



### **There's a Pink Elephant in this Room**

*It's so obvious I can't believe others don't see it too but then I have to keep reminding myself that this is what we have done to one another.*

Despite the fact that it's human nature to categorize people according to similarities and differences we will go to great lengths to argue the fact that we are somehow different from the rest of the world. Out of our mouths will come statements like "We are all human" or "I only notice you as an individual and that's all that matters to me". These and other statements are usually said in an effort to prove that we don't stereotype or label and therefore are free of bias and prejudice. In my experience, the more we try to ignore difference the larger and more colorful the elephant in the room becomes. If you look close enough you can see the elephant through the political, social, economic and education inequalities that exist in this country. After all, how can we for example, solve the problems of educational disparities for our children of color if we don't notice the ways in which they are culturally different?

Society has socialized all of us at an early age to say we don't notice differences, particularly racial differences. Somehow the message gets sent that if you do then there must be something wrong with you. In fact, we are taught to believe that being a good, kind, loving person is dependent upon our ability to not notice difference. In our childlike way we may ask our parent "Mommy, how come that man's so chocolate?" During these awkward moments we are most likely immediately met with a quick hush of the mouth and clear embarrassment from our parent by what we just said. So our youthful curiosity goes unexamined until we are old enough, and hopefully committed enough, to figure out the many dynamics of differences and the anxiety they create in us.

Graduate school was the first place I was ever *expected* to examine my thoughts, feelings and reactions to difference, including my own multiracial identity. During this time I was on an emotional roller coaster. But despite the discomfort that this exploration created within me, I found myself becoming strengthened in my own understanding of who I was and the kind of person I hoped to one day become.

I was struck by the fact that as I was going through this transformation in my own identity development, so were most of my colleagues. Frankly, the process of self examination fascinated me. Yes, there was a lot of pain, anger, frustration and even denial in this type of voyaging but who we were developing into with the assistance of our professors was mind-blowing to say the least. As cliché as it may sound, it was during these times that I began to realize my own calling. The idea of helping people through a process of engaging in deeper understanding of self and more meaningful relationships with others energized me.

This is why I do this work. I believe that when people see themselves more clearly and understand and appreciate cultural differences, we can close the racial divide and work together toward racial reconciliation and social justice.

*Caprice D. Hollins*