

“DO YOU HAVE CANCER OR SOMETHING?”

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“**Y**eah or something” I lied not wanting to go into the long winded explanation of my disorder in which, based on past experiences, the conversation would either end in awkward silence or confusion and then awkward silence. It was easier to say what they wanted to hear, to give an explanation that they wanted, that they knew; it was better to lie. I plastered on a smile and finished up her transaction, unable to do much of anything else. I handed over her receipt. “Thank you, have a good day” I said mechanically. “You too, oh and good luck with... that” she said hurriedly grabbing her groceries. I choked back a cynical laugh.

“I just thought you didn’t shampoo your hair...”

Trichotillomania is an impulse control disorder that causes people to pull out the hair from their scalp, eyelashes, eyebrows, or other parts of the body that can result in noticeable bald patches. As many as 4 percent of the world’s population is known to have this disorder and is four times more common among women than men. Hair pulling varies greatly in its severity, location and response to treatment. I have been battling with it since I was thirteen.

“Did you have surgery?”

In 2012, Americans spent around 11 billion dollars on about 1.6 million different cosmetic procedures, not including Botox, which is one of the leading non-surgical cosmetic procedures in America. Over 90% of plastic surgery patients are women with more than 10 million women having plastic procedures each year. These procedures always run the risk of going wrong, and even if it works out well, it takes a long time for the body to heal. Risks like pain, infection, hives, bleeding, numbness, scarring, skin loss, blurred vision, swelling, blind-

ness, nerve damage, ruptured implants, hair loss, loss of facial expression, skin damage, baggy skin, skin falling off, toxic shock, burning, fat clots in the lungs, heart problems, kidney problems, bursting blood vessels, blood clots, disability, and death.

“Why?”

Why do you bite your nails? Why do you twirl your hair or tap your foot? Why is there a need to check our phone every two minutes for new messages? Or talk to ourselves when no one's around? Why do we have to dress up every day before leaving the front door? Why do we have to adjust our hair just so? Why do we cake on makeup and take hours upon hours to look perfect? Why look in the windows to make sure nothing has changed? Why must we stare at ourselves so closely that we fog up the mirror? Why do we obsess over every zit, every blackhead, every pore, every out of place eyelash, every drool stain and every remnant of food in our teeth?

“Why don't you want to come swim with us?”

What if I get my hair wet? They'd see my bald spots. The thinning of my hair exposed by the lake's touch. I let the subtle waves brush past my feet as I stay covered tightly in a towel. Looking out to where my friends are laughing and splashing I feel a pang of sadness and longing. Longing to not care, to enjoy the water and the feel of the unknown. To give myself over to my love for the sea and all its cousins. Instead, I silently turn back to the fire pit and sit waiting, eyes brimming with tears, for them to return.

“You shouldn't worry so much over what other people think of you.”

According to researchers at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, from 1983 to 2009, stress increased 18% for women and 24% for men. Those with higher stress were women, people with lower incomes and those with less education. The average high school kid today has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the early 1950s. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in America, affecting 40 million adults age 18 and older, or 18% of the population.

“Oh. Your hair is so short on top... I'll see what I can do.”

My heartbeat quickens as I silently psych myself up. Do I really need a haircut? I could just dye my own hair. Or wait longer, no big deal. They probably won't even have an opening. I avidly avoid appointments because they tend to loom over my head and amplify my

already heightened anxiety. I lock my car door and walk through the clear glass doors into the salon. Looking inside I see a wave of nameless faces and feel a bit better. Not much. I don't know any names of the people inside because I try to avoid the same hairdresser twice. Not because I am picky, but because I hate the conversations. The silences, the inquires, the need to try and 'help' or understand. The judgments or conversations that always circle back to the one topic I hate to discuss. I don't want to hear all their confusion and attempts to figure out how to best hide or blend or fix my hair. So I just sit there, as statuesque as can be allowed, watching the clock tick until I am released.

“Do you have a rash?”

Thought to be brought on by poor diets, pollution, or lack of exercise, acne is most likely the bane of pubescent people's existence. In the 1960s, blackheads managed to rank as the most repulsive of all bodily excretions. Americans spend over 11 billion dollars annually to treat acne and skin blemishes. Although thought to be a modern day curse, acne is not a new development. Ancient Egyptians believed that acne was caused by telling lies and facial disfigurement has been seen as a mark placed by the devil throughout history. An analysis of cinema shows that even now we still have an association between skin conditions, scars, and evil.

“You have a baby face.”

Like it or not, a person's face affects the way that others view them, especially in first impressions. According to several studies, the shape of a person's face plays a role in how a person is perceived, their attractiveness, and even their chances of getting a job. Women who wear makeup are perceived as more competent, trustworthy and attractive than their barefaced counterparts. People with symmetrical faces are viewed as prettier and more likable while people with big eyes look more youthful and trustworthy.

“That's an... interesting haircut. Did you cut it yourself?”

I look in the mirror. Tears welling in my eyes as I try to comb over the newest bald spot to no avail. Strands of hair litter the sink as I scoop the hairball out and throw it away. I try my best to hide it and hope that no one will notice. Wiping my eyes, I put on a fresh paint of makeup and head off to school.

“Your skin is so light, it looks like porcelain.”

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In 2013, a study by the University of Cape Town found that more than one-third of women in South Africa bleach their skin because they want to have ‘white skin.’ Nigerians are the biggest users of bleaching agents, with 77% of women using the products on a regular basis. Skin bleaching has been linked to skin and blood cancers as well as an increase in burns, and skin damage.

About 7.8 million women and 1.9 million men use tanning beds. Although the numbers have been decreasing overall, there is a 177% increase in tanning among men between ages 40 to 49 and a 71% increase in usage among men 50 and up. Indoor tanning increases the risk of melanoma up to 75%.

“You have pretty eyes. They look almost like amber.”

Nearly half of all Asians have an epicanthal fold, a skin fold of the upper eyelid that covers the inner corner of their eyes. East Asian Blepharoplasty, or eyelid surgery, reshapes the skin around the eye with incisions and sutures to create a defined crease on the upper lid, or a ‘double-lid’ common in Western people. This cosmetic surgery is one of the most popular Asian cosmetic surgeries in America and the most common surgery in Korea.

“Do you just not use mascara?”

“So are you just getting fat or what?”

***“I’m sure you two would make a good match;
he likes personality more than looks.”***

“You just need to eat healthier.”

“You used to have such a cute little dip in your sides...”

“Your hair looks so stupid did you cut it with a fucking razor or something?”

“You just need to lose a few pounds.”

“You have more of a coke figure.”

“You should wear nail polish more, you’d look nicer.”

I look into the mirror. Tweezers in one hand. My face inches from the mirror. Below me are an assortment of makeup; foundation, cover-up, blush, eye shadow, several different sized brushes. My straightener slowly heating up to my left along with several acne washes and a washcloth set off to the side. My phone buzzes and I look down from my daily routine to read it.

“Good morning beautiful.”