



MIXED

**Explore
and Celebrate
Your Mixed Identity**



**EMMA
SLADE EDMONDSON**

MIXED

The word 'MIXED' is rendered in a large, bold, 3D sans-serif font. The letters are grey with black outlines and shadows, giving them a three-dimensional appearance. The letter 'I' is uniquely designed, containing a white silhouette of a person with their arms raised in a celebratory gesture. The text is positioned above a grey diagonal shape that tapers from left to right.

**Explore
and Celebrate**

Your Mixed Identity

Illustrations by Tasia Graham



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To my northern grandparents, Granny Katy and Grandad Stephen, whose passion for teaching and inspiring young people, in turn, encouraged me to share what I've learnt with the next generation.



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About the Author

Emma Slade Edmondson is a sustainability consultant, writer, journalist, podcaster, TEDx speaker and presenter. A change maker and leader in the sustainable fashion and retail space for over ten years.

She is the co-host of the award-winning podcast *Mixed Up*, which is a deep dive into race and identity from the mixed perspective. Guests have included Mel B, Big Zuu, Jordan Stephens, David Oyelowo, Anton Ferdinand, Candice Brathwaite, Travis Alabanza, Lianne La Havas and Ben Bailey Smith, to name a few.

She founded Good Form, a creative strategic marketing agency working to elevate brands, initiatives and organizations that are committed to a more sustainable future. She is recognized as a *Forbes* 100 environmentalist and is deeply interested in an intersectional approach to environmentalism.

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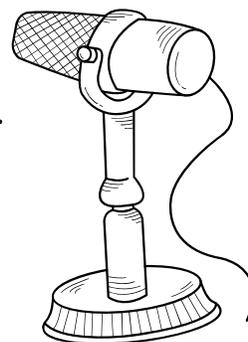
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Dear Reader,

I'm **Emma Slade Edmondson**, and I'm so happy to be writing to you.

I always find introductions a little difficult because (as I often say to other people when they ask me about myself) I wear a lot of hats. And by that, I mean I find it hard to describe exactly who I am and what I do clearly, and without too many words. But I'm going to give it a try – so here goes . . .

My name is Emma, and I am an author. I am **also** a podcaster, which means I get to chat to a lot of interesting people so that others can listen to our conversations.



Sometimes I'll interview people more formally, like you might see on TV or on the news, and other times we will just have more of a casual chat. But either way I **always, always** learn a lot from the people I talk to, especially when they have different life experiences from me. That's what I love most about making



podcasts – it allows you to connect with others and to hear really rich and interesting stories about their lives.

I think that listening to other people’s stories is a brilliant way to learn more about the world and the different people in it.

My podcast is called *Mixed Up* and – just like this book – it’s all about the experience of being mixed-race. I am mixed. I was born in Britain, and my mum and her family are white British, originally from Cornwall, but I also have Jamaican heritage, and I am also part German Swiss.

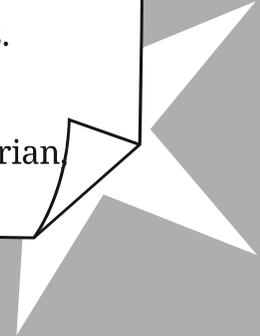
I am **all** of these things **at once**.



I am mixed-race.

My biological father’s family is from Jamaica. The north of Jamaica specifically, and they are Afro Jamaicans.

I recently also learnt that part of my ancestry is Nigerian.



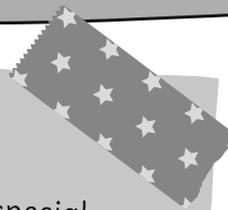
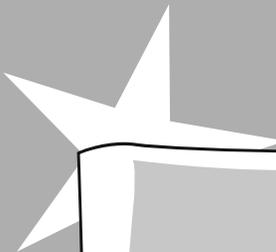


which makes a lot of sense because I LOVE jollof rice so much (honestly, I could scoff so many plates in one sitting, and always have to take a little packed lunch home in a container when I visit my mum-in-law).

I have a huge round Afro (which I almost always wear as brushed out as big as I can get it), and I have big brown eyes and brown skin. On the other hand, my brothers are white with blond-brown hair and my dad, who brought me up and has looked after me all my life, is white and northern. That means I am the only mixed-race person in my close family.

It has taken me some time to be comfortable with all of the things I am because I used to find that being mixed-race **can, not always**, but at some points in life, feel lonely – sometimes it might feel like you are the only one. But talking about being mixed with lots of different people, and especially people who are also of mixed heritage, has helped me HUGELY. It's helped me to understand how many mixed people there are in the world, and how we all have unique stories – stories that can bring us together.





HERITAGE:

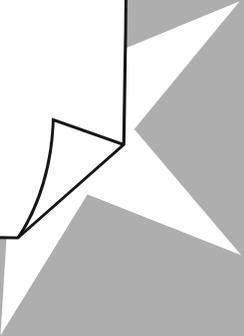
The word 'heritage' brings together lots of special things that are relevant to your family's past – stories, traditions, values – which come from your family and their culture. Your heritage can help you feel connected to your living family and also past members of your family. Understanding your heritage can make you feel proud of where you come from. And discovering more about it can be really interesting!



Through my podcast, I have spoken to footballers, historians, nurses, actors and actresses, and even famous singers and chefs, like Mel B and Big Zuu.

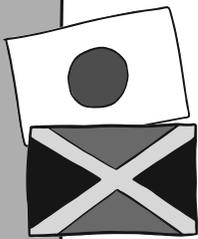
We have shared stories. We've cried together, when talking about things that have been difficult for us, times when we've been misunderstood or hurt by feeling excluded by different groups. But we've also laughed together, discussing shared experiences.

It's been interesting to find out about how different it is growing up mixed in other countries outside of the UK. We'll talk more about the differences we

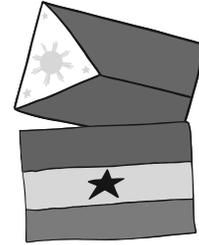




experience because of geography, location and exactly where we all grow up later in the book . . . but for now I want to finish this letter by telling you about one of the most important things I've learnt through making my podcast – mixed-race people come in all different forms.



Quite often on TV or in the papers and magazines (especially in the UK) we are portrayed as having one Black parent and one white parent. But I've met people who are Japanese-Jamaican, people



who are Filipino-Ghanaian, people who are Mexican-Italian and someone just recently who is Iranian-Venezuelan. We are all so different, but in some respects, there are many things that unify us, and I want to talk about both our differences and our similarities in this book.



Because our stories are unique, and there's no one way to be mixed, I've asked a few of my mixed-race friends to write letters that you'll see throughout the book. I have always loved letter writing and pen pals, so I thought this would be the perfect way we can all learn together, from experiences that are not our own. You





might find that you can relate to the experiences of my friends, or that what they're saying prompts you to think about your own identity differently.

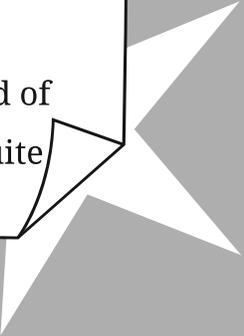
To tell you the truth, I've been on a bit of a journey with my identity. In fact, if I'm really honest with you, I am still on that journey. I believe that we may all be on a journey with our identities for our whole lives.

And that's OK.



It's actually a good thing because being willing to grow and learn about yourself is a really positive thing that can give you a real sense of pride. It can make you feel more aware and more confident to talk to other people about their own background and their cultures, which also helps us all be more considerate and understanding of one another.

I've had such a positive experience making the podcast, that I decided to write this book to share the things I learnt along the way. This book is one that I wish I'd had when I was younger. Having this information would have really helped me feel more confident and proud of myself. It would have answered questions I didn't quite





know how to ask the friends and family around me.

I hope that this book inspires you to be bold in the discovery of who you are, how you want to describe yourself and put yourself out into the world. I want it to help you begin to answer questions that might feel difficult right now. Use what you read here about other people's experiences to support you in pushing back against the idea that you have to **choose** one side of your heritage over another, or that you need to be what other people say you are versus who you understand yourself to be.

I want to tell you that no matter where you may go or what you may hear, you are **complete** just as you are. You are **enough**. Not half of one thing and half of another, or more of one thing and too little of another simply because someone else says so (unless of course you decide that that is how you would like to describe yourself). In which case that's just fine.



**Who you are is
really up to you.**

Emma Slade Edmondson x x







1

The Question

Dean Atta

is a British poet – his poetry often explores questions about identity and social justice.

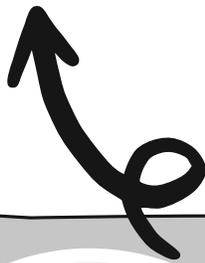
Dear Reader,

Dean here, nice to meet you.

When I was ten, people often asked me where I was from. Sometimes, they wanted to know which part of London I was from, but usually, they wanted to know about my heritage.

***My mum's family is from Cyprus,
and my dad's family is from Jamaica.***

That's an interesting mix.



It is an interesting mix. Later, I learnt that Cyprus and Jamaica were once part of the British Empire as colonies – both countries have a complicated history with the United Kingdom.

I didn't visit Cyprus until I was fifteen, and I didn't visit Jamaica until I was an adult. When I was ten, what I knew about Cyprus and Jamaica came from family, family friends, schoolteachers, and school friends, as well as what I watched on TV and heard on the radio.

I didn't have access to the internet back then, so I couldn't just look it up. But I could've gone to the library to borrow books about Cyprus and Jamaica, or I could've turned to the encyclopaedias my mum bought me. These big books, full of facts, started with the letter A and went to the letter Z. However, I didn't look in Book C for Cyprus or Book J for Jamaica because I'm dyslexic and found reading difficult back then. My identity felt as jumbled as words on the page, especially new words. And at ten, so many things were new to me. I often heard new words I didn't understand in the languages my family spoke



PATOIS:

Patois is a language spoken by Jamaicans that is a combination of English and West African languages.

around me – Cypriot Greek and Jamaican **Patois**. But my family in London could all speak English as well, so it wasn't until

I visited Cyprus at fifteen and met family members who didn't speak English that I felt excluded from conversations.

If I could give one piece of advice to anyone with another language in their family, it would be to learn that language. It will help you connect with your family and others who share your heritage. It could make visiting a country of your heritage easier and more fulfilling. You may consider moving there for a period of your life.

If I could give a second piece of advice to all mixed people, it would be to ask your elders (older family members) about their lives. When I began to ask my grandparents, great-aunts and great-uncles about

their lives, I found I understood my parents, aunts and uncles better, and in doing so,



I understood myself better.



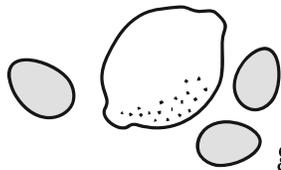
Our elders are like the internet, or the encyclopaedias I described earlier. Full of information. But many won't share their wisdom with us unless we ask them. We may not always agree with our elders' opinions or follow the same customs and traditions, but it is worth trying to understand why our elders think and do what they do.

Here are some ideas of questions you could ask your elders:

- **What was your life like at my age?**
- **Who raised you, and what were they like?**
- **Do you have any favourite memories?**
- **Will you teach me a recipe that's special to you?**

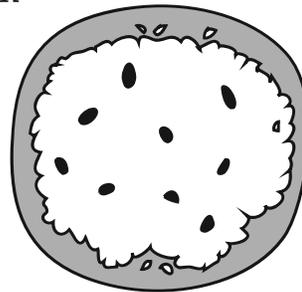
I hope asking them these questions will help you feel closer to them and lead you to a deeper understanding of your family as a whole.

Food has always been my special connection to my family and heritage. I learnt to make egg-lemon soup the way my Cypriot grandmother

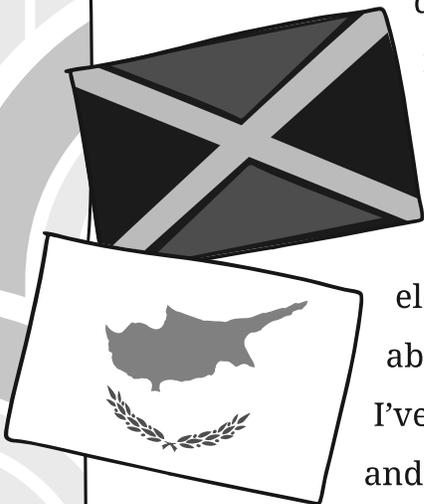


made it, and rice and peas the way my Jamaican grandmother taught me. I've

also taught myself to make other Cypriot and Jamaican



dishes from recipe books and the internet.



I know not everyone has their elders around. When I haven't been able to get answers from elders, I've turned to books, films, TV shows and the internet to fill the gaps in my understanding. But I've realized



***there's no such thing as a
complete or total understanding
of yourself or your heritage.***

And what you think of as fact is often more complicated than an encyclopaedia, elder or any book can explain.

Dean Atta x

'What are you?'

OR

'Where are you from?'

is probably (I'm going to bet) a question you've been asked before.

It's certainly a question I've been asked many times, and when I talked to some of my friends and the awesome people who wrote the letters in this book, they all agreed that a version of this question is up there as one of the things they are asked most frequently.

But what does this question really mean? What information are people actually looking for when they ask this?

Well, this is interesting because it's what we call a loaded question. That means that although on the face of it's just one question, if you look a little closer it's actually loaded up with many questions layered on top of one another – a bit like a **question burger**.





For example, when people ask you **'Where are you from?'**, they could be asking what town or city you live in. They could be asking where you were born, they could be asking what country your parents were born in, or, they could be asking what race or ethnicity you are. Or like Dean mentioned in his letter, they could be asking about your heritage and where your parents and their parents were born (without explicitly asking).

QUICK DICTIONARY PULL-OUT

RACE

The idea of race as we know it today was created by European philosophers as a system to identify and group people across the world based on the way they look, whether it's their skin colour, hair texture, facial features or eye shape. This way of grouping people has been used as a way for people in one group to falsely claim that they are better than, and more deserving, than those in another group.

People are often grouped into categories of race like:
Black, Asian, Mixed or White.

People who are **racialized** as Black or brown are often asked this whether or not they are mixed, but I think the reason people often ask this question of mixed people is because it really is human nature to want to label and sort things into groups and categories that feel easier to understand. Many people might at first find it difficult to place mixed-race people, because we don't look like the people they are already personally familiar with or because they are used to being able to decide who they think someone is just from how they look or sound.

QUICK DICTIONARY PULL-OUT

RACIALIZED

*The way people categorize or divide people into groups according to their race. For example – I am mainly **racialized** by people as Black because they see visual cues like my Afro and my nose shape and my skin colour. I am actually mixed-race (Black Jamaican and white British), but because people tend to categorize me as Black based on what they see, I am most often ‘racialized’ by the world as Black.*

In my experience, when people ask ‘Where are you from?’, they often hope you’ll tell them about your ethnicity or heritage because this is one of the things they might use to try to understand the kind of person they think you are. Some people will be asking because they genuinely want to know more about you, but it might also make you feel uncomfortable – and if that’s the case it’s OK to not answer if you don’t want to. It’s also OK to not answer if you feel like you don’t know the answer to the question.

Sometimes, if you respond to 'Where are you from?' by telling the person where you live or where you grew up, they might say, 'But where are you **really** from?'. This question makes me feel quite uncomfortable. I think it makes me feel like this because it feels a little like they are digging for something, or that they are not satisfied with the answer you've already given.

In my opinion, if this question makes you feel uneasy, it is OK to either:

1. **Avoid answering it, or**
2. **Ask them a question in response.**

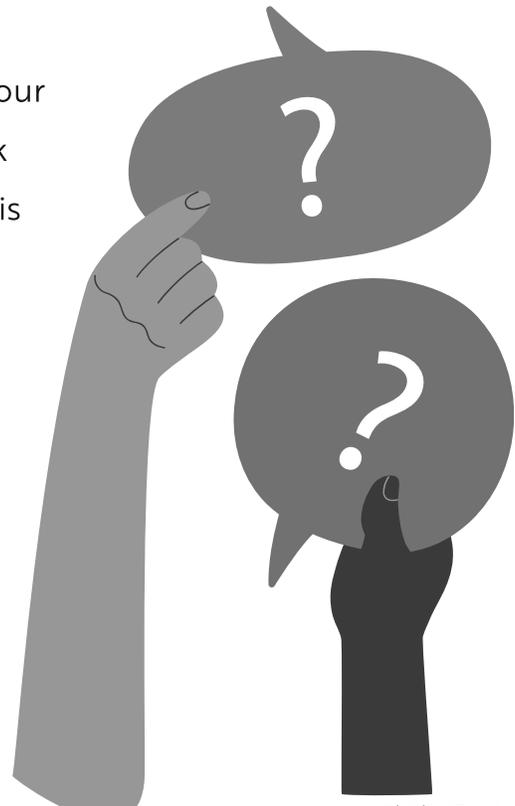




So – instead of answering – you may want to respond with something like:

- 1. I'm not sure what exactly you mean by that, because I just explained where I'm from. I'm a bit confused by your question.***
- 2. I don't feel comfortable giving you more information about that at the moment.***
- 3. Maybe you could tell me a little bit about yourself and where you're from first?***

It is human psychology to want to 'organize' things in our minds, and in our world, so that it's easier for us to think about and understand. And in fact, this is exactly where **stereotypes** come from (this is something we will talk more about a bit later).



QUICK DICTIONARY PULL-OUT

STEREOTYPE

A belief about a type of person or a group that is over simplified, not very thoughtful or considered, but nevertheless widely held and quite fixed in the minds of people.

Mixed-race people can be difficult to categorize because it doesn't feel as if we fit neatly into any of the boxes people are working with. Being mixed-race means that we don't have one **ethnicity**. Often, we may have a complex identity that combines two or more ethnicities or cultural backgrounds. Like Dean was explaining in his letter, we may have two or more different traditions, religious practices, languages, or even favourite foods that our parents or the elders in our family have shared with us. These cultures can be very different from one another because they come from parts of the world with very different traditions. And on top of that, mixed-race people might not look the way that someone might expect us to.

QUICK DICTIONARY PULL-OUT

ETHNICITY

A group of people who share the same heritage, background, traditions, customs and beliefs. Someone's ethnicity is different from their race, as it includes the society and culture a person belongs to. An ethnic group will have a shared history and a sense that they belong together.

The funny thing is that people often use the term 'ambiguous' to describe how they think mixed people look. This means they think our race is not easily identifiable: it's not immediately clear which race we belong to.

Personally, I don't like this term because it can sometimes feel quite dismissive and a bit negative, but I think it's a good way to illustrate how frustrated people can be when they don't know how to place you. They often feel they **need** a label.



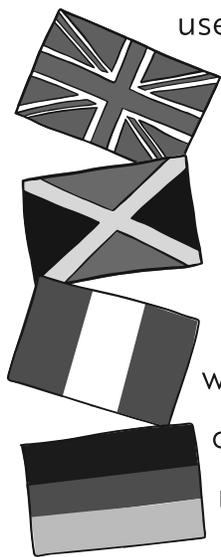
The important thing to remember here is that only YOU are responsible for, and capable of, labelling your own identity. It is something that belongs to you.

Most of the time this kind of questioning – asking things like ‘Where are you from?’ – comes from a curiosity about your identity that people have when they see you and it’s tempting for them to start writing a story about this in their heads. But no matter how unsure you feel about where you fit in, as you are growing and learning about yourself (and maybe also your parents’ heritage and histories), it really is up to you to define the answer to this question, whenever you’re ready. Like Dean says in his letter, there may be a lot of questions you have around who you are, and your identity may feel ‘jumbled’ to you at the moment, but the good news is that there are lots of interesting ways to explore your identity – I hope this book can help you with that!

When I was younger I used to think a lot about how I didn't look that much like anyone in my family. Picture me – big Afro, brown skin, triangular nose shape and deep dark brown eyes. Now picture my mum, my two brothers and the man who has been a dad to me all my life – all white with blond-brown hair and blue eyes. I think you can imagine the questions running through other people's minds when they saw us out together as a family.



Now that I am older, I see that I do look a lot like my mum – although our skin colour is different, I have her smile, her chin and the exact same dimples on either side of my mouth when I smile. I also have a lot of her mannerisms. But when I was younger people often used to ask me if I was adopted. First they would ask ‘Where are you from?’ and then sometimes, ‘What are you?’ And, if they saw my parents, the question might become ‘Are you adopted?’ I remember that sometimes this made me feel embarrassed and even occasionally ashamed. I’m still not absolutely sure why I felt this way, but no one likes to be pointed out or picked as the odd one out in a group, and especially not in their own family. It can be embarrassing to be asked questions in a crowd while people watch, and that is sort of what this kind of questioning felt like to me. I wanted to get away from whoever was asking the question as quickly as possible or change the subject.



When people see our parents and then they can't quite do the calculation to work out our heritage, they often lurch to other explanations.

If you have ever experienced something like this and found it upsetting or frustrating, I'm sorry. If so, you might like to do the talking activity below with your parents or even with a friend.

The activity over the page is designed to help you to practise talking about your identities and yourself. It should hopefully help you be firm with other people about who you are, and allow you to stand up for yourself – especially if you are uncomfortable when being asked questions like the ones I described above. With practice and repetition, this will eventually make you feel more confident.

EXERCISE NO.1

TALKING ABOUT OUR MIXED IDENTITIES

Try to answer the following questions on your own, and then find someone you feel comfortable with to try talking your answers through with them.

- **What words would you use to describe yourself, your race and your heritage?**
- **Do you think this is different from how your parents, family or friends would describe you? If so, how?**
- **How do those differences in your description and their description make you feel?**
- **It can be really difficult to hear someone describe you in a way that you're not comfortable with. How do you react if you hear someone describe you differently from the words you've used above?**
- **Do you feel more drawn to one side of your heritage than another?**

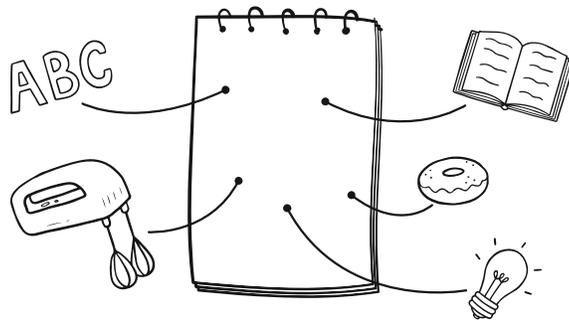
- **How do you see yourself? What words spring to mind when you think about the kind of person you are? Who are your role models? Who do you look up to? What inspires you to do the things you do? What foods do you like? Where do you feel most comfortable, and who with? How do you feel about the way you look?**
- **Do you think this is different from how others see you?**
- **Do you have any words that people have used to describe you that make you feel bad or negative about your identity? Why do you think this is?**
- **Notice what words you use to describe yourself. Why do these words feel right?**

QUICK DICTIONARY PULL-OUT

IDENTITY

How you see who you are and how you fit into the world. This can be based on lots of different things – including what you look like, how you are racialized, your gender, ethnicity, your religious faith, dis/ability, languages you speak, where you grew up in the world, or even where your parents were born.

What do you know about your heritage? For example, are there any foods, recipes, languages or stories you know? Are there things you don't know that you would like to? Grab a piece of paper and write out a list of them. (We will come back to these later when we get to 'The Chat'.)



Microaggressions and how to deal with them

Sometimes these actions or words might feel subtle, or they might be difficult to understand, but they will almost always make you feel bad.

The questions

'What are you?'

and

'Where are you from?'

are considered to be microaggressions, but another example might be someone suggesting that your hair looks better when it is straightened as opposed to when it's curly or in an Afro. The reason this is a negative and unfriendly comment is because it comes from the idea that straighter hair looks better than Afro or curly hair. This is a European and white beauty standard, which has been reinforced to us through books and art throughout recent history. Because straight hair is more commonly found on white people, and of course none of us can change the way our hair grows out of our head, it's a way of making a racist comment that may make you feel 'less than'. It is not necessarily always super obvious, but it does come from a racist idea.

Thankfully, people are becoming more and more aware that making these kinds of comments to schoolmates or family, or even friends, is inappropriate. But there is still work to be done –



***I want to empower you to help others
get better at recognizing how
their comments and conversations
might make you feel.***

You can do that simply by practising expressing yourself aloud – describing yourself however you feel comfortable so people can follow your lead.

QUICK DICTIONARY PULL-OUT

MICROAGGRESSION

Microaggression is a term for commonly used language or behaviour that can be intentionally or unintentionally unfriendly or negative in its attitudes towards groups who are already being treated as less important than others by society.

We call this marginalization.

Examples of groups that are often marginalized might be:

1. Disabled people
2. People who are not white
3. People from the LGBTQIA+ community

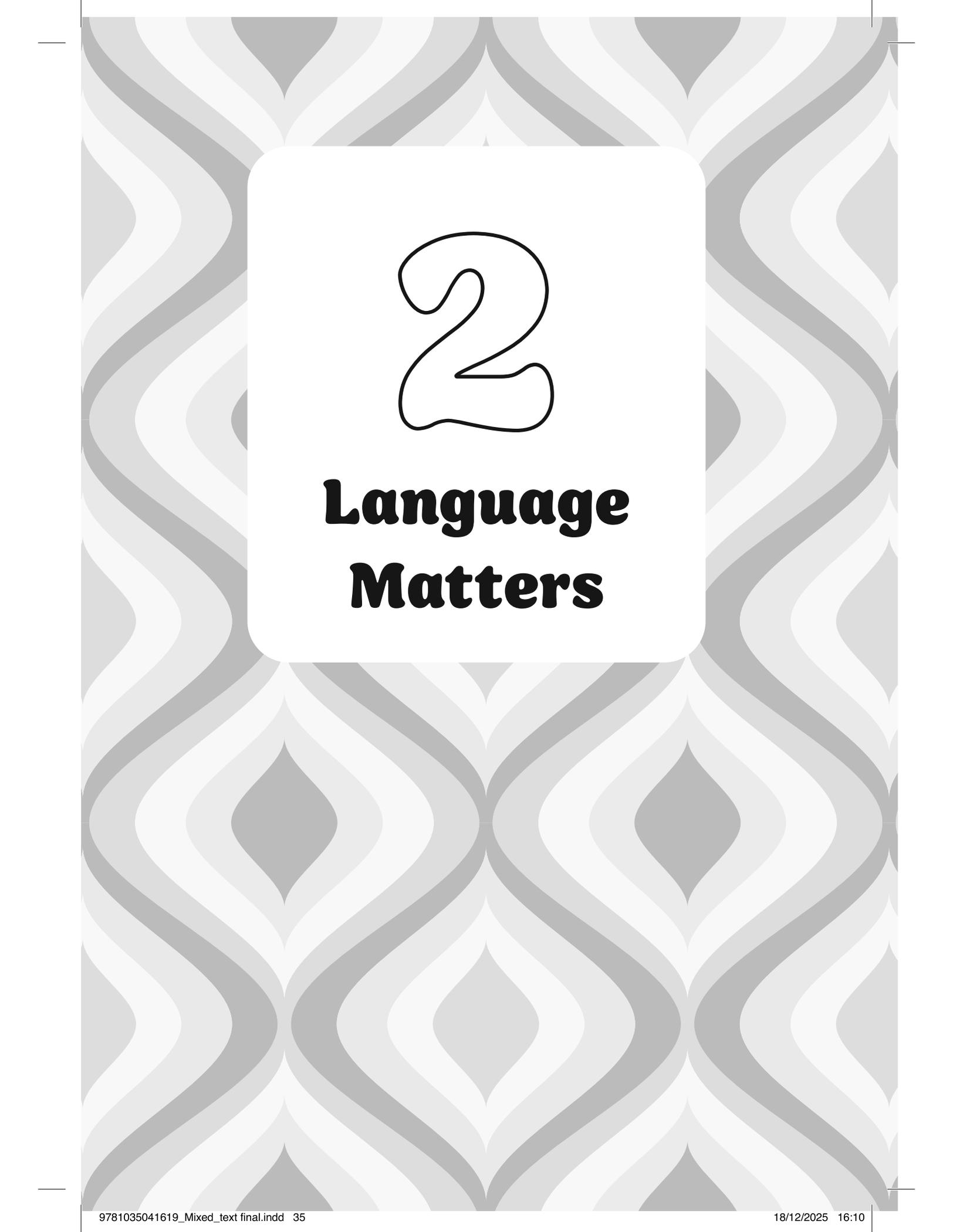
There are many more examples but these are three good examples to help you understand this term.

Overt aggressions/ macroaggressions and overt racism

One of my friends, Becca Dudley, who is a reggae DJ, recently told me that because she is very fair-skinned, she often has to explain that she is mixed-race and that her grandad is from Annotto Bay in Jamaica. One day when she was explaining this, she was aggressively told by someone that 'I don't care what you say' because 'you are not mixed, you are a white girl'.

This response to her talking about her identity can be described as a 'macroaggression' or a more overt racism. This is because the person is directly denying or arguing with Becca's identity and heritage even though she's already been clear about her grandad.





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**Language
Matters**

Tori Tsui

**is a Hong Kong-born environmental
campaigner, award-winning author,
and advisor based in England,
fighting for a greener future.**

Dear Reader,

My name is Tori Tsui,

When I was younger, I used to believe that I was divisible; that my identity could be broken down into lots of different pieces. After all, my mum was born in Hong Kong and my dad was born in England. She was Chinese and he was English. I'm 50% this and 50% that.

However, thinking this way made me feel alien and like I didn't belong. It meant I never quite fit in with people who were 100% English or 100% Chinese.

I wasn't 'enough' of either and I never quite felt at home around people who belonged exclusively to one group. I could relate to people over some things, but not everything.



Over the years I've come to appreciate that I'm 100% me. I've learnt that I am whole and enough as I am. These days I call myself Eurasian – which means I have a mix of European and Asian parentage – because it feels like a term that fits for me, one that allows me to be proud of my mixed-race identity and one that honours my dual heritage. And through this I've come to celebrate the beautiful ways in which these two cultures collide and mix together. I no longer see them as separate and I no longer believe that I'm half of anything. I am wholly human as I am.

Sure, I might not fully 'fit' into any one culture. But what's beautiful is that I fully relate to everyone who finds the experience of relating really tough. I find comfort in talking to other mixed-race people or even people who have moved from their home countries to a new one. There is so much belonging in the feeling of not belonging at all. And it is a unique experience that allows us to celebrate just how lucky we are to have grown up with these unique life experiences.

So here's to us, being fully ourselves, 100%.

Lots of love, **Tori** 

***It's really important to be thoughtful
about the language we use,***



particularly when we are talking about other people. The words we choose give them an idea about how we feel about them – even when we don't mean anything bad. If someone says something about someone else's skin colour or uses the term 'mixed' in a careless or unkind way, it might hurt their feelings or make them feel like they don't belong.

***Using thoughtful language
helps us show respect
and kindness.***

It says, 'I notice who you are, and every part of you is important to me'. When we use thoughtful language, we show others how to do the same, which helps make

everyone feel welcome and safe, regardless of where their family comes from.

The language and the labels we use to describe things tend to change over time, and often quite drastically as the years pass.

This is very much true of the words we use now to describe mixed-race people and experiences. Some of the things that your grandparents or the older people in your life might have told you they used to say when they were younger – and that they felt were commonly used and ‘acceptable’ – will very much not be seen as acceptable today. **You** might even be **much more** aware of modern labels and names for things (and why we do and don’t use certain words) than they are.

I’m almost certain you will have heard expressions or words used by older people before that you know today are racial slurs, or that are harmful and disrespectful.

And undoubtedly there will be words we use today, and even in this book, that may become outdated at some point. We may, I hope, with more conversation,