

50 Experiences of Racially Mixed People

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The 50 questions or comments and experiences evolved from a questionnaire I developed for a study on biracial siblings I conducted from 1996 to 1997. These questions and comments provide an introduction to the way in which race consciousness is brought up directly, sideways, and from all sides for people of mixed heritage. These comments and questions, though not an exhaustive list, provide a window into how this country internalizes assumption about race, belonging, and identity. They socialize the mixed race person to understand as well as question race American style. It is a monoracial system; one race per person. Not everyone experiences these questions or comments the similarly. One person might enjoy being asked, “What are you?” whereas their sibling might dread and resent the question. This list provides a launching point for sharing, discussing, laughing, debriefing, and educating.

1. You have been told, “You have to choose; you can’t be both.”
2. Your ethnicity was mistakenly identified.
3. People assumed your race to be different by phone than in person.
4. You are accused of not acting or wanting to be Latino, Asian, Black...
5. You have been told, “Mixed race people are so beautiful or handsome.”

6. Strangers looked between you and your parent(s) to figure out if you were related.
7. You have been told, “You don’t look Native, Black, Latino...”
8. You have been asked, “What are you?”
9. People say things they might not otherwise say if they knew how you identified racially.
10. You have been asked, “Where are you from?”
11. You have repeatedly been the recipient of stares or longer than passing glances from strangers.
12. You have been told, “You look exotic.”
13. Your choice of friends has been interpreted as your “selling out” or not being authentic.
14. You have been accused of “acting or wanting to be white.”
15. Judgments of your racial authenticity have been based upon your boyfriend/s or girlfriend’s (partner’s) race.
16. Comments are made about your hair or hairstyle, skin color, eye shape etc.
17. You have been subjected to jokes about mixed race people.
18. You have been told, “You think you’re too good for your own kind.”
19. Grandparent(s) or relatives don’t accept you because of your parents’ interracial relationship.
20. Your parents or relatives compete to “claim” you for their own racial or ethnic group.
21. You have been told, “You have the best of both worlds.”

22. You have been asked about your racial or ethnic heritage as an object of curiosity.
23. Upon meeting you, people seem confused by your last name. They do not think it “matches” you.
24. People assume you are confused about your racial identity or have had a hard time figuring it out.
25. People speak to you in foreign languages because of how they interpret your physical appearance.
26. You have been told, “Society doesn’t recognize mixed race.”
27. You have been told, “You aren’t really Black, Latino, Asian...”
28. You have been mistaken for another person of mixed heritage who does not resemble you.
29. You have been told you must be full of self-loathing or hatred because of how you racially identify yourself.
30. You have been told, “You are a mistake.”
31. Different people perceive your race differently based upon the company you keep.
32. The race people assign you varies in different parts of the U.S.A.
33. You have difficulty filling out forms asking for a single race.
34. You identify your race differently than others identify you.
35. You are told, “You aren’t like other Indians, Asians, Latinos...”
36. Your siblings identify their race differently than you do yours.
37. You have been called racial slurs of groups with which you do not share heritage.

38. Friends suggest that you date someone based upon the race or ethnicity with which they think you should identify.
39. Your parents identify your race differently than you identify.
40. You are told, “You aren’t Black, Latino, Asian...enough”
41. Your mother was assumed to be your nanny or babysitter.
42. A stranger assumes that your father is your “older boyfriend” or your mother is the “older woman.”
43. You were treated differently by relatives or your parents than a sibling on the basis of racial features.
44. You were well liked by peers but were not asked for dates.
45. You wish you were darker and try to get as much sun as possible.
46. People assume your father was in the military.
47. You have enrolled in Spanish language classes in order to develop the ability to say “Yes” to the question, “Do you speak the language?” and remove one of the blocks to authenticity.
48. Your otherwise friends become more distant when they think associating with you will make their racial authenticity or popularity questionable.
49. You have been knowingly approached and asked, “Your mother’s white (black, Asian), huh?”
50. You have tried to hide one or both parents from view of people who know you but are not your closest friends because you anticipate they will treat you differently.