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, the language I speak - I am apparently not enough.

Within these tight-knit communities of cultures, there is often a physical stereotype some must identify with and maintain. Many biracial people are shamed 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 enough for them, I wasn’t doing as much as I should, 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 other races treat me any less degrading.”

Webb said, “I feel like we were all taught about racism but in such an aspect like, it’s (a) 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.”

It’s 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.

“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 knowing what I am 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.”

In 2010, the US Census measured the multicultural population within America reached 33.8 million, which was a 270% increase from 2010. Another thing that is also rising is mental health 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.

“Definitely feel like I’m 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,” said Webb.

“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 is kind of separates me as a person.”

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 fits in are standards Webb chooses to ignore as the idea that someone must look 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.”