

Aishani Ghosh

Mrs. Small

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Identity and Bravery in Reshma Saujani's Essay

Reshma Saujani writes an inspiring essay reflecting on her experiences as an immigrant as part of the *American Like Me: Reflections on Life between Cultures* anthology of essays in 2018. She recounts multiple stories from her childhood throughout her twenties, illustrating what helped her be brave. As a child of immigrants, and an immigrant herself, Saujani oftentimes has been told to hide her identity, yet embracing it in the face of adversity is how she shows her bravery. As an attorney, author, activist, and founder of Girls Who Code, Saujani has faced no shortage of obstacles to get to her position today, especially related to her race. However, by taking risks and staying true to her name, and therefore identity, she proves her bravery. Reshma Saujani utilizes rhetorical devices throughout her essay to convey how embracing her name and taking risks enabled her to be brave, inspiring children of immigrants to do the same.

A motif throughout her essay, Saujani continually returns to her name, Reshma, in the form of juxtaposition, anecdotes, and rhetorical questions to show her bravery. Names, which are so intricately tied to identity carry far more than a word to call someone by. To Reshma, her name is a window into her culture, her parents, and her lived experiences. Despite this importance, she was once told to change her name to Rita for her campaign for congress, as it would be easier to pronounce. In this anecdote, she explains how she could “never turn [her] back on Reshma to become a Key-Chain Rita” (17-18). By placing Reshma and Rita next to each

other in the same sentence, Saujani uses juxtaposition to highlight the uniqueness of her name by comparing it to a name that could easily be found on a key-chain. This same device is used just a few sentences later, when she compares “Sweet Valley Jessicas” to “Schaumburg Reshmas” (22-23). This time, Saujani uses juxtaposition to highlight the cultural and personal meaning that her name carries to a “Sweet Valley Jessica”, something perfect that all American girls are raised to be. Saujani rejects the idea of “perfection over bravery” by choosing her own name over the one she is supposed to be (22). She again relates back to her name by including an anecdote in her essay about meeting a woman voting for her, despite not being able to pronounce her name. Through this anecdote, she uses imagery, describing the emotions behind the scene. By utilizing words like “flustered but kind”, “frantically”, “swell with pride”, Saujani appeals to pathos by illustrating the emotions in her anecdote with imagery (48-55). Though the woman may not have been able to remember or pronounce her name, she voted for her nonetheless, meaning Saujani shouldn’t have to give up her name or identity to follow her dreams. Reflecting on this, Saujani determines that it would be unthinkable to go by Rita instead of her given name, when it holds such significance to her. She asks the reader a rhetorical question, that when her parents named her, “did they dream of a world where it would be unthinkable to go by Rita instead?” (59-60). In facing a world filled with discrimination, her parents still bravely decided to name her Reshma. Her name is a symbol of bravery not only for her, but for her parents who named her in a less progressive time. She writes her essay to all children of immigrants, who might have a unique name too. Through her rhetorical devices of juxtaposition, anecdotes, and rhetorical questions throughout her essay, she inspires bravery and courage to embrace one’s true identity.

Saujani also continually takes risks throughout her life, describing them in her essay through parallelism and irony, to inspire others to be brave. In the start of her essay, she describes her campaign for congress: “I bravely quit my job. I bravely ran for Congress” (10). The repeated “bravely” and similar, short sentence structure is a clear use of parallelism. She utilizes this device to reinforce the bravery of her actions. It’s not easy to quit a stable job in pursuit of one’s dreams, but she did so anyway. She follows those two sentences with “And I bravely lost by a landslide” (11). A reader wouldn’t expect that losing would be something that requires bravery, so Saujani utilizes this verbal irony as humor. Though it is used for comedic affect due to its unexpectedness, she explains that losing actually was brave of her, because she did so “authentically … as *Reshma*” (12). By utilizing parallelism, then verbal irony before explaining how losing really is brave, Saujani engages the reader in her story of taking risks. She uses verbal irony again, later in her essay, when addressing how she founded the nonprofit Girls Who Code. Despite founding a nonprofit centered around encouraging women in technology, she admits that “I don’t even know how to code, myself” (34). For a founder of a technology nonprofit, a reader would expect her to be well-versed in the industry, but she says the exact opposite. This situational irony is one of her indirect examples of bravery. Many times throughout the text, she repeats the word itself, brave. Here, however, she shows that despite not being the best at something, coding, she decides to take a leap and follow her dreams regardless. Her bravery is an example to all readers in how she follows her goals despite setbacks. Through parallelism and verbal irony, Saujani inspires readers to take risks and be brave in the face of failure.

In all, Saujani employs an array of rhetorical devices to show how embracing her name and taking risks are what make her brave, inspiring readers to follow in her footsteps. She uses a motif of her name, Reshma, to show bravery in embracing her identity despite discrimination. She uses multiple anecdotes, juxtaposition, and a rhetorical question that invokes the reader to think about the significance of names and identity. Throughout her essay, she also describes her many risks, and subsequent failures through the devices of parallelism and irony. By attempting her goals without fear of failure, Saujani proves her bravery and persistence. With her essay, Saujani encourages readers to think deeply about their identity and to stay brave in the face of adversity.