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## Who Am I?

Karlique Kemar Caesar was the name that was bestowed upon me once I drew breath. Growing up I had always felt a disconnect. I felt loved but I never really understood why we love. I was cared for but could never understand what it was about me that could cause my parents to care for me in the way they did. For a majority of my life, I felt like a shell. A golden shell that was hollow on the inside but the golden exterior led most to believe that there was something of more value inside. From an early age, I had lived life by observation. I saw beauty in being able to watch my environment. The slight differences in the ways animals behaved from one another in their species and how that played into them fulfilling their role within their species specific dynamics. That's when I realized I was given a name but not a role. This bled into schooling as well. I remember distinctly sitting in for my pre-kindergarten class. For the first week we were asked to sit around for class readings in a circle on the floor. The entire class sat down facing the teacher except me. I had sat with my back facing my teacher and would turn my head to her instead. I may not have known my role but whatever it should have been, my behavior had defied. In that formative age I had been assessed for entry into special education. The results of my testing had placed me into my school's honors program, EAGLE. It was an acronym though it escapes me now. We were told that while all attendees of my elementary school, P.S.203 we earned the moniker of EAGLE student by "soaring higher than the others". I never liked that title. It seemed like an improper distinction for any type of positive growth. This was my intentional line of thought. In that same breath, I learned to embrace that feeling of superiority. My mind was my gift and my role was to be intellectually superior. This was my unintentional line of thought. As flawed as my thought process had been, it is reflective of the place I have been put in societally. The attractive aspects of my personality have often distracted people from the

atypical workings of my brain or how I hold general interactions and for years the praise and accolades let me pretend to not notice the differences as well. The goal of my T-shirt is to finally represent how it feels to play the role undetermined.

The purpose of my shirt was to display fluency in my understanding of the relationships between gender, dress and society and apply that to my personal experience. The beauty of fashion is its ability to be subliminally informative. For example, an umbrella straddling the back of a commuter while they apply suntan lotion on an 85 degree day can imply that they checked the weather this morning and are aware of the storm coming at about five o'clock pm. The pair of daisy dukes and a crop top on the passenger sitting next to them may lead you to believe that this passenger did not. Certain garbs are religious like hijabs or yarmulkes. Others are just cool and that's a statement in itself. So what is my design attempting to say? My design gives a glimpse into my mind. All aspects of my design had been heat transfer to T-shirt. The backside of my T-shirt displays a sky half red and half blue. The red is supposed to encapsulate all of my feelings of doubt. My momentary wishes to be something I am not or the feeling of being an imposter in a space I feel I do not belong. The red also is meant to represent my more assertive thoughts. My aggressive tactics to take what I want and claim my destiny and achieve my goals. My Dominance. The blue sky reflects the calm in my life. The things that make me docile. On the blue side of the realm is accompanied by these things. My girlfriend, Lorena, is calm to my many anxieties and fears. When I think too much she centers and grounds me. The anthill that chains the moon on this side represents the constraints and requests of society to conform. The moon itself represents my mind and propensity to go through phases. The condition I am in at the time directly affects the type of work that I make at the time. My creative endeavors are extremely important to me as it allows me to have an opportunity to reflect on how I am feeling at the time. Creative expression is exclusively raw, direct and personal for me and that was displayed by my moon's mouth gnawing deep into an arm coming out of its mouth to craft this world. On both sides of my person, I have suggestions represented in the form of an angel and

a devil. They represent the forces that attempt to guide me without truly knowing me as I remain sat with the only vegetation growing in this barren world under my person. I will bud. I will grow. I will flourish. Experience beauty and wither away. On the front of the shirt, opposing all that I keep in my head sits I----- with my back facing the viewer as I look back.

The beauty of a project like *Who Am I* is the ability to self reflect. I've lived in my body with my experiences my entire life yet certain aspects of who I am have been left unexplored. I sometimes wonder if the things that hold real estate in my mind matter. Maybe if I could turn my brain off I could lead a happier existence. But I have come to realize my mind is nothing to be ashamed of. I love how I think and I have come to cherish the type of person I have become. Do I know my place? No maybe not but I have come to figure out that no one really does. We just exist. And as long as I am allowed to, that is what I shall do.