

What Are You?

As a biracial woman in America, that question has been asked of me more often than I like to admit

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“You don’t talk Black.” This is probably the phrase I have heard muttered to me the most when it comes to my identity. My mother is white and my father is black. Therefore, I identify as biracial, having parents of two different races. As a person of color, I am faced with social challenges, but I think most biracial people would agree that being biracial poses some different

kinds of challenges that those who identify as monoracial will never experience. Being biracial is a constant social crisis that includes microaggressions, the feeling of not belonging to any society, and being forced to choose between two parts of me that make up one whole person. These personal troubles of mine are part of a broader public issue in America concerning biracialism, the principle or practice of combining or representing two separate races.

First, I'll begin by saying: I am not "half" anything.

I have multiple selves, molded together, that form a whole person. Being called "half" can make a person feel like they don't fully belong to any society. Not surprisingly, feeling like an outsider can affect a person's emotional and mental well-being. It is even worse when one is called a "mutt." One of my biggest struggles, that I still face today, is the feeling of not belonging. I am either not white enough, not black enough, too white, or too black. As stated in the online article, "Understanding the Stressors and Types of Discrimination That Can Affect Multiracial Individuals" by Astrea Greig, it can also leave a multiracial person feeling as if they do not match what society arbitrarily determines they should be.

Greig also includes that the microaggressions multiracial people experience are often unconscious implicit social acts or statements that insult and discriminate against others. Phrases such as "What are you?" and "You're so exotic" are dehumanizing. Asking a person "what" they are implies that they are not human, and the word "exotic" only means "different from the norm." By that logic, they have just been labeled a mutant. Sadly, this form of discrimination can even come from family members. Microaggressions from my family members have made me feel disconnected from them on many occasions.

Another challenge that multiracial people face, and one of the hardest, in my opinion, is having to choose.

Society will always see me as black because of my physical appearance, but that denounces a part of me that others don't see. There is nothing worse than other people denying my identity and having to prove who I am over and over. If a multiracial person chooses or is forced to identify as one or the other, they might feel like they are denying one side of their family. To go a step further, having to choose one race on legal documents feels like an official denouncing of your family. In the 2010 census, approximately nine million people identified as multiracial. The option to choose more than one race only began in the year 2000. It is discouraging to think that my identity has only been documented for 19 years. Greig states that despite the fact that multiracial people are now one of the fastest growing populations in the United States, they are still one of the smallest demographic groups, comprising only 2.3% of the American population.

The goal of identifying as multiracial is to shift attention from the black and white viewpoint on race to all the gray areas in between that get overlooked.

According to *Beyond Black: Biracial Identity in America* by Kerry Ann Rockquemore and David L. Brunnsma, sociologists have contributed by employing symbolic interaction as a theoretical framework. Studies have shown that biracial individuals develop their racial identities from a number of structural factors including physical appearance, family, childhood experience, peer network, and geographical location. Rockquemore and Brunnsma concluded four typologies to characterize biracialism: border identity (based on neither single race but an integration of the two); singular identity (based exclusively on one race); protean identity (based on situational context); and transcendent identity (based on the absence of race as a factor). Developed from my personal experience, I would

categorize myself as protean identity.

As stated in the online article, "Multiracial Identities" on Encyclopedia.com, the multiracial identity paradigm defies traditional racial paradigms by replacing these one-dimensional identities with more multidimensional configurations and acknowledging the presence of various ancestries in their background.

The goal of identifying as multiracial is to shift attention from the black and white viewpoint on race to all the gray areas in between that get overlooked. Being a diverse person not only sounds nice at face value, but it has real significance. I am able to understand two different racial perspectives on a personal level and less likely to encourage stereotypes. I believe that multiracial people understand better than anyone that race is not biological, it is a social construct. As concluded by Robin O. Andreasen, it is entirely a product of the ways that people think about human differences.