

Beyond the Discomfort

I have always been an active person. I danced, skied, played field hockey and lacrosse, and even hiked a lot as I grew up. Recently, I ran my first half-marathon and felt great about it. And hot yoga has become one of my all-time favorite forms of activity. Especially coming from a mother who is a fitness guru - teaching dance, yoga and Pilates throughout our childhood, I was exposed to a healthy lifestyle early on. But for some reason, when it comes to hiking, it just gets me breathing, sweating and thinking in a completely different way. And honestly, I kind of hate it. But for some weird reason, I also love it.

I like to think of myself as an avid hiker, or at least an ambitious one like 22-year-old Cheryl Strayed in her novel and film *Wild*. I pretend I have all the skills and gear to claim myself as a real hiking enthusiast, but as much as I want to be a badass hiker - I'm not. Or at least as much as I'd like to be.

Whatever mileage my fellow hiker announces before a hike as the desired distance, I get ecstatic about conquering that much of the mountain ahead of me. The first incline is always so exciting as I look up and eagerly wait to reach the top and see the beautiful views. But this excitement quickly fades as I begin to tackle the thoughts in my mind and tell myself how out of shape I am.

To be honest, it kills me to admit that I am not as keen on hiking as I'd like to be. Being from Colorado, specifically the mountains, people expect more from me. I am an outdoorsy person and I love being outside, but with hiking I just can't wrap my head around it sometimes.

I saw *Wild* for the first time a few years ago, and loved it. I thought, what a great way to find yourself and get more in shape all at the same time. Hiking the Pacific Crest Trail seemed like not too far-fetched of a goal for me - but full disclosure, I still have yet to even attempt such an endeavor. After all, I do spend a lot of time outside and doing some form of activity. But like I said before, hiking is different. And I am beginning to understand and try to wrap my head around if it is

maybe just a mental thing or if I am in fact more out of shape than I thought I was. But regardless, I have to get to the bottom of this revelation.

It's a love hate relationship that I have with hiking. I love it because there is no better feeling than getting outside, breathing in the fresh air and simply just being one with nature. But I hate it mainly because my breathing becomes heavy and shortened.

My love for hiking comes from the joy I get with the chance to clear my head, and it's honestly another form of meditation for me. One of the best parts of hiking is the photo-ops, which I absolutely crave. Colorado nature is incredibly photogenic, and for that I love hiking. It makes me appreciate where I live more, to see towns and valleys at higher grounds, and to experience the real and genuine bonding a good old-fashioned hike can bring. Whether it's with my brother, best friend, dog, acquaintance, or by myself – they all give me something that is completely satisfying. Looking back and being able to say 'I did that,' is one of the most rewarding things to be able to say.

But yet, I still don't know what it is. The minute I start the first incline and my heart starts beating faster and my breath intensifies, I start to lose a bit of faith in myself. Many moments of huffing and puffing consume my first few miles as I try to pretend like I'm not sweating while the other people hiking are strides ahead of me.

It's like when I'm in New York City with my older sister and for some reason I always find myself running to catch up to her. Granted, my legs are shorter than hers and I do get distracted a lot, but it dumfounds me how I will be right next to her and then the next thing I know I am sprinting to catch up to her as she's calling my name to quickly make it to the subway in time. And let me tell you, running into the subway trying to get my MetroCard and swipe it in a timely fashion, as a line of about 30 people has somehow just formed behind me, is one of the utmost stressful situations.

And that's how I have started to compare my hiking adventures- to catching up to my sister in a city that never stops moving. Terrible comparison, I know – a dirty city without any space versus a fresh aired, beautiful and spacious trail. Hiking is way different than hustling to work in a crowded subway, but it's stressful to me

when people move fast and it doesn't give me enough time to truly absorb everything around me.

I am learning more and more that I like to take it all in, and when I say take it all in; I mean truly taking the time to do so. I enjoy slow-moving hikes, as I am a bit of a slow moving person myself – or so my best friend likes to remind me from time to time. But I like leisure, and for some reason I keep coming back to hiking as an idea that it's one of my favorite activities - so weird, because it's not.

But I will still continue to hike, because I love nature and it pushes me to be okay with the uncomfortable parts in life. I love the connection it brings between individuals and the pure bliss I get from sitting on top of those mountains. Looking over the imperfect yet perfect world we live in, I sit there breathless from the beauty beyond my very own eyes. And I think to myself, how lucky am I to be able to admire such magic from a seemingly not so simple activity we call hiking.