

# A Unique Discovery

by Jazmine Smith

My life as a person and a student has been anything besides a normal pathway of development. This is due to the many unique situations that have happened within my life. However, I am not here to give a whole lifelong story about how I developed and my educational pathway. Instead, I am focusing on my first semester here at California Lutheran University as a graduate student. More specifically, the push and knowledge that was given to me from my counseling program which has allowed me to discover more about myself: my hidden identity!

To give some background, prior to being a graduate student, I always thought that my identity was how it was stated by my family. According to my family and my own knowledge, my identities are that I am a first-generation student, I am female, I am low-income, I am first-generation to obtain a career, I am from a White-Irish background, I am a person who struggles with mental health, and I am heterosexual. Honestly, there should be no reason for me to question any of these identities, right? However, something always felt off to me within my family. I have always questioned my racial background about being White and Irish. This might seem an odd thing to question, as growing up your family usually talks to you about this, or you figure it out on your own due to life experiences. Yet my family just passed down what was told to them. Also, due to the unique aspects of my life, I was not able to figure out this identity I had until way later in life.

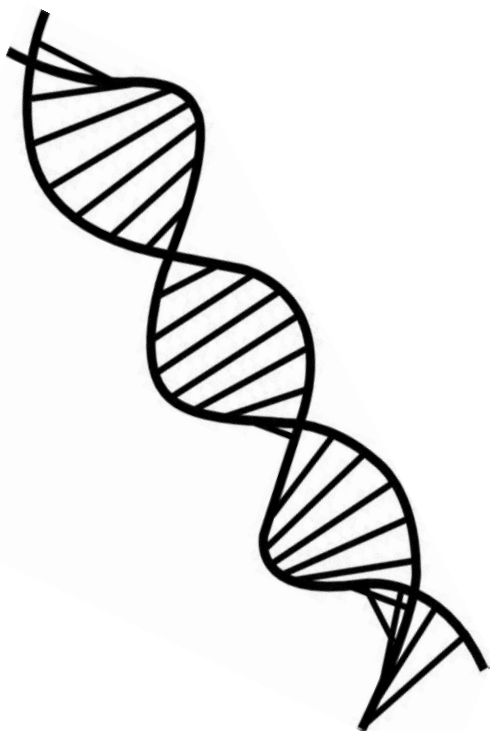
I questioned this due to not looking like my grandmother, who did tell my mother and I about the Irish history that we have. Again, my mother totally believed that this was our identity since there was no other possible answer. Yet, growing up, I always knew that my mother and I were darker skinned and seemed to be different compared to her.

Of course, everyone is screaming right now reading this, “Well what about the men in your family?” Well, there aren’t any biological men within my family. “How come you don’t take a DNA test?” Well, like many other people, there was a fear of finding something out. To add on, my mother did not have her father within her life, and as we decided to have a conversation about this topic, we discovered that my grandmother never told us who the father actually was. My mother also said that my father was just a random white man that left us before I was born. My family barely knew these men, but they were positive that we were still fully White and Irish biologically. Looking over to the DNA test aspect, my mom always feared me doing one and having our information sold on the dark web or something. So, I was very anxious to take this step for myself, since I also grew the same fears as my mother.

This fear from my mother and my own anxiety controlled my life to not seek an answer. Yet I still had to always be questioning myself and having others question me as well. I always just stuck with what I was told, even though I knew I had this questioning feeling every time I had to talk about myself. Being a graduate student now allowed me to decide to finally just take the DNA test.

The class I was taking my first semester focused on cultural diversity, not only within the future populations that we would be working with, but also within ourselves. My final for this class was to talk about my identity development throughout my life, but since I always questioned myself, I knew this paper would be a difficult task for myself. I always saw my peers confidently talking about knowing their background and their culture, and I would be like, “Well.... I am here I guess?” I finally decided that I am an adult, and this is graduate school where I am learning about not only myself, but my whole career choice. As a future counselor, how am I supposed to be a model for students if I don’t even fully know myself?

Therefore, the discussions, topics, and information from this class allowed me to spend the money and finally take the DNA test to end all my questions. However, this would not be a unique discovery if all my questions were fully answered. My questions are just as wide open as they were before I took the test. I found out that I am half White-European and half Mexican, having both aspects from both of my parents.



The DNA report told me that my father was mixed and my mother as well. However, this was not what I totally expected since I thought my mother was fully White, and maybe my father was Mexican? I finally discovered why I always questioned myself, since I knew something was different with my mother and I within the family.

However, this just opened more questions about my mother's background, since the report said she was mixed. Also, it filled me with this question of whether my grandmother was biologically related to us.

I am still sitting here with many questions in my mind about who I am, since this was a lost part of me that I now must see if I can gain back. Currently, my mother and I are the only living "Smith" relatives within our family. There are reasons for my lack of family within this story. For one, sadly, we lost my grandmother to cancer a few years back. Secondly, my grandmother is the only one who had and knew about the rest of our extended family. However, I was told that there is a reason we aren't in contact with them due to bad history. Now, there is no way to find out much more, since who can we actually ask? Instead, we are focusing on moving forward and trying to see how we can identify ourselves now. We don't fully know our feelings about how to identify ourselves, but what we do know is that we still hold the cultural aspects we grew up with, and maybe there are some new ones that we can find.

