

The Yin Yang That Is My Life:

My Experience with Being Biracial and The Dot That Haunted Me

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I've spent my whole life holding two half full glasses. One glass was my "black side." and the other glass was made up of the components of my "white side." Poured together—they should've made a full cup just like any other person—and technically they did. But rarely did the glass feel full. It always felt like it was separated into two parts. Separated by culture, perception, and history. I had just as much color as anyone else, but I could never drink from both glasses at the same time. I had two half full glasses, but I died of thirst anyways.

I always thought of my existence as a yin yang, which represents balance, and interdependence. Meaning that neither side exists without the other, that they're intertwined together to reach equilibrium. The yin-yang shows that nothing exists in complete isolation. Inside every light there is a shadow, and inside every shadow there is a light. Being mixed felt like this, because within my black side there was my white side, and within my white side there was my black side.

In the yin yang you have a white curve and a black curve, and the opposite-colored dot in the opposite-colored curve. Sometimes the blending of this is beautiful, because you're able to live "in between" it also means I got two of everything. I got two sets of stories, culture, food, music, clothing, and films. Instead of getting one glass, I got two, and this was a very unique experience. Sometimes I was extremely grateful that I had two different sides of me that I got to explore, because it added to the depth of my character and helped me understand perspective and culture on a much deeper level.

But it was very rare that I'd wake up and feel happy and comfortable within my identity, because most of the time, I felt being biracial just complicated things more, and I often found myself wishing I could just have one glass like everyone else.

One of the things that I felt defined my biracial identity most was, of course, my hair. Growing up, I had a terrible relationship with my hair. I'd go around, and I'd get compliments *everywhere* about it. People would touch it, and I swear their eyes would pop out of their sockets as they stroked their fingers through it. It was so *bouncy*, so *curly*, so *silky*, so *desirable*.

It was the “perfect” hair, but the irony in this was that I couldn't have hated it more. My hair was the bane of my existence throughout my childhood. It was too bouncy; it would never sit still. It was too curly; I could never get it straight. It was too silky; it looked greasy all the time.

When I was younger, I'd have this reoccurring nightmare. It was an unescapable nightmare, and it would start like this: My parents would run me a bath and I'd strip down and get in. At first it wasn't bad. I'd clap the bubbles in the bath, and I'd listen to music and play with dolls. The dolls would swim, jump, fall in love, get married, and live happily ever after all within the soapy waters of my imagination.

But then my play would be interrupted by a loud knock on the door. The knock that meant I'd soon be face to face with the gates of hell. *The dreaded hairbrush*. My mom would walk in holding the brush in her hands. It was big, loud, and spiky, and it was out for *blood*. She'd set up a step stool in front of the bath, and I'd sit there and prepare for the pain I was about to experience.

The water turned *cold*. The bubbles *dispersed*; the dolls *drowned*. All that was left was me and this hairbrush. And boy did I put up a fight. I'd twist and turn and shriek; I'd cry, and cry, and thrash my arms around. I'd do everything to get away from that hairbrush.

This hairbrush held so much power over me, and it seemed no matter how much I fought; it always won. My mom would run the hairbrush roughly through my hair, tearing out matted curls and tangled knots, and as I watched my curls fall into the water, long hot tears would stream from my eyes.

My scalp was on *fire*. The conditioner was in my *eyes*. There was water in my *ears*.

She was only halfway through. This was miserable. I was *miserable*.

Eventually after my scalp felt like it had been ripped to shreds, the bath would drain. The conditioner would be put on the shelf, and the hairbrush would be shut into a drawer under the sink, and with time, and lots and lots of towel rubbing, I could see again.

Even though my hair was a big part of the insecurities I carried within being biracial, there were a lot of experiences in my life that only deepened this resentment. For a lot of my life, I felt like people tried to split me in two and pick whether they loved my black side or my white side. They'd subconsciously put me in a box and chose parts of me that they liked, while making the other parts feel less than. A lot of the times I think they did this unknowingly—unaware that they may have just been entertaining a certain side of me.

But for every comment I got calling me an Oreo, or telling me I was whitewashed, or even just subtle looks that reminded me I didn't fit in I'd be teleported back into that bathtub.

Every time I had to pick what group to hang out with, or pick my race on a document, or pick whether I wanted to switch on the white side of me or the black side of me, I was teleported back to that brush ripping through my scalp.

And the moment I was teleported back into that nightmare, all I could focus on was the hatred little me had once felt for herself, and how suffocating that hatred was.

In the moments that I felt trapped in this, I'd often find myself trying to divide myself or split myself into two, because so many people in my past had done the same. It felt familiar to only be half of what I was, so naturally I started splitting myself up everywhere I went.

When I was with my dad, I'd "act" black, and when I was with my mom, I'd "act" white. This caused me to never have a safe zone. Because rather it was school, work, or home, I was *constantly* putting a mask on. It wasn't that I was trying to be someone that I wasn't, it was that I was only showing people half of what I *am*. I only showed people half of me, when in reality, having all of me is such a better and more meaningful relationship to have.

So sometimes, when I was around people who made me feel like I was in that bathtub again, instead of shutting my eyes and doing everything in my power to escape the feeling, I'd let myself sit in that bathtub. I'd feel the cold-water coursing against my skin, and the crinkling sound the conditioner made in my ears, and I'd even relive the harsh slamming of that brush against my scalp.

I'd cry the tears, and I'd thrash my hands around, and I'd do the screaming until my throat hurt, but then, I'd sit there, and I'd wrap my arms around myself, and I'd give little me a hug.

I'd tell her that her hair wasn't perfect because everyone told her it was, it was perfect because it's part of what made her, her. I'd tell her that she wasn't too black for the white kids and too white for the black kids. I'd tell her to curse out the girls who made fun of her hair, and I'd tell her to stop wearing makeup that made her skin look lighter. I'd tell her she wasn't whitewashed, or an Oreo. I'd tell her she didn't have to wake up each day and pick whether she

was black or white, that all she had to do each day was wake up and be herself, even if she was still figuring out who that was.

In fact, I'd take her hair in my hands, and I'd run my fingers through it softly. I'd tell her to take the two glasses in her hand, the glass that was her black side, and the glass that was her white side, and I'd tell her to pour them into one. And drink.