How Dark Am I?

Many of my white friends complained about being too pale and needing to tan. I wanted to be like them and tan too, but I'm already brown.

July 9, 2020 By Megan-Claire Chase

I have repressed memories from childhood of the racism I've experienced. It's the memories of the self-hate that seep into my mind. There are so many stories to share of when I first noticed I was different. I don't mean quirky different. I'm mean when I noticed I was a different color that wasn't found in my crayon box.

There was a time I loved the outdoors. I could lay in the sun, hike, play tag or kickball with friends all day. I loved soaking up the sun and smelling it on my skin.

Many of my white friends have always complain about being too pale or pasty and needing to tan. I wanted to be like them and tan too, but I was already brown. Did I really want to get even darker?

Me in my teens at the beachCourtesy of Megan-Claire Chase

I cringe even writing this. The self-hate is so evident. That fact I'm only recognizing this now shows how deeply rooted these feelings are in me.

Then I had another thought. If my white friends ever woke up my skin color, they would lose their ever-loving minds. Isn't that what they want though? To be darker? As they want to get darker, I've always wanted to get lighter.

Many white people, even in 2020, don't realize that black people of any shade can get sunburn just like them. I remember the first time I got sunburn when I was a teen and some of my white friends were fascinated by the fact my neck, shoulders, and back turned red and then peeled…just like them. "I didn't know black people could get sunburn," they would say. When I think back to that moment, I wonder if I purposely laid out in the sun until I burned so I could show I was just like them—them being white.

Now, I'm rarely in the sun. If I am, I always have a hat and sunscreen on. I've even used skin lightening cream in the past, which obviously didn't work.

I remember when I was selected to go to Georgia Girls State at Middle Georgia College in Cochran, GA in the summer before my senior year of high school. I was so excited. There was a time I thought I might major in political science. My roommate was a black girl who was darker than me. She was kind of standoffish at first. I was slightly uncomfortable because I hadn't been around many other black girls, let alone have one for a roommate. I acted like my usual zany self and eventually won her over. She kept saying I was "different," but it didn't sound like a compliment. She even wrote it on my banner at the end of the week. It felt more like she was saying you don't act like a typical black girl, whatever that means. I've experienced this a lot in my life, even now.

Roommates's comment – she spelled my name wrong.Courtesy of Megan-Claire Chase

Well, I was selected to take part in the mock trial. It was a big deal. They only selected three students to be the defendants and I was the only black one. I got to work with a judge, district attorney, defense attorney, chief of police, and a G.B.I. agent (Georgia Bureau of Investigations) to

prepare for the mock trial. We even got to go off campus to film “the crime.” The jury was made up of students. I was the innocent friend who happened to get caught with the other two defendants. I had to tell the jury how I knew the defendants and what we were doing before “the crime.” The mock trial was held in the auditorium where the rest of the general assembly (all the students) were in the audience.

GA Girl’s State Mock Trial Cast – My given name is Megan Hester.Courtesy of Megan-Claire Chase

I said we were at the beach just laying out before deciding to leave. When I uttered that sentence, I heard snickers from the black girls in the audience. When the mock trial was over, some of them asked why I would be laying out in the sun to get darker. They said, “Black people don’t do that.“

That’s how deep systemic racism is in America. As blacks, every single one of us are aware that during slavery the light-skinned slaves got to stay in the slave owner’s house while the dark-skinned slaves had to be in the field. So, we inherently know that being lighter is seen as less threatening and aesthetically beautiful.

I continue working on my own Mixed Fragility and admit I’m struggling. Each time I look in the mirror, the first thing I notice aside from the chemo curly hair is my nose. It’s large. It’s not dainty like my mother’s. I’ve always compared my features to my mother who is biracial. We look nothing alike, yet white people always say we do because blacks often “all look alike” in their eyes. When I look at one my favorite pictures with my mother from when I was 10 years old, the difference is striking. I’ve always hated that I favor my father’s side who are dark-skinned and not my mother’s side.

10-year-old Megan and MotherCourtesy of Megan-Claire Chase

What shades are considered light, medium, or dark? Where do I fall in the spectrum? I have a visceral reaction when someone in the black or white community calls me dark. I immediately take it to mean I am not considered attractive. How warped and heartbreaking is that? Will my exact

skin color ever be seen in our society as beautiful and desired?

Just how dark am I?

Me on Wed., 6/24/20Courtesy of Megan-Claire Chase

Until next time,

Warrior Megsie

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