

Thank You, Denise

Alisha Persaud

A white therapist who tried to heal me with rocks once said something that stuck with me. She asked why I have to match constant adjectives to my person. Enveloped in the storm of “not knowing who I am,” I sat there silently, thinking she was going to go on one of her many tangents about some New-Age Spiritualism concept colonized by Western Culture from ancient religions and traditional customs. A few minutes later I sat dumbfounded, instead. After my bit of unthoughtful silence, she explained that we are always changing (especially since I was 15 years old at the time). I didn’t have to be one thing all the time, and instead, I am always in flux. And that’s okay. Instead of convincing myself I had no intuition about myself, I would rather think about it as me excitingly evolving and developing during every moment.

While I still believe in this idea and attribute it to her words, I dare to say that it is a dangerous slope to go down depending on who you say it to. And at the time, I thought it threw me into a revolution about my character; I could rebel against common paradigms and reframe my thoughts to make myself more comfortable with the stages I was navigating through, horrified.

They’re right when they say everything is best in moderation.

I spent nights awake in my bed in a fetal position, unable to control my breaths. I trembled constantly, not being able to get up and take care of myself in the most basic ways. I lost forty pounds in two months and hoarded garbage in my room until my floor was filled with obstacles and surprises and my bed with layers of blankets to conceal the despair from the night prior. I had crying spells from my nervous stomach that couldn’t contain themselves and came out in wails instead of sniffles. An ambitious kid who spent her childhood using far-fetched goals to escape unsafety in her environment found herself unsafe in her head because she was trying to get up in the morning. Today it feels like it only lasted a moment, likely due to the blockage in memory that usually comes with shocks to the system. But the time I am recounting at this moment was five years in the past.

She didn’t know me well enough to know that she was telling a kid who was headed toward crisis that it was okay to find comfort in feeling like I lost my mind. She only saw my loss in character. Not my loss in sanity.

This is an introduction essay to me. I am a faithful believer in the idea that we are not who we are just because we choose to be something we idealize. I don’t think it’s as simple as that statement.

I am who I am because of the amalgamation of experiences, feelings, and memories I carry that shape how I choose to see myself now, in the past, and who I want to be. It is evident that some people imagine a character they want to play and perform for the rest of their lives. But I know through being stubborn to many lessons that came rather uneasy:

I am various characters in one vessel that come to life, sometimes one-at-a-time, sometimes all-at-once. But it is only these authentic persons in me, stemming from the stirring pot of my past, that comfortably upwell through me. Safely. Because it is only that which is true that can flow fluidly in my embrace. I am what I've sensed; seen consciously and unconsciously, listened to, voluntarily or not, tasted and smelt as one, and felt in the emotional, mental, or physical. All else is performance. And while I ebb and flow, unlinearly, through me and not me, byproduct of an unquiet mind, I will always return again.

It is my human nature and personal duty to come back to myself when I stray away.