

**WHY DOES SHE HAVE TO PROVE HER IDENTITY TO US?** 'Go ahead and speak Spanish' her peers would taunt.

**WHY DO WE QUESTION HER CULTURE?** 'You're too white' her classmates would say.

**WHY DOES IT MATTER?** You just don't look 'it' people would tease.

Hailey Webb's culture was always a question and never a fact.

Being biracial, Webb struggled with juggling between two identities, never being quite Hispanic enough to be accepted by others as Mexican but never pale enough to call herself white.

"People would compare their tan to mine as a child and make a joke about how funny it was that I was lighter than them when I'm supposed to be Hispanic. Later, these comments turned into straight, head on racist encounters leaving me silent and intimidated," Webb said. "I have always participated in traditions and practices within my culture as there are things I grew up with because I am Hispanic, but because of my skin color, because of my accent, because of the language I speak- I'm apparently not enough."

"Oh, you don't look Mexican". These were common words Webb has heard as far back as the second grade as she has had to constantly defend her culture.

"I know on every paper I have to fill out, I have to (say) I am white cause I look white, but when I start telling people that I am hispanic, people want me to prove it, like it's something I need to show them," Webb said. "I don't need to be told how I can act, who I can be, and how I can identify myself. While I look white, I am also hispanic and I am tired of how people perceive me rather than listening to me about who I am."

### YOU CAN'T SIT WITH US

Within these tight knit communities of cultures, there is often a physical stereotype some must meet to identify with their heritage. Many biracial people are shunned away from being accepted by others of the same race simply because they don't look Hispanic/Black/Asian/or white enough to identify with their culture.

"Not only was I told what I didn't know about my culture by those outside my heritage but I was also judged by my own community. I wasn't

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enough for them, I wasn't doing as much as I should have or I wasn't connected enough," Webb said. "People who don't even know me, people who don't know my life, my background, my family- had at some point set a rule that I have to be the image of my culture and if I don't match that, then I am not a part of it."

As racism alienates even those within a culture, The Pew Research center reports that 55% of multiracial adults report that they have been subjected to racial slurs or jokes, and about 1 in 4 have felt annoyed because people have made assumptions about their racial background.

"I acknowledge the fact that many others face worse than what I have dealt with, but it also doesn't mean that how others treat me makes it any less degrading," Webb said. "I feel like we were all taught about racism but in such an aspect like it (is) something people want to forget, it's a horrible part of our past, but that doesn't mean we should erase it. Not acknowledging it only makes the problem worse and allows the cycle to keep circulating."

### A MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS

While not a mental health diagnosis, many people of a multiracial heritage also experience feelings of self-doubt or personal crises in relation to how they identify themselves as their peers question their validity.

"I feel like I am not enough, it's not that I need others to know what I am, but in trying to identify my place, others have pushed me into losing what I know of myself. I get caught in a mindset of how I feel I need to make myself look and sound, but why is there a part to play," Webb said. "I am Hispanic, how can I possibly be told that I am not? I have never been a person that needs validation but with this, I find I even doubt myself."

In 2020, the US Census measured the multicultural population within America reached 33.8 million, which was a 276% increase from 2010. Another thing that is also rising is mental health

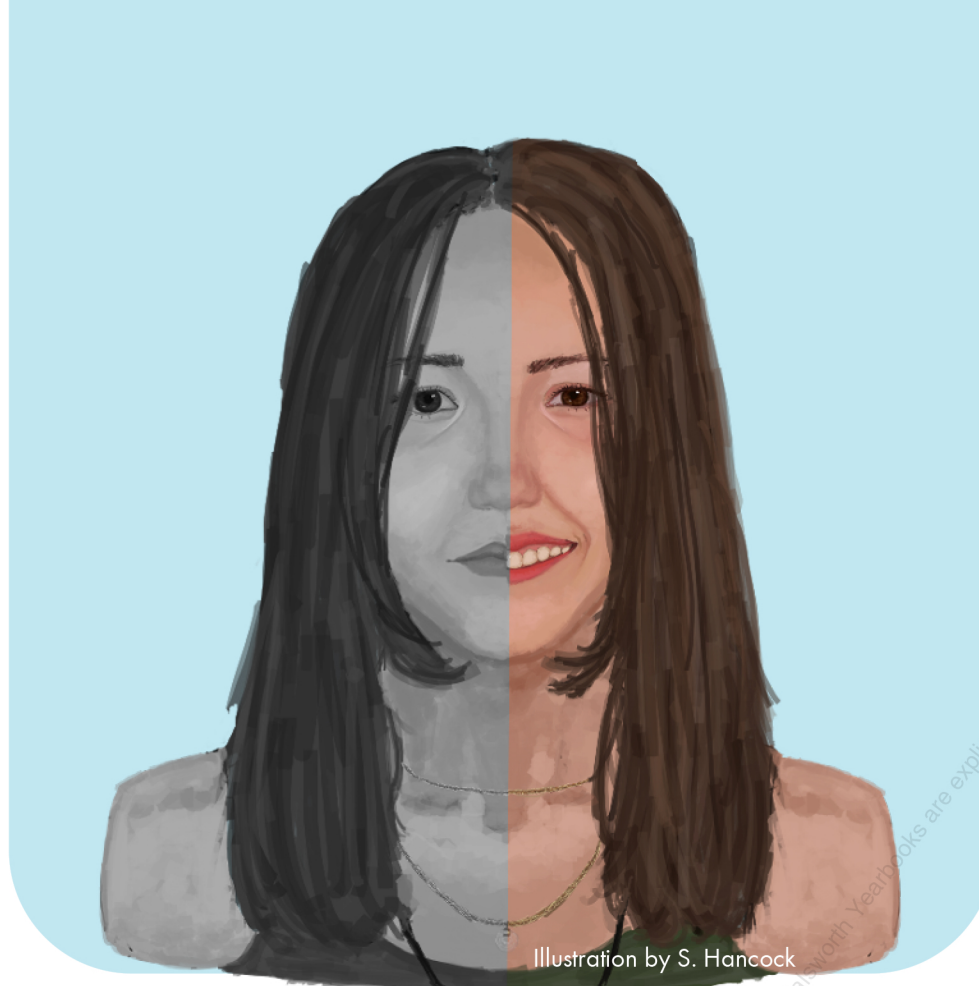


Illustration by S. Hancock

conditions of multiracial communities. Biracial youth are especially susceptible to symptoms of depression and anxiety as they learn to navigate school, their peers, and beginning to come to terms with their identity.

"I knew I was facing racism but at the same time I had never really acknowledged it too much until one thing came up and I broke down crying about everything because of how people use it against me," Webb said. "I try not to dwell on it, but I have broken down about it several times, and there are times where I (have) an identity crisis and it does wear me down."

### PICKING SIDES

It has only been 15 years since the U.S. Census Bureau first allowed Americans to choose more than one race when filling out their census form, yet many biracial students feel they need to identify based on their looks rather than through their culture.

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**"I definitely feel like it's challenging because I feel at some point, I have to choose one even though I don't want to. I have to choose that I am white because that's how I look and that's how people are going to perceive me, which kind of separates me as a person."**

point, I have to choose one even though I don't want to. I have to choose that I am white because that's how I look and that's how people are going to perceive me," Webb said. "Even though I don't look like it, (and) I don't speak spanish, I do identify myself as being hispanic. I am proud of being hispanic, I love that culture and I love learning that part of me."

### WHITE PASSING

As the term "white passing" gets thrown around, Webb noted how she understands her privilege to be considered white but also feels hurt as the phrase undermines the other parts of her culture, as being white is not the sole way she identifies herself.

"Looking white should not take away my culture, maybe I am not the most ideal image that people think of when they think of being Hispanic, but I will not have people take that away from me," Webb said. "I will not have family members from Mexico who fought to be here, be diminished

because of the way I look and how people want to perceive me."

### CULTURAL IDENTITY

As America has been a melting pot for diverse cultures, traditions and celebrations have become a significant part in Webb's identity and cultural expression.

"I think about my Nana often, she had done so many things to be a part of her community when she moved here. She's always been such a big part in helping us and doing traditions with us and being everything for me," Webb said. "I know that she wouldn't want me to get diminished by other people because they say who I'm not."

### A DIVERSE FUTURE

With each generation, America is becoming more diverse. Yet one's culture is still being determined by physical appearance. It's a cycle Webb hopes ends so herself and other biracial peers can find a sense of belonging. "I love my family, I love my traditions, I love the food I get to make with them, and I love learning the language, but because I look white I am not able to be a part of my community. That is what people tell me," Webb said. "When I state that I am Hispanic, others judge me, either saying I don't belong and I don't belong here with them. So where do I belong?"

### LEARNING TO LOVE YOURSELF

In a world that is so diverse, looking the part to fit in are standards Webb chooses to ignore as the idea that someone must look it to be it is a diluted way to view culture. "I am what I am and I shouldn't need to prove that to others. I love who I am, I love my culture, I wear what I wear and I look like what I look like," Webb said. "I don't want to treat my culture like a trophy prize, I will not make myself any more than I am."

# WHEN AM I ENOUGH

In a world where biracial students often have their cultural identities diminished, senior Hailey Webb has had to learned to navigate finding her identity while having others try to decide for her. (Story by T. Hutcheson)