

I am Just What I am:

Things Learned from Being “Half” in Japan

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I was born and raised in Tokyo as a mixed boy. My mother is Japanese, and my father is Argentine. Now, I have a short question. What was on your mind when you saw me as a speaker? Did you think “Oh, he looks like ‘Half’ so he would speak English well” or, did you think “It’s not fair that he is in this contest”? I do not blame you if you feel this way, but let me ask you another question. Have you ever imagined what it is like to be a mixed person, or a “Half” in Japan?

What I find the most difficult about being a “Half” in Japan is the fact that people do not accept me easily when I enter a new environment. Whenever I move into new surroundings, I tend to feel uneasy because I feel like I am being judged by my appearance. I feel like I am simply categorized as a “mixed” person, and other factors that compose important parts of me are ignored. People often tell me that they are jealous of me because I am “Half”. Sometimes, I feel like those people think that a mixed person lives with many advantages. That is not true, however. People with mixed race live with a lot of struggles.

In my research on mixed people’s experiences, I came across a website called “Half Talk.” Reading life experiences of mixed people on the website, I found that a lot of them shared the hard feelings that I experienced, and often escaped Japan seeking a better environment. Learning this, I was reminded of my experience in Argentina.

When I was a fourth-year elementary student, I moved to Argentina with my family and stayed there for one year. On my first day at a local school, soon after I was introduced to a class, many students rushed to talk with me even though I could hardly communicate with them. Unlike people in Japan, my Argentine classmates did not seem to care how I looked. At that moment, I felt like I was accepted. During my time in Argentina, I was never treated as an “outsider.” It was one of the rare times in my life that I was free from worries related to my mixed race.

While there is an increased calls for diversity and globalization, it appears that Japan is not the ideal environment for mixed people to live in. They often feel that people treat them as if they do not belong to Japanese communities.

What could we do to better the environment for mixed people then? While it is understandable that you have certain images towards mixed people, I believe it is important for you to treat them as individuals before categorizing them as “Half.” Doing this could be a first step for Japanese society to be a more comfortable environment for mixed people. This could also eventually turn Japan into a “global” society.

Here are some facts about me that the label, “Half” does not describe. These are the parts of me that you might have overlooked when you simply saw me as a “Half” person. I was born and raised in Tokyo. I speak Japanese as my mother language. I’m practicing Krump dance, which is one of the street dances. One of my favorite things is eating Yakiniiku with my friends after exams and dance recitals.

This is me. This is what I am. Don’t label me as “Half”. We humans are a complex existence, composed of many aspects that can be seen and cannot be seen. Our one and only existence cannot be described with any labels.