

Introduction: Live, around the world, this is the BBC's outside source.

Announcer: You might have seen this story on the Washington Post, among others. The Headline, "I honestly thought of myself as simply American; DNA testing shocks college students. Anita Foeman is professor of Communication Studies at the public university in Pennsylvania, and asked freshman students to take the DNA test to uncover their ancestry. She's been speaking to Olivia Padova of the OS team.

Foeman: What we are doing is asking people to tell us what they know about their ethnic background and then we DNA test them and find out how close the narrative of their family is to the DNA test, and that opens up all kinds of possibilities for conversation. One of the reasons that we wanted to do this is so often when people talk about race and ethnicity, it's negative. That there's some kind of terrible conflict, some kind of misunderstanding and so we put people into these buckets as if we're so very different and one of the things that the DNA test do is show us how much we share and that we're just much more similar than we thought.

Olivia: And when we talked about you know these tests for ethnicity for DNA. What do we mean by that? What exactly can it tell us?

Foeman: What generally happens is they tell you the regions from which your ancestors come. Somebody will say to us, "I'm a hundred percent Italian" and then we get back their ancestry and you find that they have ancestors who are from that area of Italy, but also in one case all across North Africa into the Middle East all around Europe and so what we think of as somebody's ethnicity in their story a hundred percent Italian in this case tends to be much broader when we actually look at their DNA and of course people identify in many different ways. A lot of people call themselves Americans but you can look at an American and find any kind of ethnic background or geographic region from which they come.

Olivia: Your main name for the project has been to you know, use DNA to actually bring people together but actually is there not a risk because you know, you're essentially exposing people very you know different mix backgrounds that actually you could risk just confusing people or further dividing people perhaps.

Foeman: I don't think it has divided people but we've had to do a lot of processing because when people find things that are unexpected in their past, sometimes they have to face sometimes of prejudices that they've had. Sometimes they find out things. One of the first things that we do is ask people to go back and talk to their families and see what the narratives their families are. One instance in which somebody had grown

up identifying as African American and she found out as a young adult that her mother was actually white; she wasn't black. She just thought her mother was white and black and then when we tested her. Her DNA profile was almost all European and she found that very disorienting and we were not able to complete an opposed test with her.

Olivia: Do you think that this project which is taking place in America, perhaps has particular resonance now, in the age of Donald Trump and Clinton election etc. and also see particularly this year with you know the advent of the black lives matters movement and that kind of real focus again on race and on your background.

Foeman: Yes. And I think particularly at my University. I'm at a state university and we have students from every socio-economic background, from every ethnic background. When the whole Trump election occurred, there was a lot of conflict. And I felt that my class, where we were doing this project, was this little island where we could have these important conversations that were very sensitive and one of the bottom lines of this is that, if we can create narratives about ourselves sometimes that are very disconnected from our genetics, can't we create a narrative that...(cuts off)