

Not _____ Enough



I will never forget the first time I felt “less than.”

I was onstage and in costume, ready to perform for the very first time at the local Greek festival. Our dance troupe director was welcoming the audience and explaining the origin of our opening number. The girl standing next to me in line started to ask the dancers in the immediate area “how much Greek” they were. She went down the line.

“I’m 100%.”

“100!”

“100.”

It was my turn. “I’m half Greek,” I said.

The “100%” crew proceeded to exchange high-fives and accolades with each other.

I had just turned five.

We see one-upmanship everywhere, but it astonishes me even more when it happens among “circles” of people. We see it within various ethnic or racial groups—not black enough, not Asian enough, not Italian enough. It happens within different religious groups, too, when people challenge each other’s piety, and within the LGBTQ+ community, when some don’t

feel “queer enough.” We see it when a musical artist or celebrity passes away, and “true fans” call others “bandwagoners.”

When a person who expresses a fondness for an athletic team, comic book character, video game, or movie franchise, their dedication and aptitude is put to the test by other fans. Men aren’t “man enough” if they show their emotions. Vegetarians and vegans judge each other’s level of commitment. Body builders, feminists, artists, the list goes on.

We all do this to each other to some degree. But for what?

I’m especially shocked and saddened to see this unfortunate phenomenon within our very own MS community.

“You’re weak because you take medication. You’re poisoning yourself. Yoga and diet is just as effective.”

“You’re too negative. You just want attention and for everyone to feel sorry for you.”

“You’re too positive. You’re blind to reality.”

“Your symptoms aren’t that bad. You could have cancer.”

“You’ve only had MS for a short time, so therefore you’re naïve and are behaving all wrong. You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“But you don’t look sick.”

We, as people living with MS, often hear hurtful, judgmental comments from people around us. Sometimes our doctors can be insensitive. Sometimes we get glares and accusations from people when we use our disabled parking placards. Some of us get denied social security disability insurance, even if we wake up in constant pain, unable to move or lose our eyesight.

And we don’t appreciate it.

So if it hurts us so much, why do we, as an MS community, do these things to one another when we’re all in the same boat?

Our community should be safe space to share our own experiences and learn from others, without it turning it into a competition. The ways in which our disease manifests vary from person to person, from day to day. We know this. So why can’t we respect that fact and allow and encourage each other to cope in our own unique ways?

For me, the most frustrating thing about MS is this:

My body... **MY** body, is attacking itself.

When we MSers turn on each other and try to make others in our community feel less than, we self-attack.

Just like the disease we are all trying to fight.

We become MS.