



## Section 4

### Stories told by young people

*Hello, my name is Melanie and I'm 21 years old. The greatest difficulty for me is that as a person of mixed origin (half Ivory Coast and half Swiss) I am at home neither here nor there. Wherever I am, I am regarded as being foreign, either "white" or "black". It happens to me when I live in my mother's country of origin, in Switzerland, and it happened to me when I was living in my father's country, Ivory Coast. I would feel at home where I could feel that people accept me just the way I am!*

*When you are a small child you first do not feel that you are different from the others. But soon the others will make you feel different - and children too can be very cruel in their behaviour against the "strange child".*

*Sometimes incredible incidents happen. Some time ago I was riding my bike somewhere in a little place in Switzerland nearby to where I live. A car drove by, and the male driver opened the window and yelled at me: "Scheiss-Neger - dirty nigger!" I virtually froze. I felt helpless and unable to defend myself. When I looked at the number plate, I saw that it was a German number plate. This means that the insulting person himself was a foreigner in this country! How could he dare insulting me like this? I felt that I wanted to kill this man. When I recovered I was able to think about it more clearly. These racist people are just stupid and do not know anything about life.*

*Intolerance really is the thing that bothers me most. I think that everybody is different and everybody has the right to be different - without exception, no matter what the mentality, the colour of skin or the religion is. But this doesn't mean that he or she must be a second class human being because of these differences. Tolerating something doesn't mean that you have to agree with everything; it just means that you try to accept it unconditionally. May people be much more open-minded to foreigners and their way of life: that's my wish!*

Melanie, 21, Switzerland

*My name is Nikola Bobann, I'm half Danish and half Bosnian. I want to write about an incident I had 3 years ago. I had just finished business college and was applying for this job in a big, well respected company. I had all the necessary diplomas and qualifications and was self-confident. So I delivered my application personally just to make a good impression.*

*The company told me that I would have an answer within a month. I waited two month for a reply and than I decided to withdraw my application. I was disappointed but at the same*



time I had to find out what the reasons were for the silence.

I went to the company for the second time and got to talk with the manager. He sat behind a big table full of papers and he asked me why I had withdrawn my application and I answered. He reached out for two piles of papers and asked for my name. I told him my name and he looked surprised and asked me where I came from. I had to find out that one of the piles had familiar Danish names and the other pile had only foreign names.

At that time I understood his astonished face - it was because of my blue eyes and blond hair - he thought I was a Dane, but according to the application form I was a foreigner for him.

This experience made me realise the race problem even in well respected companies, which are supposed to have an intelligent workforce.

Nikola Bobann, Denmark

Hello! My name is Juliana Violari, I'm from Cyprus and I'm 18 years old and I'm half Catholic and half Orthodox. But this is not the only special thing in my life. I'm also a child of parents who are in the Turkish area since 1974. Because I have to study I came to the South part of the island. When I was 12 I left home and went to Nicosia to school. I could only visit my family during school holidays, at Christmas, Easter and during the summer break. This was the situation until last year when I turned 17 years. Since last year I am not allowed to visit my family. My parents are allowed to visit us, my brothers and sisters and me, once the month.

When I was 13 years old I went to visit my parents during Christmas holidays and I really had a good time. When the holidays were over I returned to the Greek area to continue with school. But things didn't turn out so fine. When we reached the so called "Green Line" the Turkish border police would not allow us to go to the Greek side. They said that if we went to the Greek side we would never again get a permit to visit our family. I felt like the world was ending. I didn't know what to do and what to think. How could they ask me such a thing? How can they stop me from being in my own home with my own family? How could they? But I couldn't do anything about it. The Turks thought that this was one way so they can make us leave our home. But they couldn't achieve it. After that many problems arose but I have never felt as bad as on that day. Even after all these problems my family didn't think about leaving home and moving to the Greek side. I just hope that I'll never feel like this again. After all it is one of the Human Rights to be able to live where ever you want in your own country. And all that because I'm Greek and they are Turkish. That's the reason.

Juliana Violari, 18, Cyprus

I am a 24 year old Hungarian Jew living in Budapest. When I was still studying in High School I felt intolerance more than ever before and after. Once we had a chemistry class and we

**all different**  
**all e q u a l**

Racism is the proof of incapacity or powerlessness to understand the other people's problems.

Roman Rares, 24 years,  
Romania



**all different**  
**all equal**

**some different**  
**some equal**

*studied the process of soap producing. At a certain point one of my classmates in the first row turned around and shouted: "Gabor! Do you hear this?" In the context it was clear we he meant. I found also sentences on the black board like "Gabor! Go back to Israel" or "Stinky Jew". The word Jew or Gipsy was generally used as a four letter word. Teachers did nothing on this issue.*

Gabor Rona, 24, Budapest

*Hi, I'm Anna from Poland and I'm 20 years old. I would like to tell you about a situation in which I felt really bad. It happened already one year ago, but I can still remember it very clearly. I was on a student exchange in Holland. I lived with a very friendly family, whose daughter Sandra visited me later on in Poland. Sandra and I met (on our way home from shopping), a boy from Sandra's neighbourhood. He didn't say 'hello' to me, but only to her and spoke only in Dutch. I do not understand this language, but I felt that he told her something about me. When I was gone I asked Sandra to tell me what he talked about. Let me repeat the short dialogue, Sandra had with her neighbour:*

*Sandra: "Hi, how are you?"*

*He: "Well, I am fine. I do not have any Polish at home."*

*For me this was really awful - I did not understand why my friend did not tell him off. Her mother told me that he was probably jealous that he was not able to invite somebody from abroad to his home. I do not know. Maybe the mother was right. But I think the guy was not even aware about the stupidity of his behaviour. Such people are deplorable!*

Anna Smolen, 20, Poland

*My name is Daniel, I am 21 years old and I live in Denmark. I want to write about an incident I had three years ago. I was at my best friend's birthday and we were all celebrating. After the party we decided to go to a discotheque in town. When we got there the group split up and I went to the bar to get something to drink.*

*At the bar I noticed a man who looked at me in a strange way. I did not like his looks and the situation but I did not pay much attention. Suddenly the man walked towards me and asked me where I had bought my tie. I thought it was a funny question, but I did not mind as I felt open and I wanted to meet new people. I answered his question and suddenly he took a knife out of his pocket, grabbed my tie and cut it off. Then he slashed the knife towards my hips and walked away. All this happened in the discotheque. I was shocked and first idea was to run away. On the way to get my jacket I noticed I was bleeding. It didn't hurt or look serious, but I was frightened. The police came and I reported what had happened. Although they caught the guy they couldn't do anything -they didn't find witnesses or the weapon and the man was let free again.*



*Since this happened I had a lot of difficulties. I was scared all the time and felt uncomfortable in big crowds of people. I did not trust people any more - so I lost a lot of my friends. I attended a therapy group but this didn't work, either.*

*I often wonder if the person who stabbed me ever realised what he did that night.*

Daniel, 21, Denmark

*Hello. My name is Marcella, I'm 23 years of age. I was born in Colombia, but I'm living in Sweden for 5 years. The reason I left Colombia is rather complicated, but one of them is the fact that I'm transsexual. For those who don't know what that is, I will shortly explain it. I was born with the body of a boy, but deep in my soul I've always known that I'm a woman. To be able to live, I'm going through a long process, and right now I'm in the middle of it. Yet, I haven't changed sex but I'm eating hormones and I really look like a woman now. It's very tough to be Columbian and transsexual living in Sweden. Often I'm discriminated twice, if you know what I mean. People have beaten me up, not only physically but also in a verbal way. Until now my life has been a mess, but as I have the possibility to change sex I'm very happy. Someday I hope people accept me for the person I am. I'm not a pervert, or strange in any way, I'm just a person who wants to be happy.*

Marcella, 23, Sweden

*My name is Tedros Tesfaye. I'm 20 years old. I was born in Ethiopia but now I'm living in Sweden. I want to tell you a true story where I was discriminated. In the summer of 1992, I was in Stockholm with 2 friends. We had been at a gay club, afterwards we went to McDonalds for a hamburger. At the gay club, there had been a masquerade, so we were dressed a bit "different".*

*At McDonalds most of the people, just thought we looked funny, but they didn't mind. But there was this guy who didn't like our appearance very much. This guy was very drunk and he began to argue with us. He asked me if I was queer and I said "Yes, do you have a problem with that?" Of course he did and he told me what he wanted to do with me. He didn't like the fact that I was alive. He wanted me to dig my own grave, and then he would strangle me he said. I was very upset, and as his friends arrived, I was very afraid and ran away. The last thing I heard from him was that I was a gay nigger with no right to exist. I will never forget this, but one thing is for sure, nobody can take my dignity away from me.*

Tedros Tesfaye, 20, Black, happy queer living in Sweden

Reading through the above stories raises many questions about identity and how we all come to terms with a) the way we see ourselves and b) how others see us. You might find it useful to look at the discussion and activities around what is called The Onion of Identity in the Education Pack.

**all different**  
**all equal**

