

"Youngmi Mayer writes with a raw, enviable freedom that simply floors you."
—MICHELLE ZAUNER, author of *Crying in H Mart*

I'M
LAUGHING
BECAUSE
I'M
CRYING
A Memoir
YOUNGMI
MAYER

BOOK CLUB KIT

Hiiii Book Club People,

Thank you for reading *I'm Laughing Because I'm Crying*. The book is based on the Korean saying "If you laugh while crying, hair will grow out of your buttohole" which has been the punchline of one of my most popular standup bits as well as the inspiration of the name of my podcast.

I set out to write a memoir in the style of how stories are told in Korea, where trauma is bookended by inappropriate vicious jokes, causing the children listening to laugh while crying, and hair to grow out of their butts. I discuss the severe trauma faced by my Korean family throughout the last 100 years, including everything from Japanese Imperialism to being forced to listen to The Bee Gees. I also discuss the harsh realities faced by my dad's white family as European immigrants, before moving onto my own life, full of relatively milder yet different trauma, as a biracial child growing up in South Korea (before it was cool) and a tiny Micronesian island called Saipan. And throughout it all, I tell jokes. Because one thing I learned from my Korean family is that the only way to survive the sadness is to laugh. The only way to get through life is to have a hairy buttohole.

I'm Laughing Because I'm Crying is a book of extremes, a book split in halves—much like me—where each binary is explored and dissected to death, resulting in the ultimate conclusion that there actually is no binary, and to laugh is to cry.

I hope you and your book club enjoy the read.
I'd love to hear what you think!

—Youngmi



Discussion Questions

1. Youngmi Mayer spent a significant portion of her early life outside the United States. In what ways do you think this background influenced her perspectives on race and culture in America?
2. The title suggests a blend of humor and sadness. How does Mayer use humor to cope with challenging situations? Can you identify specific moments where laughter intersects with deeper emotional truths?
3. Youngmi shares, "People ask me all the time why I don't identify as a white person when I am as white as I am Korean. The answer to that is simple: white people will not let me." (p. 30). What insights do you gain from this statement about the complexities of racial identity?
4. Reflecting on Youngmi's narratives about her grandparents and parents, how do you believe these previous generations have shaped her worldview and her own identity?
5. Youngmi identifies as half-Korean and half-German and discusses the historical contexts of these heritages. In what ways do you think the historical elements of your own background influence your perspective on life?
6. Through the exploration of her parents' relationship, Youngmi addresses gender dynamics. Which of her observations resonated with you the most, and what impact did it have on your understanding of gender roles?
7. How does Youngmi Mayer delve into the complexities of her identity throughout the book? In what specific ways do her cultural background and personal experiences inform her viewpoint?
8. How do you think Mayer's profession as a stand-up comic contributed to her writing style and the book's themes? Discuss the impact of her tone, structure, and use of anecdotes on your reading experience.
9. In what ways does Mayer demonstrate resilience in the face of adversity? What lessons can be drawn from her journey?
10. How do the themes in the book resonate with current social or political issues? Can you relate Mayer's experiences to contemporary discussions about identity and belonging?
11. Mayer mentions the yin-yang throughout the book as a symbol of two extremes coming together, stating "at first you think it depicts a binary of white and black, but the symbol isn't split down the middle- it's a circle encompassing both. We aren't one side or the other; we are both sides, forever and ever." (p. 8) How do you think this theme applies throughout various stories throughout the book?
12. How does motherhood change Mayer's life? Discuss the importance of her relationship with her son to her life journey.

Book Club Recipe: Tiger Salad

Inspired by Youngmi Mayer's time at Mission Chinese Food

This is my version of the Tiger Salad based on the dish from the Mission Chinese Food in San Francisco. The original is sort of complicated so I made a version that has all the parts I love about it but is way easier to make.



You can swap out basically any of the ingredients except for the following or it won't taste the same:

- Grated daikon
- Rice wine vinegar
- Hearty, herby dark greens such as mesclun, chrysanthemum greens etc (I don't personally think cabbage or kale work in this recipe but you can use a bagged lettuce mix)
- Fresh rice noodles in large sheets (you can't swap this out because it's 99% of the reason I like this salad, the texture is unique and different than rice paper)

Ingredients (Note: I never measure anything so all the measurements are approximate, add everything to taste.)

Dressing

1 tbs - Grated daikon

1 tbs - Rice wine vinegar

1 tbs - Soy sauce

1 tsp - Yuzu juice (this comes in bottles in Japanese stores)

(optional) togarashi, furikake, toasted sesame or shredded seaweed (the kind that comes in individual packs)

Salad Mix

1 tbs - Olive oil

Pinch of Salt

1 tbs - Rice wine vinegar

3 cups - Dark, leafy greens or bagged mix lettuce (or both)

1 cup - At least 3 of the following herbs (or you can use all of them): cilantro, mint, kketnip, shiso, basil

Mix the salad and the herbs in a big salad bowl. Add olive oil, vinegar and salt. Basically you just need enough liquid to barely cover all the greens and lightly bind them together.

Take one sheet of rice noodle and put some of the salad near one end, like you're making a sushi roll. Use enough greens that the roll is sturdy and packed pretty tight. After rolling up, cut into 3 or 4 pieces and place vertical in a row so they're standing up.

Mix grated daikon, yuzu juice, rice wine vinegar and soy sauce in a small bowl and drizzle on top of the salad. Finish by sprinkling either togarashi, furikake, sesame seeds and/or shredded seaweed on top.

The salad is extremely light and refreshing and serves as a good side dish to heavier Asian dishes. I think it would also be a good side for Korean bbq and could even replace standard lettuce.

Also I've seen it served in the restaurant with canned smoked mussels on top or pieces of Japanese style eel with eel sauce, which could be an option if you're eating the salad as a meal.