

Inquiry into hearing aid fosters reflection, self acceptance

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What sparked my recently renewed interest in the science behind my hearing aid started out as a pretty ordinary scene. Someone walked up to me at school and asked what happened to my left ear-- if that's what you can call the endearingly small bundle of cartilage (as endearing as small bundles of cartilage can get) that somewhat resembles an ear if you turn your head a certain way. With a familiar flourish of indifference, I replied robotically, "Oh, I was born like that."

Although this unintentionally vague response is usually enough to dispel further inquiries, this particular student was almost aggressively inquisitive, asking, "What kind of surgeries did you have? How'd they put the implant for the hearing aid here? What's the implant made of? What kind of hearing aid is it? How does it transmit sound? What is the meaning of life?" Okay, maybe not the last question, but it struck me that to me the others were just as unanswerable. I felt like Chutney from "Legally Blonde," when Elle viciously cross-examines her in court about perm maintenance. (Don't pretend like you haven't watched *Legally Blonde*. We all know the truth.)

That incident was a wake up call. I realized I was embarrassingly uneducated about this important part of me that, despite what I often like to think, does impact my life to a certain degree. For example, lacking

sound depth is a kind of annoying because if you call my name, chances are I will look every other direction before I see you, just like I won't know where my phone is ringing unless it's on my person. It's also always a little awkward to inconspicuously swivel my head to a friend who's talking to me on my deaf side, especially if they're trying to

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whisper some life-or-death secret to me-- I can tell you right now that never ends well. But on the plus side, if I'm on the right side (which actually is my right side), I can sleep through any kind of noise, like my neighbors' yappy dogs, or the volcanic snores of certain nasally congested persons (not saying any names). And all I have to do is rest my head on the pillow a certain way.

My quest for self-discovery began with hours scouring the Internet for scientific journals and uncomfortable emails to my doctor whom I hadn't talked to in about eight years. I didn't have much to go on except the mysterious name my parents called my hearing aid- The Baha. But as I sifted through online articles, I learned that people like me, without a functioning ear car-

nal, undergo surgery to get an implant for the BAHA, known in the medical world as the Bone-Anchored Hearing Aid. The doctors had apparently fused titanium with the bone in my skull right above the ear to make the implant where the BAHA would process sound through bone conduction instead of traditional air conduction.

Since this discovery, I haven't minded the whirring of the machine as much. Don't get me wrong, it's still an annoying sound, but the fact that I'm hearing it through vibrations in my skull strikes me as incomprehensibly amazing.

So I guess being deaf on one side certainly is a classic "is your glass half empty or half full" type deal; however, maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe you don't need labels because the amount in your glass won't change either way and maybe you should just be content you got options in the first place. After all, there are no discrepancies concerning what to call a glass that's completely empty.

If you want to be technical, I suppose I am half-deaf. But it's not like I'm hearing only 50% of what I'm supposed to. It's always been 100% to me. It's the medium through which I hear that varies, whether it's through my right ear, the indescribably strange vibrations I feel when I put my left ear up to a speaker, the bones in my skull via the miraculous hearing aid I so unfairly underappreciated or even the ringing from my left ear I only seem to hear in the dead of the night, so gentle and imperceptible I feel

like I'm imagining it. And maybe I am, but it lulls me to sleep nonetheless.