

## The Racial Trauma we Share

Not white or Black, somewhere in-between,  
Always half something, never completely seen.  
Never the right colour pencil to draw a self-portrait in school,  
“let’s bring baby photos in and guess who’s who”  
But I’m the only brown one? So now don’t I feel like a fool.

I grew up in an area, predominantly white,  
Faced with every shade of racism, every day, every night.  
A beautiful snowy day, excited for a day off school,  
Tarnished by the words “p\*ki” written on my mums car  
Kids aren’t born being that cruel.

Or what about the time, our housing needed to be relocated,  
Because of the racist abuse we were receiving, the property vacated.  
And all those times throughout my life that I’ve been called the n-word,  
And can we talk about the fact that English teachers would let it be read out loud,  
and say nothing when every White kid looked at me and stared.

Aged 15, my first boyfriend, my first crush,  
“you should straighten your hair” he says, a reminder that my curls aren’t good  
enough.  
And I continued to do it, for years to come,  
Damaging my hair, who I was, to an extent that it almost couldn’t be undone.

And I was what? 16? 17? When the police strip searched me, pushed me, threw all  
my things on the floor.  
A group of about 15 White people and I was the only one?  
somehow it feels like I’ve been here before.

Aged 17, just on my way to work  
I gave a brown homeless man some money,  
A guy spat on the floor, said yeah that’s right you p\*kis stick together,  
a desensitised eyeroll, yeah wrong ethnicity honey.

Let’s not forget the fetishising and my body being treated like a possession,  
Described as “exotic”, “I love mixed girls” different sexual expectations, a toxic  
obsession.  
The feeling of being vulnerable as others sexualise my ethnicity,  
Constantly in threat-mode to check which white people are safe, which is very few  
I’ve learnt to see.

Now I’m an assistant psychologist, providing therapy to those who look like me.  
Different cities, different ages, different people but similar experiences  
How can that be?  
Hearing stories of racial abuse, physical and verbal,  
Hearing how the mental health system is part of that, it’s like we’re running around in  
circles.

We don't need to say it explicitly, because we both know that we've been there,  
Descriptions of racist experiences followed by "you know though", yeah I do and we  
both know it's unfair.

As you talk, you hold a mirror up to me, the past racial trauma that we've been  
through.

We know it's still never ending, tomorrow there'll be another "microaggression",  
racial assumption or slur that we'll have to listen to.

But we have a laugh in those sessions too, and an appreciation for everything we  
share,

Our culture, the food, the music, all that pride, that's the therapy, right there.

The validation of experiences, which we provide for each other,

An acknowledgment of the trauma, but giving hope for change to one another.

Wouldn't it be great, if that's what the mental health system focused on giving,  
I'll let that fuel my drive to change it and call out everything it's missing.

And all the things that need to go, over-representation, over- medication and  
seclusion.

And please, no more calling our cultural beliefs a "delusion".

Let's use the empathy and self-reflection that psychology prides itself on having,  
To sit together, listen to experiences and understand how the system is damaging.

Acknowledge white privilege and challenge white fragility,

It's time to start making some changes, changes that us minoritized groups will  
actually see.

*By Sherquita Waller*