 18 have been held captive by the government and been put on trial. This clearly conveys the idea as to how young students have been developing and been trying to dismantle the severe economic and social regimentation. Students have emphasized how these migrants and refugees are employed at minimum wages and many of them have also found their partner after coming to Poland. One peculiar example is of a person who has been working as a courier and understates their diligence towards their work in the time of Pandemic and how their constant effort to provide services on time has got them appreciation from people. Many also elaborated the imperceptible prejudice towards minorities in Poland, but many of them have also been able to find and establish a good support system.

Other identities that were of women and people from the LGBTQ spectrum. One of the people elaborated how homosexuals in the 80s became a vessel of hate. With the outbreak of AIDS in Europe the homosexuals were blatantly targeted and this apathy

can be witnessed even today as many of the cities in Poland have claimed themselves to be “Free of LGBT ideology”. A catholic, belonging to the spectrum has also questioned the idea of religion and how many of the priests

spread hate against the people from the spectrum have been dispossessed on the grounds that they are a “threat” to Poland’s cultural values and traditions. One of the students has also taken the issue of women in

Poland and has sensitively questioned the culture of tokenism that exists when it comes to the minorities of any nation. The idea of equal remuneration still seems inconceivable in our “progressive” society.

Perspective Taking was a milestone because it brought out the sensitivity and empathy of each student when covering and discovering the identities of a person who has been marginalized by the majority. Facets such as privilege, religion, traditionalism have been put under the scanner and have given a nuanced understanding when cogitating about these identities. Students did accentuate the concept of love and simple living, the conflict of language and discrimination, familial piety and change and continuity.

Questionnaire: An overview

This activity was a set of five simple questions.

- Do you think mocking someone is a projection of our own insecurities? Why?
- Do you agree that identity is fluid? Why?
- Do you think that politicians often pit people of different identities against each other to secure vote bank?
- Do you take cognizance of the racial and ethnic slurs we use in our daily conversations? How would you like to improve it?
- Does the portrayal of your identity on social media make you feel empowered? Why?

Nearly all the students answered in a similar fashion. They all were aware of the psychological sense of insecurity in a person when they made fun of others. They affirmed that it only revealed the mocker’s own weaknesses.

They were in agreement regarding identity being fluid and ever changing. They realised that with the changing situations, life events a person undergoes many shifts which results in the change in their identity too.

They are observant about the Polish politics in general and agree that politicians use people and their identities to create conflicts and to earn votes. This is also an indicator that as young people they may not be actively inclined towards politics but they know the selfish motives that drive a country’s political scenario.

According to almost all students the usage of racial and ethnic slurs can be addressed by the family, church and the school learning. It must start early on for children to learn to respect people who are different from themselves.

About social media impacting their self image and sense of worth, they unanimously brushed the idea aside, not giving any importance to it. For them social media is only a diversion and

perhaps some amount of fun, nothing more than that.