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Sample Essay for the Analytical Paper (option two)

"How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie" is a culturally tangled short story about a Dominican immigrant boy's complex social insecurities and assimilation woes. Acclaimed author, Junot Diaz, wrote this popular story about a young urban man's navigation through the culturally diverse world of dating. The story is designed as a type of immature instruction manual for dating girls of different racial backgrounds. The narrator shows evidence of being self-reflective rather than being any sort of manual to aid others. Yunior explores the dating world around him in a quest for self-discovery, more than any laughable attempt at being directional. The central idea is that cultural stereotypes are not concrete, but ever changing and ill-perceived.

The author imposes a seriocomic tone throughout the story, brought from his own experiences as an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. The tone of the story helps to give a clearer picture of the narrator's experience (or lack thereof) inside the dating world. The tone also allows the reader to experience Yunior's cultural identity confusion, especially in reference to how he is perceived by the girls he dates. Yunior struggles throughout this story with his unique heritage. Daniel Bautista notes that Yunior is "[k]eely aware of class, racial, and ethnic differences." That confusion is reflected through his direction and reaction to events throughout the story.

Although assumed, the evidently poor urban New Jersey backdrop used as the setting provides a deeper understanding into Yunior's experiences. Yunior attempts to mask his own cultural identity in order to be more appealing to potential dates. He refers to hiding the government cheese and photos of his cousins back in Dominican Republic that reflect his former lifestyle. According to Bautista, "Despite the baldly provocative title, Díaz subversively reveals the limits of stereotypes by treating race and ethnicity as performative . . . that individuals assume or take off according to the demands of the moment." The setting also influences the narrator's inability to date without the outside influence of friends and family in his New Jersey neighborhood. He is watched by nosy neighbors interested in knowing all the details of his conquests, or at least his attempts. The narrator toggles back and forth between New Jersey influenced English and broken Spanish, communicating his still distant familial ties to his old country:

You wait, and after an hour you go out to your corner. The neighborhood is full of traffic—commuters now cut through the neighborhood—making it hard on the kids and the *viejas*, who are used to empty streets. Give one of your friends a shout and when he says, Still waiting on that bitch? say, Hell, yeah! (Díaz 256).

Another important quote from this story sums up how Yunior feels about his heritage: "Run a hand through your hair like the whiteboys do even though the only thing that runs easily through your hair is Africa" (Díaz 256). This admission expresses Yunior's lack of self-esteem and confidence.

Yunior is the central character of the narrative whose main conflicts both internal and external. According to Moreno, "Dominicans simultaneously struggle to integrate and to protect their distinctive cultural identities." He is not easily identified as black,

brown, white or "halfie" himself. Since he does not fit into any one category easily, he allows the girls he dates to put him into a category of their choosing. The reader witnesses his attraction to girls from all races and backgrounds, perhaps in an attempt to find identity within those relationships. He desires dating the white girl the most and secretly longs to be in her skin. He idealizes dating white girls as being the ultimate departure from his heritage: "Tell her that you love her hair, that you love her skin, her lips, because, in truth, you love them more than you love your own" (Diaz 257).

Basically, he melts into whatever is the most appealing to them. This behavior reveals his lack of identity and self-worth.

As a young woman who identifies as Mexican American and Anglo, I can relate to Yuniors plight. I often feel stuck in between two worlds and it seems like I'm never quite enough to satisfy either cultural group. "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie" is a complex story that explores the ideas of the intermixing and blending of people who are culturally different from one another. In the end, it is really only self-reflective and not instructional at all.

Works Cited

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