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“My dad and me are Asian. My mom’s not”: Multiracial Identity and Disassociation Before and After the Internet Age

By Jenn Hernandez

Growing up, I’d tell people that “my dad and I are Mexican, my mom’s not”. (I suppose my future kids could say something similar: “my dad and I are Asian, my mom’s not”.) Surely, many kids growing up these days could say something like this because, of the total American population, as taken from a 2005 internet-only publication of a population profile by the U.S. Census Bureau, 13.9% identified themselves as being of “two or more races”[1].

I didn’t necessarily know what this all meant when I was a kid. Later, I learned that my mom is a mix of European heritages, and my dad is of a line that I’m only guessing comes from Mexico a few generations back. We’ve talked about using Ancestry.com [2] or something similar to find out where we really come from, but we’ve never actually followed up on the idea. (I don’t want to pay for a membership, and my dad is too busy anyways. I considered trying out Ancestry.com for this article, but I’m sure I’d forget to cancel after the 14-day free trial and end up having to pay the subscription fee for something I’d probably never use again).

I wondered how others deal with this issue, so I took my query to the Internet, where I can be part of a bigger group that transcends traditional demographics and borders. Out of curiosity, I searched within popular social networking sites–general ones, as well as ones specifically geared towards ethnic groups, such as Asian Avenue, MySpace Latino (which is the regular MySpace in Spanish), and Black Planet–a small survey of what’s out there. All had at least a few groups pertaining to multiracial people and issues [3][4][5].

In my search, I found an array of groups and forums for multiracial people in specific categories:
raising multiracial children, giving multiracial teens a voice, etc. (Teen Ink [6], Project Race [7], Fusion Program [8], Melting Pot Moms [9], and Blur Digital [10].)

I also came across one particularly interesting line of products geared towards multiracial people. Different racial combinations mix different types of hair, right? Yes, multiracial (in a small part) means having different types of hair—and a need that isn’t necessarily noticed in mainstream society. I have a mix of straight hair from my mom’s side and thick, black frizzy hair from my dad’s side. Then I seem to have everything in between: tight kinks, big wavy curls, and tighter corkscrews. All in all, from a hairdresser’s perspective, I’m a mess. The beauty tips in Seventeen [11] and CosmoGirl [12] never worked for me. So, I come across Blended Beauty [13], which is available primarily online, besides at a handful of specialty boutiques and shops internationally and in the U.S., and is most specifically for the purpose of smoothing and containing the mixed curls of mixed girls.

That said, an issue that has recently come back to the front of my concerns, while discreetly poking at me from the back of my mind all these years, has been that of raising multiracial children. Someday, my children with my husband will be half Vietnamese-American and half Mexican/English/Irish/German. In addition to having an intense dislike of “Paris by Night,” which I take to be some kind of popular Vietnamese variety show [14] (“our kids are NOT watching Paris by Night! If we go to anyone’s house and they’re watching it, we are going right back home!”), my fiance doesn’t really identify with the Vietnamese culture. He does, however, know and speak enough to order food at Vietnamese restaurants. (Mmm pho!) I don’t know any better, so he sounds okay to me.

I don’t blame him, because I’m not very whatever-I-may-be either. I’m not sure if our kids will know, or what they should know. Do we try to get them to learn Vietnamese for family’s sake? I would learn Vietnamese. Does that make me weird?

My fiance suggested that Spanish was more useful. But I just can’t get away from the fact that my dad never wanted to learn Spanish and that his family is slowly becoming “white-washed” as far as the whole being aware of their heritage and language thing goes. In high school I tried taking Spanish language classes and even forced myself to continue in college, past the minimum foreign language requirements, trying to feign an interest and fool myself into thinking that I’d find a place somewhere when I could speak the language. Trying to do something when not interested is not a good idea. It’s probably horrible to say this, but I don’t care to learn Spanish at all. I’m much more intrigued by Chinese. Yes, I know it’s completely different from anything I’ve had access to, what with the character system and all, but I’d like to try something new. (Not to mention that a large part of my personal music library consists of Jay Chou [15], which I buy online from overseas. Jay Chou is amazing!)

So, neither my fiance nor I are by far the best examples of a single culture or heritage, me never quite finding my own, and my fiance not entirely embracing his. I don’t find fault with any of this, but our children might potentially grow up just as confused as I was, and still am, regarding their
racial and cultural identity.

So, can the racially confused citizens growing into the Internet find an outlet? Not that this is a huge social problem, by the way; I think of it as a personal journey, which is more and more likely to be experienced as attitudes change about interracial unions. There are sources out there on the Internet if one takes the time to find their niche, as some have by blogging about their experiences. [16][17] As discovered, the Internet forms a community where discussions can be raised, questions answered, and identities sorted out much more conveniently than before.

Notes


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2 THOUGHTS ON "MY DAD AND ME ARE ASIAN. MY MOM’S NOT": MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY AND DISASSOCIATION BEFORE AND AFTER THE INTERNET AGE

Editor

on November 1, 2009 at 6:23 PM said:

Poster Name: Jennifer B.
Message: What a clever and humorous and personal story! I’m taking an Ethnic Studies course right now. I just keep being reminded of all the blessings that come with being multi-racial. It makes me think of me and you. Oh, your children will be so blessed! Because there are so many mixed-race peoples, this is altering our perception of what it means to be “American.” The meaning is organic and evolving rapidly as our population changes. It is a good example of how not to define yourself too rigidly. It also harder to be racist when racial groups are harder to define, when the lines are blurred. It’s harder to know what you’re hating. =p In the past, races were kept very separate simply because people didn’t have the means to travel and be mobile. They didn’t even know of the other races, or once they did, they didn’t consider them human. The mixed-race people today are signs of the world’s citizens being more mobile and also accepting of each other. I remember us once complaining about how scantrons made us feel unwelcome because they didn’t account for us mixed ones. NOW, I see more often the forms that say “mark all that apply” or allow to write-in how I want to define myself. You and your fiance will be solid evidence to your children that different races can love one another. They will be more equipped to understand this evolving world.

Danica Coopage

on January 30, 2014 at 6:15 PM said:

I do believe all the concepts you’ve presented to your post. They are really convincing and can definitely work. Still, the posts are too quick for novices. May you please prolong them a bit from subsequent time? Thanks for the post.
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