

# Welcome Yourself to Peculiarity

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May 7, 2019

I came out as queer and it never felt so underwhelming. Yes, I was fearful. Yes, I heard a plethora of homophobic comments and yes, it was a moment of painful growth and gut-wrenching anxiety. Yet, these feelings were familiar to me and somehow, I already had mechanisms for dealing with not fitting in. I was used to being peculiar.

In addition to being queer (in a gay relationship), I grew up biracially and biculturally. Navigating two worlds as an African-American and Mexican-American mixed child I was constantly coming out to people about my ethnicity. In a group of black people, I was fearful to share that I am black because my skin color is not dark. In a group of Mexicans, I was often the reason someone would nudge someone else because of a racist comment. “You know he is black right,” they would say in a tone as if I were going to round up my homies and jump them.

I was used to receiving the typical racist jokes from both sides of my family. My Mexican-American side would make jokes about how my hair did not get wet like the rest of family when we would go to the river - “nigger hair” they called it. My African-American side would poke fun at the rhythm at which I spoke English, commenting on how my intonation varied from the typical pronunciation. With one side of my family I was the only with an afro and with the other side of the family I was the only one with a lighter skin tone. I felt like I was not Black enough; I felt like I was not Mexican enough. From this situation, I learned what it meant to not fit into society’s rigid categories and how to advocate for myself in situations and empower myself with my own complexities. It doesn’t matter what they say about me; what matters is what I say about myself.

Within myself, I have multiple identities that intersect, my race, my ethnicity, and my sexual orientation. Before there was a voice within me that dictated my how each of my identities should be presented and performed in order to be received as the identities I held, but there were conflicts. The Mexican machismo ideology conflicted with the queer perspective I have on gender and the treatment of women. My sexual orientation clashed with the expectation I was going to marry a woman and reproduce my African-American genes. My Mexicaness and my Blackness existed within me, but in the lived reality these two communities coexist and often collide instead of existing harmoniously.

I had to grapple and bring peace to the competing identities that make me who I am. My combination of identities has enlightened me to look beyond societal categories, while also understanding how we operate within them. These conversations I have with my inner selves occupied a new space – a tertiary space, a space that many people have experienced but have overlooked it as a place of empowerment. Not everyone fits perfectly into a single social stratification, but intersect with many of them (some intersections are not desirable when considering those with privilege).

Living in this space is uncomfortable, but those who do are all fighting against the trope of the cisgender, straight, white, man. Women who are proud to be women and not men. Black people who are proud to be black and not white. Asexual people who are proud to be asexual and not sexual. Queer people of color who are proud to be queer people of color. The more pride we carry in our own being, the more we move away from the feeling of needing to be the cisgender, straight, white, man trope.

Those who choose to live in this space shall belong to a group called the Peculiar.

I choose the word peculiar, because of the ambiguity of the term itself. Usually holding a negative connotation, peculiar is a term that is defined as being something “strange, odd, particular, and special”. I chose this term to encapsulate the experiences of those who do not fit into the mainstream but nonetheless exist in it. The term invites society’s challengers, the brave, and the unapologetic to congregate and harmonize over differences.

### **The Peculiar:**

- have the courage to disidentify from mainstream culture
- have the integrity to always take pride in their intersectionality
- have the curiosity to dig deeper into other’s dimensions of identity

### **They Have the Courage to Disidentify from Mainstream Culture**

Queer Cuban theorist, Jose Esteban Munoz, said it first. He articulates the act of disidentification as the middle ground between identification which could be interpreted as assimilation and counter identification which can also be interpreted as anti-assimilation. “Disidentification is meant to be descriptive of the survival practices of minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian sphere that elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship.” These individuals are fearless participators in mainstream culture, but simultaneously finagle change. This situation prompts the Peculiar to actively disidentify with spaces that only seem to represent one identity. To disidentify, a Peculiar person could think along the lines of “I recognize that I am a woman, but I am also a black woman” and then that person could proceed to outline ways to make a space more inclusive. This disidentification is a vivid singling out of the self in a space of perceived

homogeneity, which can be daunting and invite humiliation, but ultimately a new perspective was offered.

### **They Have the Integrity to Always Take Pride in Their Intersectionality**

Recognizing intersectionality as an important idea has allowed many people to feel comfortable in their complexity, but in some ways, it can be quite difficult to find people who match all of these identities. Often times less favorable aspects of identity are left out from visibility to appear more privileged. For example, a woman who is biracial but passes as a white woman may not be open about her blackness to prevent her from being perceived with a negative stigma. Another example could be a straight passing male may not openly state openly share he is gay when with peers to stay reputable. These decisions to only show aspects of personalities that grant us privilege does not bring light to the aspects of ourselves that does not. The choice to be our whole selves in our success and our failures challenges false notions that success and failures are associated with only certain outcomes. Maintaining the composition of the diverse identities that a person has prevents society from applying stigmas and rigidity to the complex perspective and motivations any person may have.

### **Curious to Dig Deeper into Other's Dimensions of Identity**

The Peculiar understand that there are multiple layers of identity. There is the layer that is visible, the layer that is invisible, and the layer that is learned. Visible identities are those such as race, gender, spoken language and in some cases class. The invisible layers of identity include sexuality, hobbies, geographic location, religion, and work experiences. Etc. These identities are often discovered through small talk. The deepest layer of identity is learned about a person from a personal conversation you have with them where a person shares their life experiences and life

sentiment. I believe the most meaningful relationships develop from entering the deepest layer of identity. In this relationship building there is a chance that two people who do not share a visible identity can have a deeper connection rooted in the deepest dimension of identity. I feel that we don't take the time to dig deeper and allow our eyes to make judgements about who we would connect with and who we would not.

*The Peculiar Community welcomes you - your quirks, your soapbox, and your disagreement into an active form of engagement for the progress of our society at large.*