



PARUL BANSAL

HOW TO FILL YOUR CUP

<https://youtu.be/S43F1BzfQKY>

I used to love taking showers until October 20, 2017. I remember that day. Because on that day, as I was washing my hair and pulled my hand away from my head, there was a massive clump of hair tangled in my hand. I just stared at it. It looked like a tarantula. I tried not to think about it, till the next time I showered, and it happened again, and again, and again, and again. Within a few months, I lost over 50% of my hair. I was basically bald at the back of my head.

Then one day, my boyfriend turns to me and says maybe you should get a wig. I cried so hard that night. But two weeks later, on Valentine's Day of all days, I walked into a wig shop. I took off my winter hat to reveal my mess of patchy, thin hair. As the wig shop owner looked through my scalp, he told me that I may have alopecia and that it's perfectly normal and lots of his clients who have it wear wigs and feel good about themselves.

Then he showed me the most beautiful wig you could ever imagine. And me, a perfect Indian woman, so I bought it. Yet the very next day, I felt like a fraud, like I was hiding a dirty little secret. And because of this wig, I can't shower at the gym or go swimming or even ride a freakin' roller coaster. I essentially lost all spontaneity in my life. And within a few weeks, the truth became clear.

I am not allowed to be me. I mean, to not be allowed to be is like not being allowed to see, blinded by the burden of expectations placed on me. I diapered beneath this wig, a physical embodiment of social, societal, and family pressures placed on me as a female, placed on me as an Indian woman. Should and shame, they're the same, and this wig, this wig, represents shame, unworthiness, other people's thoughts implanted into my mind. I hate this. It feels like the pressure cooker inside me's about to go off. My insides are screaming what if? What if I shave it all off? So, I went for it and f*cking shaved my head.

Hundreds of messages and phone calls flooded in, people telling me how brave I am. Ladies came up to me on the streets and picked up their wig just a little bit for me to see sparse strands of their hair. But you know what? I felt f*cking terrible. Shaving my head was supposed to finally allow me to be myself. But I literally couldn't recognize my own shadow. Once again, avoiding mirrors. I became she. Who is she?

I was forced to examine all of me with a bald head. Do I look feminine? Am I Indian? Am I even attractive? Do I fit in? 'Cause I sure as hell feel like I stand out. You know, it's as if I had this cup of who I

was, and it was full to the brim of other people's ideas. When I shaved my head, I went like this, and now, I have this empty cup. And I don't know what to do with it.

I was drawn out of hiding by many role models. I was inspired by the queer community who showed me that the spectrum of identity exists beyond conformity. I was inspired by black women who invited me into their safe spaces beyond a world that still polices their hair. I was inspired by a mere workshop, which asked me to lock eyes with myself and acknowledge my own existence.

But it wasn't until November 21, 2018, that I truly saw myself for the very first time. And in all of places, it was during six hours of video meetings where I couldn't help but notice her in that tiny little video chat box. She looked gentle, yet fierce.

Oh my god, that bald chick, she is me. I am her. For the first time in my life, it felt like my insides and outsides were in alignment. I looked like how I feel, and I feel like me. And you know what? I f*cking love my shaved head.

I mean, I look like the future. I decided that every seemingly opposing version of myself could truly coexist, my Indian roots, my Canadian upbringing, my femininity, and my fierceness, my love for hip hop, and my vintage teacup collection.

There is no box to fill, no cup to fill, and no should to hold us down. I mean, I'm bald as f*ck, so why not be bold as f*ck?

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