

Skin color – the root of my anxiety

[Experience](#), [Personal Experience](#)



The race question has always made me pause. I know who I am and I'm aware of my ethnicity. I have not struggled with my identity because my parents have shared the details surrounding my heritage. My mother is mixed and my father is African American. My struggle is dealing with the questions and harassment from others who constantly question my race. I've lost track of how many times someone has asked me, "If you're black why are you so pale?" or "Which one of your parents is black and which one is white?" My question to them is, "Why do you care?" I shouldn't have to justify who I am to anyone in person or by checking a box.

Growing up, I was often frustrated trying to explain my racial background, because I found myself having to prove my "blackness" to certain people and neglecting the totality of my heritage. I was called names such as "white girl," "albino," and "lighty." It hurt, but I learned to ignore the ignorance of those who would make these comments. I understood that by having light skin, blue eyes, and blond hair, people often thought of me as caucasian because they did not believe these were features of a black person. I do classify myself as black and I am very proud of it. To me, being black goes deeper than having dark skin. It's about ancestors who were enslaved, a great-grandfather who was an original Tuskegee Airman and prominent businessman, another great-grandfather who was one of the first African American business owners during the Jim Crow era, a Norwegian great-great-grandmother who came to America on a boat and signed her name in the book at the immigration station on Ellis Island, and a family who is just as content and proud of their background as myself.

Being of mixed ethnicity often leaves me misperceived. People think I have a problem with my identity. Do I wish for a darker skin complexion so when I tell people that I am black they won't think I'm lying? Not at all. I've learned to accept and sincerely value who I am because of all the wonderful people who came together by the grace of God to help create me. The color of my skin does not define who I am. People have belittled me and made me feel as though I should be ashamed of who I am. Their efforts are futile.

Experiencing these hardships related to my heritage my entire life has made me more resilient and better able to face future challenges. With the help of my parents, I became a student with the potential to do great in all my classes and in real world situations. I didn't let what people had to say get to me. I kept on going with my education and life. However, here I am back in that room, trying to move forward with the SAT, but still staring at the race choices and sighing as I color in the African American bubble. Not because I'm ashamed, but because I'm forced, once again, to classify myself and justify who I am. I know who I am: A strong young woman of mixed heritage who's ready to take on the world completely content with who I am and never allowing others' perception of me get in my way.