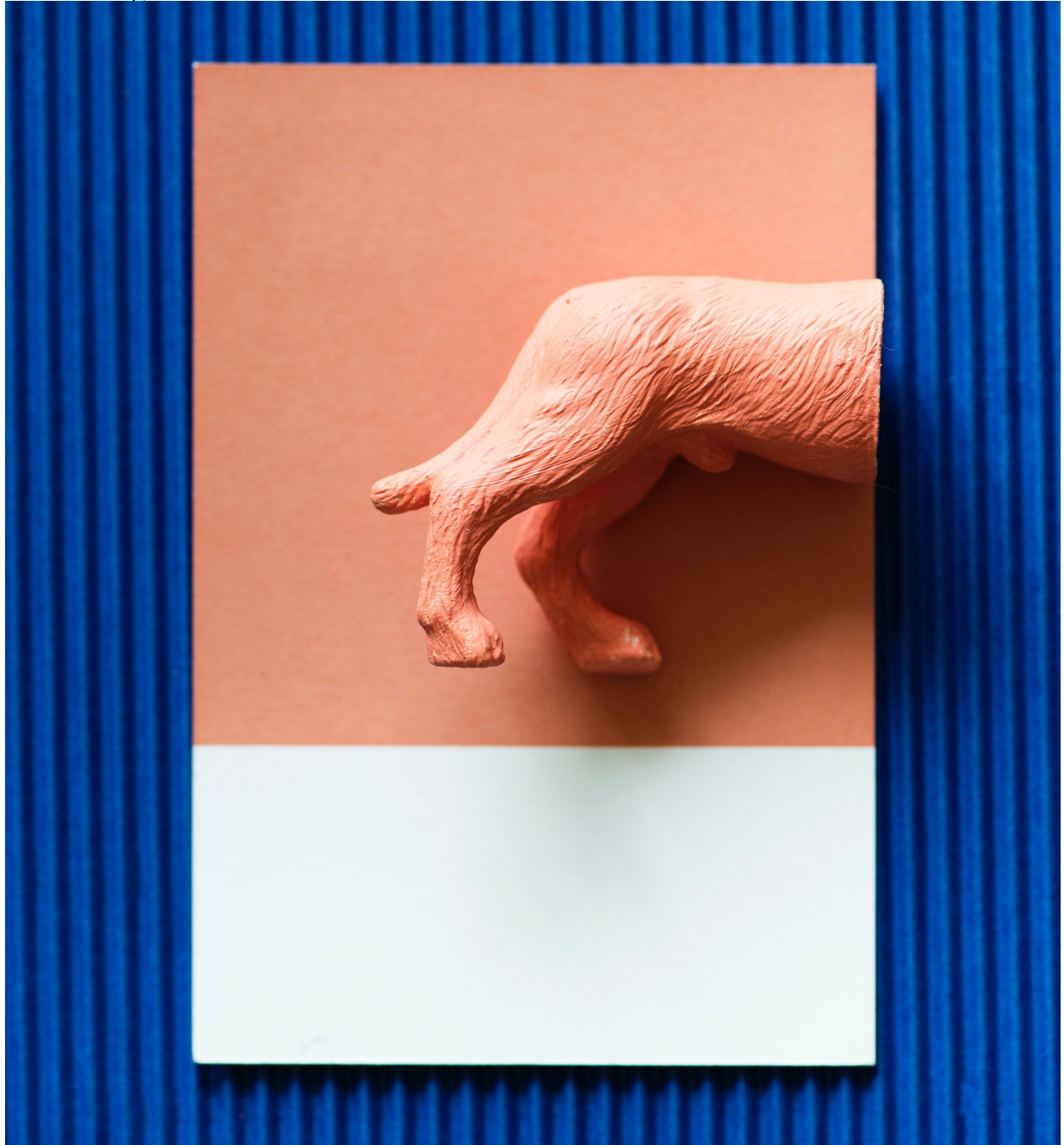


# Half-White, Half-Asian and Fully Othered

[Allison Yeh](#) | Jul 26, 2019



Growing up half-Asian felt like being a malfunctioned chameleon, often trying to blend into the background, always knowing that all of me could never completely change color. I was raised in New York City, attended a primarily white Jewish school and lived in a predominantly white Jewish neighborhood. I was five years old when I realized my family was not Jewish (my mom had to break

the news) and I was six when a boy on the school bus asked me, "What are you?" a question I became conditioned to answering from curious men at bodegas and Uber drivers searching for conversation.

I was seven when someone teasingly said I must be good at math because I am Asian. *But I'm not good at math*, I thought. *My brother is good at math, does that make him more Asian than me?*

I was ten when I excitedly flashed an A+ mark on my geography test to my parents at dinner, only to have them point out that the professor had mistakenly handed me the test of Allison Wang, my enemy for the sole reason that people mixed us up because of our shared first name and Asian-sounding last names.

"C'mon Al, Of course Allison Wang got an A+," my dad said as he forked rice into his mouth, "Asian parents have high expectations."

"Aren't you an Asian parent?" I asked.

"Yeah, and I expect a lot from you."



The author (far right) and her confusing family

Even though my dad said this, and still says this, he never made me go to SAT camp like many of my Asian-American friends' parents. He allowed me to quit piano lessons, guitar lessons and study English in college without forcing me to defend myself. Sometimes I wonder whether my brother took the role of the "Asian" child in the family, being a piano prodigy and having spent a summer in China before attending the same college as my dad to major in Mechanical Engineering. Meanwhile, I ventured to Italy, where part of my mom's family is from. My maternal grandmother expressed how she was over the moon that I was in Florence, learning Italian, finding my roots.

Being half-Asian means being in constant guilt of neglecting sides. I cried in frustration when my Ama tried to teach me Chinese and then tormented myself years later when in Taiwan I was unable to communicate with my relatives. I am guilty that as a child I wanted to be half-white; I am guilty as an adult that I want to reclaim myself as half-Asian.

A mixed-race ethnicity provides the privilege of ambiguity with the disadvantage of never truly belonging to either side of your parents or your peers. No matter how welcoming a community was, I never had the comfort of company that looked like me or had the same experiences when it came

to racial profiling or upbringing. My roommates often invited me to Shabbat services where I awkwardly stood in silence as everyone partook in prayer and song. I ate at dinners where I was the only American among Asian immigrants and felt estranged by my lack of an accent and inability to relate to their personal, yet unified, experiences of being Asian in New York. There is no “half-Asian community” because we are straddled between two identities that refuse us full belonging.

I never had half-Asian clubs or half-Asian tables in the cafeteria. I never thought to start one either, because blending in half-way was what I accepted as my identity. I became used to dating white guys who thought my half-ness justified their lack of diversity in previous girlfriends. I became used to the men at bodegas and Uber drivers asking me about where I am from (hint: the answer is not “New York”). When I am my whole self, my two sides combined, I am an ethnicity guessing game, I am a fetish, I am the box labeled: *Other*.

Yet, I am also proud to be a product of my parents who raised me and my brother in our entirety. I’ve learned to tolerate the microaggressions that make assumptions. There are places I will go to that will preemptively switch my chopsticks for a fork. There are other places that will be confused I can’t speak Korean even though I’m half Taiwanese. Even my own label as a “half-Asian” simply assumes my other half as white. I don’t know if there is any proper way to navigate this racially charged, label satisfied world. I do know that I enjoy marking the “other” box among a list of ethnicities.

Maybe because I am, in my entirety, a product of acceptance and love of the *other*.