

My TEDx Talk

By Niya Picket-Miller, PhD



I am an academic. As such, giving a TED or TEDx talk about a complex theory I developed or expanded upon is a reasonable fantasy to have. Yet, I never imagined giving a TEDx talk only two years into my post-doctorate studies on a topic having nothing to do with my research. I was to talk about my heart; and I don't mean my major blood-pumping organ. I am referring to my children and my God-gifted calling for albinism advocacy.

Through a thread of vulnerable narratives about raising my seven-year-old albinic son and non-albinic twelve-year-old daughter, I spoke about my coming-of-age (of sorts) with understanding albinism and learning how to communicate about it with my children and others. Moreover, I talked of my wrestling with the complexities of the condition and teaching my son to understand his dual identities of otherness, being an albinic black male and vision impaired.

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My talk was not the academic achievement I once imagined. It was more. While speaking, I felt vulnerable and empowered at the same time. Saying aloud—publicly—how hurtful comments and stares at my blonde-haired, blue-eye black son made me feel was cathartic. From the iconic red dot, I explained how stereotypes and assumptions about the meaning of pigmented black skin are damaging. I also spoke about widely

held negative ideas about albinism and the feelings of insecurities once growing in me as a mother of an albinic child.

I prepared for five months. I needed to be comfortable with hearing my voice tell the stories on May 4, 2019. Honestly, I was nervous about my honesty. I fathomed those (family and friends) who commented on my son's appearance (in the early days) would find the narratives tough to hear in the present day. Nevertheless, I talked for thirteen minutes or so.

I was and continue to be challenged by albinism. But, there is in me a burgeoning resolve to raise well-adjusted and tenacious children that empower me. While I don't have albinism, it is still a part of my purpose. It makes me think more creatively, and speak more inclusively and publicly.

I have told my kids that I would climb mountains for them. I hope they perceive the TEDx stage as one that I've scaled and feel inspired to know they too can climb higher.

Watch my TEDx talk here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQ0u5AOIuII&feature=youtu.be>

