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How it Feel To Be Colorless Me

Teryn Trent

I am just as black as I am white. I remember always trying to explain to people that I am not just black or African American when I was younger. When you mix the shades of black and white you get gray, but for some reason I am not gray. When I first learned about colors and shades I often questioned why it was that I was not gray. It only made sense that if my mother was white, and my father was black, then technically I should be gray. However, I am not gray, I am brown. It is because of the fact that I am brown that people have looked at me differently and it has taken a long time for me to realize that the color of your skin will dictate how society will judge you. I have come to love and accept my skin, but I didn't always feel that way.

I remember the day that I first discovered racism, my great-grandfather called my mother on the phone, drunk, to call my mother a "Nigger Lover" for "bringing a nigger into the family". He died 14 years later without knowing anything about that "nigger", the only great grandson he shared a birthday with. I was five years old when that happened, but I didn't fully grasp the situation until I was an adult and she explained to me what happened that night. My mother never forgave him. Being a single mother raising two mixed African-American children, my mother did her best to raise and love my sister and me to the best of her limited knowledge and ability. Growing up my mother taught me what unconditional love was. She told me, "true love sees no color, it is blind", tears streamed down her warm autumn eyes, each one carrying a universe overflowing with love, all for me, and to this day I live by that principle, and I love by this principle. I love deeply, unconditionally, and colorlessly.

Growing up I was surrounded by my white family. A black boy on the outside, a white boy on the inside; surrounded by a white family, in a white community. I stood out like Sharpie ink on an ivory piece of paper. I remember growing up side by side with my white cousin and at the time we didn't see color, we saw family. We would spend our weekends at our grandparent's house and play while they worked contently in the emerald garden of their love, and we would make jokes about insufferable girls and their "cooties" like normal boys do. At the time the world seemed so easy and innocent. I never noticed that I had different skin until someone else pointed it out. I always knew I was different, but I thought that was just because I didn't have a dad, not because my skin was darker than everyone else in my family. As a kid, you don't think about those things as much as you do as an adult. Kids are more focused on having fun than how their skin color impacts their life.

But changes came in middle school, when I could be placed into racial and ethnic groups. Somehow my Afro-European race was overlooked and I was just labeled "black". Naturally, I would be forced to hang out and act like the "black" kids. I tried, I tried very hard; but they didn't want me. I was too white on the inside to hang out with the "black" kids, and too black on the outside to hang out with the "white" kids. I was an abomination; I asked myself if I really should be ashamed of my beautiful skin color. It was because of this time in my life that I questioned my own self worth because I had no clue where I belonged. So I began to traverse the vast wastelands of racial mutts until I found a group of my own that would not be conscientious and judgmental of society's racial barriers. It helped me develop my sense of identity to have people like me to hang out with, but it still was a small percentage of the population that I felt could understand how I felt.

High school changed things. In high school the racial groups were not so evident surprisingly. I went to a very diverse high school so it was at this time I decided to branch off and

explore where I felt I belonged. I no longer felt like a fly in milk, I no longer felt like I wasn't "black" or "white" enough to become friends and socialize with certain people. I began developing my own identity as a person of mixed race. Of course there were people that I would necessarily fit in with, but at this point I began not caring. I realized that I am more than my skin color. Even if society would label me as black, I would remind myself that I am more. I am Teryn. I am more than just some word used to describing my external appearance. I am human. It is hard to love something when you feel like people look down on you for that quality, but I came to realize that it isn't impossible.

However, I still felt unsure of my identity. I wanted to find a group of mixed people that could relate to my internal struggle. I never really found that group. I tried to talk to my mom and explain how I felt, but she would always get very upset because she felt like I shouldn't need to identify with anything. It would make her feel as if she had failed as a mother because I had not known my own worth. I think a lot of it has to do with being raised without a black father, but if I were to talk to her about it I know it would break her heart-so I haven't said anything. She believed that race really isn't important, and I understand that, but it still feels good to know that there are other people like yourself out in the world and that you are not alone.

Now that I am in college I feel like I don't need to categorize myself. It seems like everyone, including myself, is too focused on surviving college instead of what group of people they belong to. Luckily Butler is a more diverse and liberal school, so I don't feel any real racial pressure. I also feel like the students and faculty in this school are mature enough to talk about these racial barriers and how they impact people of color like myself. It makes it much easier for me to accept who I am and what I look like now that I don't feel judged based on my external appearance. However, I know that the rest of the world is not Butler University and that there are people who will judge me solely

based on the external color of my skin. I guess that is okay, there is nothing I can really do to change that. I think it is more important to be secure with myself and my identity rather than try to change it to be “whiter” or “blacker” just to fit in with a group.

I still feel conflicted when I have to fill out my information and I am asked for my “race” or “ethnicity” it bother me that I still have to fill in the box next to “black” or “African-American”. This frustrates me; is a tiny box supposed to represent me? I am proud to be both European and African-American. So why must I only be represented by one? My ancestors where Kings and Queens of the motherland of all life, they where explorers and settlers of a new world, they were warriors and soldiers, survivors of slavery, and so much more! How can one little box represent thousands of past generations? I wish I could just rip that box up and walk away with a little rebelliousness in my stride, but I can’t. I have to fill one in, I have to identify with something or to everyone else I will be nothing; it doesn’t matter that to myself, I am me. It is times like these that I wonder if my own self identity really matters. If my feelings on the matter don’t matter to someone else, why should they matter to me? I have never taken it so far as to disregard my own self identity, but it makes me wonder if I am just a racial statistic or a person.

I am black, and I am white; no matter how much I may have wanted to change that at time, I realize that I cannot. In ballet there is not a lot of diversity. It is a Eurocentric art form, thus it is predominately made up of Caucasians. That doesn’t mean that there aren’t different races and ethnicities of people that can dance, but majority of dancers are white. Most dancers of color are not really seen as classical dancers unless they work exceptionally hard and land a job in principle roles in big name companies. Like with other aspects of life I fall in the category of being a dancer of color. Other than that dancers of color are not really as popular as their white counterparts. I am not Martin Luther King Jr. or Nelson Mandela; I am just a dancer on stage; my sole purpose is to

entertain people, not teach them. How is a dancer supposed to change the way the world sees color like his mother once did for him? I don't think it is possible. It seems all I can really do is accept myself and hope the world learns to love people like me, like I love me.