

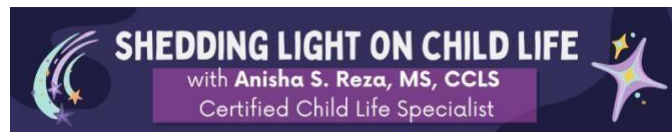
Welcome to Shedding Light on Child Life, a podcast associated with Childlifewithanisha.org by Anisha Reza. You can find content here presented through the lens of a person of color, career changer, from medicine to child life, exploring the intersection of diversity, student experiences, and psychosocial health and advocacy for children.

Hi everyone, welcome back to Shedding Light on Child Life. This is actually the first episode I'm recording post launch and post getting over a cold and not having a voice. So it has been super exciting and humbling that it's out there. I've already been able to make a lot of cool connections and I welcome more of those if you see a way that your work or expertise could fit into my mission, which we'll get into in this episode.

Anyways, I am glad that you're listening from however you found it. And I actually had already recorded my episode that I wanted to release next, but the sound quality wasn't there. So I'm re-recording and also had a different intention to talk about my mission and goals for working with students and a little bit more about my journey from medicine to child life and how I rediscovered my goals in my career and how that led me to a career change and the complicated emotions and professional challenges of that journey. So that's definitely coming at a later point. But I think part of why I was shying away from hitting record for a little bit for the next episode was that it kind of hit me in a different way that this project is going to be difficult at times.

So some of you might have found it because you know me in some capacity, whether we've crossed paths in some way, whether personally or professionally, others of you are listening who know nothing about me, but I am very much intending to share some pretty vulnerable stuff on here. And I was feeling all of that before this week, so it is January 24th, Friday. And Monday, President Trump was inaugurated and there has been a lot of anti-immigrant legislation and fear-mongering and I'm going to be pretty honest here in this episode that I really did not intend to get into that kind of level of topics and I really want to emphasize I have no intention at all to get political in this podcast, but it's inherently political when diversity equity, inclusion is being targeted and as someone with a voice and you know trying to be careful of what I'm sharing and knowing I do have a unique perspective here and quite literally that's the whole point of my publication is to share stories and be real so I definitely wanted to build a bit before I got into what I might naturally share today so please bear with me and I am not a news outlet, I am not a political page that parses down the news. I've been seeing bits and pieces of what's going on legislation-wise, but we'll get into that in a moment.

But firstly, I just want to acknowledge that I feel very important responsibility with this new platform and definitely felt pulled in a few different directions this week with feeling personally like I have unfollowed a lot of news outlets for many years now for my mental health, but then having this platform, I was like, maybe I need to be able to parse through it and speak on it with real time knowledge of what's developing, but that gets away from my mission.



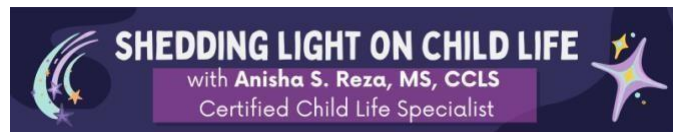
So I want to talk about that first. So I'm going to try to do a little bit of both education and displaying why the podcast element of my publication is so important to me by being honest and telling stories. So I briefed everyone in the welcome episode about the mission and the resource hubs and the links I'm sharing and my intention for long form content.

So now with what happened this week and with the ongoing developments with policy changes that are affecting immigrant families, I also am going to add a lens of that and how it might impact people's daily lives and health. mostly though, again, I'm not going to give political takes. I am here to do what I do best, which is tell stories from my own personal life, my own experiences, educate and shed light on the realities of those who might not have a voice and be able to discuss topics of diversity that really are critical to my daily life and my experiences and what I see my communities around me experience as well.

So I felt pretty encouraged to do what I do best by a public figure and activist, Brittany Packnett Cunningham. Anything I mention in this episode will be included in the show notes, but she posted this encouragement this week that says, "Please remember, the goal is for us to be overwhelmed and perpetually distracted. They want us to react to everything while they pelt things at us nonstop. Resist the urge to doom scroll or feel like you have to boil the ocean. You have gifts, interests, talents, and expertise that can be targeted and focused. Do your work, don't leave it to someone else, and don't try to do it all at once. Do the next right thing. We will get through this."

So...That kind of gets into a term that I use in my biography on the website. That's kind of my tagline on all my social media channels and everywhere you might have seen my stuff so far, which is intersection. So intersectionality is a term that was coined by a black female lawyer named Kimberly Crenshaw. And I have a few links that I'll definitely include in the show notes and will be on my DEIA page for resources under videos, but you can look into the history of where that term came from. That's not my goal here. But my first exposure to that term might have been during the big social justice push during the pandemic after George Floyd and Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery to name a few. I remember feeling like what, 20 plus years of me experiencing life in America as a person of the global majority. That's a term I've learned recently. So instead of minority saying person of the global majority.

Anyways, I think it all just built up into this fury and anger that I had just been trying to be the compliant, good Asian girl who just went with it and didn't say anything and, you know, doing the model minority thing. That time of, you know, compounding stressors in society, I was like a fireball. I was not well mentally. I was not handling anything I was seeing in the news well. I was consuming it every waking moment and I was begging people to care and flash forward now, five years later, which is insane that the pandemic was five years ago, but I am in such a different place with social justice where I have protected my energy and ability to engage with ongoing things that just need our attention. Everything needs our attention and that's why social media is such a powerful but scary tool. The internet's really scary.



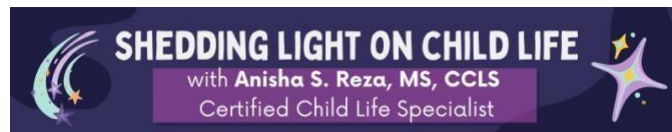
I think that is what I was reminded of this week, that the news can be so frightening because we don't know what's next and that's something like child life specialists work with children about addressing the fear of the unknown and trying to mitigate that. But I can't predict the future. I don't know where legislation's going.

Without sharing, you know, details, even with my security as a US citizen, the stuff I'm seeing this week is scaring me. I've literally born here everything, but can you just imagine if, like, on one level, I'm scared for people I care about, for people I've gone to school with who worked on, you know, student visas, work visas, like I literally cannot address what is going on because I can't, I have no emotional or mental capacity to do what some pages and social media and news outlets are doing and parsing it down of like action points and stuff. That is amazing and so needed and I've barely glanced at some of those kind of posts to kind of get an inkling of what's going on, but I'm currently trying to figure out what I can manage and I'm here recording in the way I know best, which is to just tell you that as a brown person who didn't even realize until my 20s that Asians are included in the brown, like when you say Black, Brown and Indigenous, Asians are kind of looped into the brown, but I happen to be like brown skin toned, but a lot of East Asians don't have that skin coloration, so I got kind of confused. So like,

Part of sharing my experience is that Asians are often kind of overlooked. No matter how loudly I were to yell like I did five years ago or now using my new publication to discuss topics that are kind of terrifying to be outspoken about, I think it just displays on its own why it's so important for there to be allies that as much as I speak, as much as I try to educate, the weight of my words will never measure up to the weight of dominant, someone from a dominant culture speaking up. So I'll probably miss a category, but dominant culture being white, male, cisgender, able-bodied, Christian. straight. I've definitely missed something..

Basically, back in the pandemic time, I really thought I would never be able to be a social activist or social justice leader because I would burn out so fast because I just don't have that right balance of personality and speaking and having a thick skin and it just didn't feel like the right fit. But what I'm doing here is my type of activism, which was kind of a scary thought when I'm slowly reading through the books I've recommended on my website. You can find bookshop wish lists, you can find posts with my recommendations. I just released some book reviews as well, both for children and for adults. And obviously reading is a slow process, so it'll get updated as I read them. But one of them made me realize like I am doing activism. It just doesn't look like how I usually see it.

And if I look back on my journey with these topics, it's like truly not typical for an immigrant kid to be speaking into a mic, not only about these topics, but about our feelings. And now I'm like a feelings professional as a child life specialist with emotional and mental health and being able to exist in a space where I am promoting healthy processing of emotions and long-term coping and addressing trauma, especially that relate to not belonging in dominant culture or struggling with that or assimilating or what have you. As a kid, I suppressed a lot of this, but I am really hopeful for this next generation that is getting more of the language of what it looks like to process



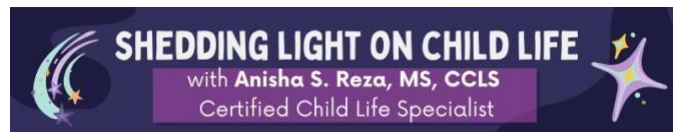
those experiences. And again, some of that is on my page in the resource hubs. And there's a lot of different opinions of people who say you need to protect your children from these difficult topics, and that's really up to you as a parent. And I think personally that because I was experiencing harm, I needed someone to process it with. So if you thought you were protecting me from those topics, you were actually causing long-term harm.

So that's kind of my goal in showing you options of good stories to read to your kids is just to normalize it. Doesn't have to be directly talking about race. It can be just showing them pictures where there's kids of all kinds of backgrounds so they are used to seeing it. I literally cried when *Mindy Project* ended and I had no idea what was going on. I was like in my early 20s, I think, when it finished and I realized that was the first time I'd seen a brown girl on TV who wasn't the quintessential nerdy side character or like an extra. So having main characters, having representation in the materials we consume in a day-to-day way really makes an impact. And I'd say this all the time, I escaped the Southeast to go to school in the Boston area because I was so tired of being surrounded by the same kind of people. It was mostly white people, very few Black people, like the rare Asian, definitely no Indigenous people, occasional Latinx people, but I really, it was so homogenous and in the neighborhood, the community, the culture, and it's definitely gotten a lot better now.

But that was the foundation of how I processed and engaged with these topics going to college and then grad school and now as a professional. And I attended Tufts University, which is known for making its students global citizens. And they're very social justice inclined. So I did learn a lot about race topics and diversity and celebrating culture and differences and engaging in those topics and celebrating it in a lot of different ways. What was key was that I was surrounded by people who I felt like I could process these things with in a safe way. So basically, as a young adult, I was starting to get vocabulary of how to talk about these topics.

And as much as it was always an important thing to me and set me apart a lot in my college applications that I was a mixed Asian kid from Alabama. That combination's really different, but this project is quite literally something I've never had in my deck of cards of things I had career aspirations to do. And it's kind of got put in my lap because I'd already decided to reroute to Child Life before I knew what the demographics were, which is, I've seen a mix between 94 to 97 % of Child Life professionals are white female. And I think I mentioned in the last episode how it felt to be the only one in the room again when I entered a Child Life graduate program and feeling like, great, I didn't know what I signed myself up for, but it is too late. I am not crew changing again. I just made the hardest decision of my life to leave my dream of becoming a doctor. And so I just pushed through and hoped it worked out, because I was just so tired and burnt out.

But I do wonder, like, would my whole experience up to now been as difficult if I had a mentor who looked like me, who had been through this process? So while I totally acknowledge I've had a lot of opportunities and privilege to be where I am today, and see, I forgot education and... socioeconomic status is another part of dominant culture, so...

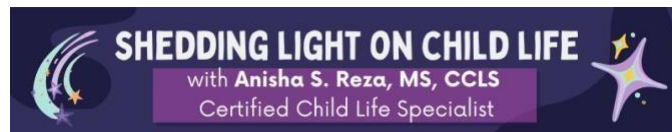


I have that privilege of being very highly educated and there's a sociological term called social mobility and my parents have given my generation upward mobility because of their hard work to pursue the American dream and that is kind of the classic immigrant story that we want to kind of have a better life here because we have that opportunity. So I grew up with that understanding that America's the dream. It's like the gold standard. It's perfect. We can never speak harm of America. But I grew up here. I have intimate knowledge of how harmful things can be here and I was trained as a kid. We do not talk about what goes on at home, but I think that's why I come back to the term of intersection because this platform is a very unique mix of what I can offer. And that is being a self-identified Asian American woman, Child Life Specialist, I'm an immigrant kid, so that's what makes me second generation immigrant. And all that feels really important this week with what's going on in America and what could happen and with ongoing changes to legislation and a push back against diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility work. But ultimately, it's often used in a negative limelight, but diversity is ultimately a celebration of differences and the celebration of how we all have different stories, we all have different experiences that make our world more interesting and make us human. And that sounds so sappy now to say it like that, but that's kind of why I'm here.

That's why I'm really hoping that the resource hubs I have already posted and hopeful future collaborations are going to happen because I am not equipped to learn everything that deserves to be highlighted in DEIA work, but other people are doing that work already within their intersecting identities. So that's why I think I came to this mission for my publication to emphasize the need of having a diversity lens that addresses the needs of really diverse people in whatever spaces you are in, but also to really know that we all have to keep learning and be willing to be wrong and corrected. I will not hesitate to tell you I do not know everything. My parents constantly told me as a kid that you think you know everything. So I think they'd be proud that now I finally get it, that I don't know everything. But this platform I want to use to highlight what everyone else is doing.

For instance, I think some of it is going to be just seminar style, lecture style, writing and education on terms like intersection or let's say assimilation or acculturation, which I will be discussing in my upcoming Association of Child Life Professionals webinar on mental health, landscape of Asian immigrant youth and families in the United States, which was already relevant but now feels extremely relevant and if I'm being real, feels like the importance and responsibility of that webinar has escalated. there's, So while I have some content that's going to be focused on pure educational purposes, I also want to normalize diverse stories so people who don't look like you, you learn a lot more just by seeing them live their normal life.

For instance, one of my favorite Instagram accounts is Matthew and Paul. They are a married gay couple and they're inter-abled. So Paul is a children's book author and he's blind and he has the bestest boy, Maple, as a guide dog. And then Matthew, I actually don't know what his day job is, but he's also like a classic violinist and very talented. But point is, their page isn't like, hey, let's talk about the dynamics of being an inter-abled couple. They're not sitting there lecturing us. They're just pranking each other and living day to day life and talking about their daily struggles



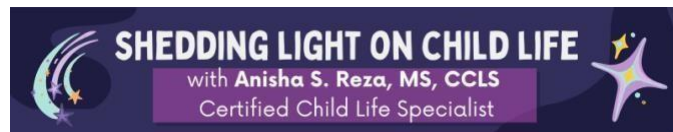
like any other content creator.

And that's kind of where I'm getting at that some of the resources I've linked and I've chosen to have in my recommendations are also things that are doing that. So just showing people that, yes, we have unique experiences, but we're also just humans trying to figure out the world. I guess that's also what I'm trying to do is normalize what it is to struggle with the same kind of news and onslaught of the daily grind. But also, yes, some things are harder because of who I am, how I present to the world. My skin color is not something I can choose to... disclose or not disclose.

There are other identities that you can hide from someone, but then that gets into not feeling like your true self or being able to reveal all of yourself, depending on what identity we're talking about. But I'll be honest, one thing that's been an ongoing thread in my life is that the categories we use in forms for self-disclosing race has changed so much and I constantly feel like my identity, I'm like questioning myself and what to check, what box to check, which is a classic struggle with People of Color.

I grew up in Alabama and I remember, still can't, I laugh every time I tell this story. I remember my dad wanted me to have some sort of identification before I got my driver's license and they asked me what race and I said "Asian, Asian American" and they said "We can do O for oriental." Bruh. I was very young at that point but I knew that was not what I said. So anyway, I've done a lot of corrections for my parents as well who would call themselves orientals. Like, no, we don't say that anymore. I basically grew up most of the time just clicking other, if it existed. And that obviously leads to feeling othered. And then there have been times where there's an option to click multiple boxes, which helped a little too, where I'm mixed, so I never felt like one box fully encompassed who I was. But now lately, I've realized I am ethnically mixed, but technically Asian. But just clicking Asian feels like, it completely diminishes my unique background. So now I struggled actually just the other day where I finally had an option to click Asian and two or more races, but I was like, but I'm not two or more races. I'm two or more ethnicities. And so there's a lot of erasure that kind of goes on with something as simple as like a demographic form or anything like that. And I talk more about that in my post called What's in a Name Part 1, which is my first kind of written post of that nature. So you can look more about that there.

All that to say, like, I open up some form and don't expect to be like having to question my identity again. You know, like, it just could be quite literally anything at any time in the day. So I kind of lost my train of thought there. But with this platform and focusing on my personal interests and professional endeavors and expertise and the unique way I can speak to things, it is still very overwhelming how much is out there to learn. So that's why my page is split into different audiences. So there's a page for Child Life Specialists, but really any professionals that work with children to show the importance of a DEIA lens and taking it seriously, that it's not just an agenda of our work, but it's the reality of working with diverse populations and knowing that sometimes you won't be able to relate to a patient maybe the way I could just by being a similar skin tone to them.

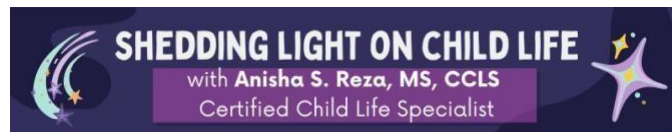


But that's what that content is there for is to help you learn and bridge those gaps to help them feel seen despite any differences that are obvious and again, that we have a lot of work to do to bridge gaps in making sure that children and families feel seen and supported. And for me and in my scope of practice, the healthcare disparities of, for instance, how Black mothers are not believed as much that they're in pain and are more likely to die from childbirth. I used to be in medical school and textbooks and like our dermatology studies, it's usually how it presents on white skin or in white bodies but we don't just work with white people. Those kind of things are really important for general education, but also for the way we interact with people on a day-to-day basis.

Ultimately, I am hoping that this content impacts your intersecting identities and that you can create connections in your day-to-day life with people you don't normally interact with and learn from them or end up finding someone you could talk to about these topics. But if not, this community on Shedding Light on Child Life is where I want to be able to create a space where you can process maybe you had an interaction with a kid who looks more like me and you're afraid to say the wrong thing or you're not sure if you're doing it right and I want to be a resource but also balance the fact that yes, I don't have a necessary responsibility to educate others who aren't willing to put in the work but in my capacity and in my endeavors here, I do want to help educate. So if you ever have a question, my email is posted in a lot of different places on my website. I just hope that we can be intentional to do the work and to try better for the patients who deserve better or the kids who deserve better.

To give a concrete example, I helped out with a patient who would not normally have been mine and I ended up spending quite a lot of quality time with her and she went by a nickname and well loved on the unit. I said, well, "Do you actually want to be called that name or how do you say your actual name?" And she was like, "Oh, no one's really asked me that before." And she told me what her name was and how to say it. I made sure to pronounce it correctly. And I think she was in middle school or early elementary. And after we hung out more, she told me that no one had really tried to learn her name like that. And no one really calls her by her full name at school. And I think we were probably making something together, crafting, and I made sure to look her in the eye and I paused and I looked at her in the eyes and I said, "It is actually really important that we call you what you want to be called." So... Then she told me how she's bullied in school for it and that's why she just goes for the nickname and you know, I was able to connect with her on that level and that's why my last post was about this because it's just so critical to be able to be seen for the basic humanity and decency of being called by what you want to be called.

Again, that's what my intention is with the Child Life Specialist page and the resources there. And for students, my intersection there is that as a... So I'm not first generation college student, but almost functionally I was, and I'm not gonna get into that, but I was kind of the first in my pocket of family to navigate higher education. And I think that showed because I had a really hard time. So, from elementary to graduate school, I have had a hard time figuring things out. And yes, I've had the privilege to struggle and not have to just drop a lot of those endeavors.

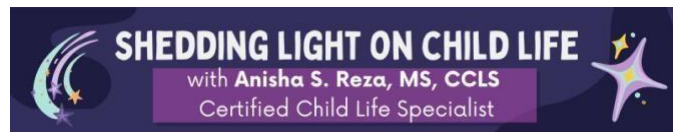


But because of that term I mentioned earlier, social mobility, I'm hoping because of my parents, you know, I'm better off. And then because of me and what I've learned, my children will be better off too. But with the student page, my goal is that students who might feel the way I might have, where I struggled, I felt like I had no resources, no mentors, no access. When I was trying to find hours to shadow medical professionals in my pursuit to go to medical school. My dad wasn't friends with doctors or was a doctor like some of my colleagues who could just literally go work at their dad's clinic all summer and get amazing experience. And here I am quite literally begging and emailing hundreds of places. I was willing to go to different cities to just get some hours. Like I remember going to shadow someone just for three hours. I was that desperate because it was at least three more hours I didn't have. So that's just an example of how it's harder for people from diverse backgrounds to get into fields that aren't used to having them.

And that's why it's so hard, I think, in my current field, child life, that there are students who are trying to enter the field, but they don't have the avenue with all of the gaps that we have in facilitating their entry into the field. And I'm a new professional in child life, but I'm not a new professional overall. So I've had a lot of experiences to get where I am today, where I'm not afraid to use my voice. I know who I am and I'm confident in that and I know while I say that I'm also scared that the internet is scary. I'm saying a lot of vulnerable things and it's gonna be out there forever because the internet is forever but things can be true and contrasting and tough all at the same time because like Inside Out taught us that emotions can get all mixed up in the little marbles. But anyway, so I've gotten a thicker skin. I'm still learning, but I want to be able to champion the causes of what people are already doing. I want to be able to support students who feel like they're being left out or they're getting behind and they don't know how to catch up and they're matching with mentors who really don't care. To be honest, I've had a fair share of mentors who have really hurt me and directed me in a way that was not in my best interest, but they just kind of gave the cookie cutter advice, but I didn't need that because I had a different background.

So that's why it's so important for me and for us as a community in whatever spaces we're in to cater to people individually and support them where they're at because without that we don't set them up for success the way they need it. Like in my college days I really struggled with meeting academic standards in some ways, probably for another time I'll get into that. It was a really shameful time, it was really hard, and I was vulnerable with my struggles and I think, one, it showed me that I was not as smart as everyone else. And they all had 4.0s in my friend group, but anyway. But I wasn't a perfect student.

But because of those struggles, now I can understand it to another level, and that's where empathy comes from. So I want to be able to impact People of Color especially, but students who just feel like they can't keep up. And I think that those kind of students are the ones we need to support so that we have diversity in our professional spaces because their backgrounds inform their practice, their approach, the way they serve in their roles. That's all so important for diversity because again, diversity is not just race or ethnicity or culture. It's everything that is not



described by dominant culture. So while I really, really wish I didn't have a lot of the experiences and traumas I do, it also helps me to move forward and make an impact in any way I can. And that's why I really hope you can consider how you can use your voice in the way you can, because only you can speak to the circles you're in. And as a thought exercise, what I did one time was draw some circles of my most important identities and had them overlapping and just kind of filled it in of what things made me unique and what were important to me and help me to to reflect on how I could be a better ally to other marginalized groups and be a true voice for those who might not be able to or to help bridge the gap of, hey, I do not identify as XYZ, but I have learned that, you know, this is helpful when interacting with this populations or what have you. Anti-racist work is not easy and it's something that requires a lot of intention and it is heavy at times and this week with the targeting of especially immigrants and LGBTQ communities.

I'm encouraged that everyone doing their good work will help us to stay steady and know that educating with stories and with our unique abilities and experiences will help to combat any fear-mongering or othering that occurs of these populations that deserve to exist and deserve the space that they occupy and also not only deserve to just exist, but also deserve to be fought for and to be advocated for and to be celebrated, not pushed away. So with that, I hope that if anything caught your attention, you explore some of the resources in the show notes. And if not, maybe check out my last written post about the importance of names and pronouncing them correctly. Because your fellow human deserves it. Because it is basic human decency to say their name correctly. So with that I will say my name properly but it's Anisha Reza. So Anisha is usually pretty easy to say phonetically once you see it spelled, but I got quite a lot of different pronunciations of Reza. But anyway...

Thank you for listening. If you have any thoughts or questions or things you'd like me to discuss in any upcoming content regarding immigrant populations, I'd be happy to discuss or maybe we can learn together and explore resources to educate ourselves better. Thanks and see you guys next time.