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SPCH-1315-008: Pub Speaking

9 June 2021

A Window Into Being Biracial

INTRODUCTION

Attention Getter: “When there is a gap--between your face and your race, between the baby and the mother, between your body and yourself, you are expected, everywhere you go, to explain the gap.”- the author of 2017’s Best Summer Read *New People*, Danzy Senna.

Statement of Credibility: Being a part of two worlds has always been my life. For as long as I can remember, I was never really a part of one. I always knew I was never just Black, or just Mexican, but it often felt that way. I’m a person of mixed race, and know what it’s like to grow up and go through life as a biracial person. Living as a person who was always nervous when asked my ethnicity or background, because I spent most of my life trying to find my own identity myself.

Pointer: As people of America, we know what it’s like to exist with people of different backgrounds. We see diversity in some form of fashion, all the time, and yet when there’s someone of two different backgrounds, it seems almost foreign.

Thesis: In this speech, I hope to relay what exactly being biracial is, and why it’s important, explaining the aspects of life as a person of mixed race, and what being aware about this topic can do for others in society.

What is ‘biracial’, and why is it important?

1. If you fold a piece of paper in half, and color each inside half a separate color, then fold it together again, the colors on the inside never mix no matter how many times you try to make them. That’s a depiction of what it feels like to belong to two different ethnic backgrounds at times. According to *Oxford Languages*, being biracial means “concerning or containing members of two racial groups”, but, what does it *really* mean? In a way, being biracial means living between two societies. It feels as though you are made up of two identities that never really collide, despite physical appearances. As Jessica Machado, Senior Identities Editor at Vox Media, stated on January 19, 2021, “you are ethnically ambiguous.”
2. Researchers belonging to the Pew Research Center made a report on June 11, 2015, and said that “how you grow up, how you envision yourself, and how the world views you, all play important parts in shaping multicultural identity.” For many people, this is very true, and many of these influential components may even be just as important as your own racial background.
3. Growing up around many white Americans, I’m familiar with the term “I don’t see color”. I saw it as a shield of protection against the controversial subject of race. I felt that race was a topic usually pushed aside or ignored to eliminate the uncertainty or awkwardness around others. Published on *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* on June 6, 2018, a research article regarding six studies promoted the notion that “exposure to biracial individuals significantly reduces endorsement of colorblindness as a racial ideology among White individuals.” Research team leader and Duke University

psychologist, Sarah E. Gaither stated that “The multiracial population’s increasing size and visibility has the potential to positively shift racial attitudes.”

Life of a person of mixed race

1. My whole life, I felt split into two. I grew up with two different backgrounds, in two different houses, with two different families of two different cultures and traditions. Being young and biracial, I was confused about a lot of things. I was confused on what to tell people when they asked me about my identity, and I was confused on which box to check when there was a question asking what my ethnicity was, but the one thing I did know was that I was different. My hair wasn’t as thick as the other few African American girls at my school, but my hair wasn’t completely straight either. I was tan, but I wasn’t dark. I was never one or the other, just existing in the in-betweens.
2. It was hard for me to relate to others my age, or even adults. I never knew someone like me, and no matter how I was treated, there was always an underlying feeling that I wasn’t “black enough”, because I had white friends, or that I wasn’t “Mexican enough” because I wasn’t fluent in speaking Spanish. I was used to the look of uncertainty when people tried to figure out my ethnicity. So much so, that I began to let others decide who I was, based on what they felt I looked like most. On most occasions, they would just refer to me as black. It began to feel easy to just identify myself as one thing, and I embraced the feeling of completeness almost instantly.
3. I’m fifteen now, and I know that what I felt back then wasn’t completeness. It was naivety. Being a person of mixed race has always brought incertitude into my life, but I was able to find the good in it as well. I finally found my individuality to be unique,

instead of solitary. I realized that people would always perceive me differently, and that was okay as long as I knew who I was on my own.

What can bringing awareness about this topic do for people of mixed race?

1. On June 11, 2015, a report was made by the Pew Research Center on the 'Multiracial Identity Gap'. When asked, "Do you consider yourself to be mixed race or multiracial, that is, more than one race, or not?," a vast majority of Americans with a background of more than one race(61%) say they do not consider themselves to be multiracial. When questioned why they do not consider themselves to be multiracial, around half(47%) say it is because they only look like one race.
2. Psychology today has also stated that "many mixed race people describe struggling to develop a clear sense of identity--and some trace it to the trouble other people have in discerning their identity. In a recent Pew survey, one in five multiracial adults reported feeling pressure to claim just a single race, while nearly one in four said other people are sometimes confused about "what they are.".
3. In recognizing that multiracial people do not just simply consider ethnicity as their racial background, but also the factors in how they were raised, and the experiences they have gone through growing up, we can lessen these demographics. Another snippet of Psychology Today's report published on May 7, 2019, supports this idea by sharing that "researchers say the growing number of multiracial Americans may help the rest of the population develop the flexibility to see people as more than just a demographic--and to move away from race as a central marker of identity."

CONCLUSION

Summary: As we can see, being multicultural or biracial goes deeper than just your ethnic background. There are many factors that come into play when finding your identity, and as more and more people come to acknowledge the mixed race as more than just a percentage, it may create a new pathway for the American society on the basis of race.

Close: Hopefully, today you will walk away knowing a little bit more about the biracial community than you had before, and you might even be able to empathize or pass some of this information along in the future, knowing that you'll be making a difference for at least one life.

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