

Truisms about myself:

I am Ethiopian.

I feel as though I've gained interest in my identity as I've grown up.

There were times I wished that I wasn't black.

I hate talking about race just as much as you do.

I love singing in the shower and dancing alone in my room with music burstin my eardrums.

I am nervous that you won't like me.

My love for you is endless.

I think people prematurely say they love you when you're younger.

I want to feel less embarrassed in public.

I am trying my best to understand Jenny Holzer's Truisms.

Sitting patiently.

I'm twelve years old sitting next to my friends in Roth Hall. We're getting a lesson on microaggressions.

Sitting patiently until I start to realize those around me couldn't care less.

An instant shift in emotion.

I'm sitting impatiently next to all of my white friends waiting for this conversation to end as rapidly as possible. I can't believe this.

We leave the claustrophobic room and I hope nobody approaches me. I hope nobody asks me how I felt about the talk. I join in on a conversation about microaggressions. An old friend of mine says something relatively ignorant and I tell her she's incorrect. Moments later, I'm comforting this white girl that thinks I called her racist when the word had not once left my mouth. I was shocked, confused as to why I was the one comforting her when I didn't do anything wrong.

I don't understand. I think white fragility is the most destructive to young black kids. It makes you feel like you must always be the comforter, not to express your emotion unless it is in reaction to your white friend. This reminded me of black representation in films and TV shows: always a shoulder to cry on or the person to tell that white girl to run to the airport and tell him how she feels.

I think the worst feeling is describing a racial microaggression to my white peers.

I once told my friend about how I was walking past a group of middle aged white people and one of the women glared at me and pulled her purse to the other side of her. There was an awkward moment in which my friend didn't react. "Are you sure you aren't just overthinking it?"

Hm. I shrugged and carried on with my day, later telling my black friend about the situation and getting the reaction that was most acceptable: "are you shitting me?"

When I'm faced with racial microaggressions now, though, I don't really talk about it. I just feel like I'm complaining about something that didn't *really* happen.

It's honestly an issue with the conscious and unconscious minds of "progressive" white people. In a *Psychology Today* post, Dr. Derald Wing Sue speaks of different sectors of racial microaggressions and what classifies as one. Although I believe he went way more in depth than necessary, I understood how cruel the unconscious mind is. Because racial microaggressions occur unconsciously, it's hard to be mad at those making borderline-racist remarks. The line between a pure interest in your culture and a microaggression is very fine, so it is difficult for me to figure out how to perceive comments about how "exotic" my name is.

I know for sure who you are.

You were once capable of denying your blackness, don't you remember?

Third grade, a group of white girls came up to you and asked if you were "African-American"

You denied it, don't pretend you didn't. Your exact words, in fact, were "No I'm not, I'm Ethiopian."

And you thought that made any difference to white people, huh? That's almost too cute.

I don't know why I'm so selfish.

I only talk about my identity when it's being threatened.

Not often will I raise a conversation about how "black is beautiful,"

Only through death and sorrow will you be called into existence.

At times like this I long to be ignorant. I wish I was the one being educated, rather than the other way around.

The act of talking to people your age as if they are children has a bittersweet sentiment to it.

I used to be way worse.

If someone so much as brought up watermelon I would go out of my way to point out the fact that I didn't enjoy the fruit. I hated the mere thought of people associating me with any stereotypes about black people. I hadn't realized until now how much I disliked myself when I was younger. I would just wish I lived in a white neighborhood, wished I didn't live fifteen minutes from the best fried chicken¹ on this planet. I so much as dragged my parents into this mess. In the seventh grade, I begged them to buy me Lulu Lemon leggings so that I could match every² other girl at my school. They were atrocious, grey and stopped right below the knees. But that didn't matter. I was still very much sporting the brand and trying, to the best of my ability, not to *fit* in but more so to *blend* in. I wanted nothing more than to be exactly the same as everyone else. Is that so much to ask?

The difference between blending and belonging:

I don't think I started to feel like I belonged at my school until freshman year. That's when I started understanding that blending in shouldn't be my motive, rather creating my own identity. I used to dream of dressing the same and acting the same as my peers, but growing into my own style and personality helped me realize how stupid it is to have that mindset. I now understand the importance of self expression and being accepted in your truest state. In *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* by Beverly Daniel Tatum, there were accounts by many high school and college students of attempting a state of "racelessness," described as: "wherein individuals assimilate into the dominant group by de-emphasizing characteristics that might identify them as members of the subordinate group" (Tatum 147). I think the act of racelessness comes easily to me, I seem to have a different personality depending on who I'm around. It happens subconsciously, I'm not deliberately codeswitching. Growing up in Inglewood and going to school in Santa Monica plays a fairly large role in my chameleon-like ways. I know how to read a room, when my opinion is going to be appreciated or looked over. It's a skill that developed naturally, really. In bell hooks' "Killing Rage," hooks cites James Baldwin's essay "Stranger in the Village." This essay is about Baldwin's trip to Switzerland, and his experience as the only black person. He writes: "But there is a great difference between being the first white man to be seen by Africans and being the first black man to be seen by whites." I was so amazed by the poetic justice Baldwin displayed with this one sentence. I have always felt slightly isolated when surrounded only by white people, whether that is with friends or in a classroom. But, with the given privilege of whiteness comes pride, almost ownership. I think these feelings are what make white people abnormally comfortable in black spaces. And this pride is what I genuinely yearn for, this feeling of being on top of the world.

¹ Roscoe's

² This is not an over exaggeration. I mean every single girl. And for some bizarre reason, I thought I was genuinely missing out on the "LuluLemon experience". It's just a brand, they're just leggings.

I have some general questions, some that have lingered in my mind for who knows how many years:

Why do I always have to talk about race? Why is it that I always have to initiate that conversation? Why do I feel like crying everytime I talk about race? Is it so much to ask to not be called out with people's eyes when discussing race in school? To just want to dance at parties without acting "too black"? To live life without the fear of people making assumptions about me? Do you mind if I sit this conversation out, (insert teacher's name)? Was that comment *necessary*, though?

I was at the Riviera Country Club. We had just finished a solid tennis practice and everyone wanted to go up to the restaurant and get milkshakes and fries. I waited in line with my friends and they all ordered their meals and eventually started heading home. My dad came a few minutes after everyone had left, so I asked him if I could buy a milkshake and fries from the restaurant. We got up to the register and the same man who served my friends asked in the most blunt tone: "can I see your membership?" My dad explained that we weren't members at the country club and I had just finished tennis practice there. The man said his sincere apologies and explained to us that only members were able to purchase food from the restaurant. I was confused, because just ten minutes prior I saw that same man take my friend's credit card and input her order without a membership.

Funny how that works.

I wanted to get different perspectives from people my age regarding race. For this, I interviewed my friend Zwena Gray starting off with a question I find very important to know the answer to:

When did you start recognizing your blackness/ understanding what it means to be "black"? Zwena told me that from a young age she recognized her blackness thanks to her parents. "...I wasn't allowed to have any white dolls or anything. They would talk to us about the police and all of that." Growing up in Detroit, a city with a predominantly black population, she didn't recognize her blackness in a way that made her feel different from the people around her. There was never that impression of being a minority because she was constantly around black people.

I followed up with asking about the shift from living in Detroit to going to a primarily white boarding school, and she told me it was a complete culture shock. We then discussed racism and typical reactions to racist remarks. Zwena said, "Nowadays, I don't internalize it as much as I used to because there's no point." She said something really profound that resonated with me: "Sometimes you're not in the safest situation to react in a certain way... the way I'd love to react." Talking to Zwena about what it's like to recognize and appreciate your blackness was really eye-opening for me. I feel that continuing conversations like these will help further basic understandings of the self.

I feel like I've been stripped of my Ethiopian identity as a black person in America.

I have such a rich culture that I love so dearly and learn more and more about as I grow up. But, in the end, my culture doesn't matter. If I get pulled over by the cops, all they're going to see is my skin color. That is all that is necessary for an arrest.

Last summer, my mom was waiting in the car with her hazards on as me, my best friend and my dad grabbed ice cream. We're walking back to the car, and see this white police officer. He's yelling some nonsense to my mom, and my stomach drops. I am genuinely fearful of this man and his capabilities, I start to pant and speed walk-turned- run to my moms car. My dad asks what the issue is, and the officer says something about my mom parking next to a fire hydrant. I start to tune him out as my focus zooms in on his gun and bat. I'm scared to see something bad happen to my mom. I have flashbacks to Sandra Bland and her uncalled for arrest. You read these things in the news and don't expect it to hit close to home until you're five feet away from a man whose mind is set on arresting your mother.

Throughout my journey with race, I have learned a lot about what it means to be black. I have learned how to cope with racism through writing and verbal communication.

I *want* to learn how to be the bigger person

In my time of growth, I've learned to cope.