

Which Side Am I On?

By Rayann Fuller



Rayann Fuller grew up in southwest Florida. She spent a small portion of her life in Fort Myers, Florida and since the age of 5 lives in Punta Gorda, Florida. She is a mixed raced (father is black and mother is white) teenager. Her mother raises her and she has not seen her father one time since she has been old enough to talk. This essay will explore racism and nature vs. nurture to explain what it is like being a biracial female growing up in a predominantly white location and being raised by a single, white mother.

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Before truly considering it, I never thought of my race as something that affects my day-to-day life. Now I realize that it has been a reoccurring theme of conflict in my life which affects me more than I notice. Being biracial I have struggled to disregard what societies, and more importantly my peers, expect me to act like. The sociology concept of nature vs. nurture directly relates to why there is such a difference in who I could have been and who I am. Conclusions of this debate have been that “half of your personality traits are determined by genetic makeup and about half by environmental factors (Shepard, Greene 73). I agree with the general idea but it’s not always true. I think I can say that my personality has been 100% determined by nature. Any pre-programmed attitudes, beliefs, or demeanor’s I had from my black side never surfaced (or never existed) because that’s not the environment I was raised in.

The earliest memory I have of my race being a source of conflict traces all the way back to elementary school. I was in fourth grade. One of my two best friends, both white, was named Christina. We knew these two boys Dalton and Peyton, who were also white. I was friends with Dalton but not Peyton while Christina just annoyed them with her huge crush. One day Dalton was talking to me and he said he had asked Peyton who he liked more, me or Christina. Peyton said Christina and Dalton asked why, since she was annoying. He told him that he couldn't like me because I was black. I remembered feeling surprised and insecure. Reflecting back on it, it was kind of weird that at such a young age someone could think interracial relationships were wrong. Peyton probably learned to think like this in his household but to be so young and have those opinions instilled in you seems...wrong. "The most beautiful as well as the most ugly inclinations of man are not part of a fixed and biologically given human nature, but result from the social process which creates man" (Schmidt 19). It's great that Peyton's family passes their ideas on to him but at the same time, he was prejudiced at ten.

At that age I remember actually wishing I could be white like all my friends and family. I thought it would be better and easier somehow. In sixth grade I would put on make-up at school with my other best friend, Josie, so my mom and step-dad wouldn't know I was wearing it. I told her I wish I had her complexion and she told me she wished she had mine because it meant having a tan all year-round (people said that to me a few times, I liked it because it meant I was just a white girl with a really good tan). I thought, if I had her complexion it would mean I could fit in with the crowd I wanted to fit with. I could be one of them, no questions asked.

I was friends with Josie for years and I really wanted to go to her house so we could hang out. She would always tell me I could come but then last minute, I'd get canceled on. Later, I found out the reason why was that her dad wasn't comfortable with her black friend coming over. I was really annoyed because I'd been friends with her for years and he wouldn't even give me a chance because of my skin color. I remember thinking, if only he knew how white I really am, I'm whiter than his daughter, I don't listen to rap music and she does!

Very similar to that, a girl I went to church with confessed to me that her dad was uneasy around me because I was black. Really, at church?! People are supposed to be accepting of everyone at church. I went to

her house where I found out she couldn't have Chris Brown posters in her bedroom and I she ever dated a black guy she'd be in big trouble.

“Middle-class African Americans, Feagin concluded, still experience discrimination based on race. Several types of discrimination were reported by the respondents, including avoidance, verbal attack, physical abuse, and subtle slights” (Shepard, Greene 298). I think, given the above examples, it's safe to say I have been discriminated against. The ways in which I have been are avoidance and subtle slights. These weren't life altering things but they made me questions myself and my friends. Racism is defined as, “an extreme form of prejudice, because it not only involves judging people unfairly but it assumes that a person's own race or ethnic group is superior. Racists believe that discrimination or exclusion is morally justified because of their own natural superiority.” (Shepard, Greene 284). I didn't initially think that any of my friends' parents were racist but, given the definition, they do have some of the same characteristics.

These situations made me struggle to be comfortable in my own skin. If I was white, my friends' parents would accept me. If I was white, Peyton would like me over Christina. Of course, I've accepted the fact that you'll never be able to change the world's opinions. Some people just won't like you and that's that. I still faced awkward situations revolving around race.

My mom is white and my dad is black. He was a bad father so he lost any custody rights over me when I was three. As a result, I don't know the black side of my family. I've met my half-sister and my nephew and I spoke to my half-brother on the phone, but that is the extent of my relationship with that side. My mom and the man she remarried raised me. My step-dad was white so my peers often assumed I was adopted, which was always fun. Due to how I've been raised, I “act white.” I talk completely “white,” I behave completely “white,” and my family is completely white. My skin is referred to as “light-skin black” and my hair, free of primping, is kinky-curly. All these things about my appearance and demeanor are totally fine, but they mean I've had a hard time fitting in.

My step-dad's family was what you consider redneck folks. They temporarily became aunts, uncles, and cousins of mine. I loved being one of them; people that fished, had country accents, and wore camo. Unfortunately, at school, that group of people was not my family and I was not accepted with that crowd. Even

though I was very similar to them, they were prejudged toward me based on the fact my skin wasn't fair and I was excluded. I didn't fit in with the crowd that I had nothing in common with and didn't act or talk like either, even though I looked more like them. This crowd is the side of my family I don't know. It's strange to consider but if my dad had custody rights, I would have fit in perfectly with the black crowd.

I have some redneck friends right now. They don't see any reason why I should feel uncomfortable going places with them where the majority would be rednecks but I do. Contradictory enough, coming from a girl who admits to being totally white minus my skin color; it's a black person thing. I just feel like, even though I'm totally okay with that culture, a group of people wearing camo and sporting rebel flags would never really accept me. On the other side, I have some black friends that I might not completely fit in with either. It would be like those movies where the one white person tries to fit in with the cool black people but is obviously just lame. I'd be that lame white person. "Kathy, more light-skinned and with features most likely to identify her as white, talked of being stigmatized by many black students who interpret her biracial self-identification as trying to establish herself as "better than" or "beyond" black" (Smith, "*Biracial Identity: Beyond Black and White*"). This is something I closely identify with. The moments I identify myself as biracial, as opposed to black, any black friends that hear this get annoyed with me. It's a struggle to please everyone yet stay true to me.

The realization that I have come to is that all these opinions I have of the white community and the black community are just as bad as the opinions that people who judge and classify me have. Plainly put, I'm friends with black people and white people but I don't have to fit in with either. I don't have to act more like one side and I don't have to look more like one side. It's fine to be my own person and be friends with whoever likes me for me, my personality no matter what race it's most like. I am who I am and no bogus stereotypes or labels will change that.

Works Cited

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