



1-27-2014

A Confession of a Blonde Asian Girl

Michelle Lee
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge>

 Part of the [Asian American Studies Commons](#), [Asian Studies Commons](#), and the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Lee, Michelle, "A Confession of a Blonde Asian Girl" (2014). *SURGE*. 40.
<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/40>

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/40>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

A Confession of a Blonde Asian Girl

Abstract

I never realized I was an Asian.

Nor was I aware I was from South Korea.

The thought of identifying myself as Asian was redundant for I was, indeed, from Asia where Asian people lived. So when I no longer lived amongst “my own people,” I was immediately labeled, “Asian.” However, I wasn’t exactly excited about the new label. Not that I was in denial of my Asian heritage, but I didn’t comprehend people’s continuous need to point out the obvious. Yes, I am Asian, but you are only looking at a microscopic part of me. My ethnicity had no more significance than saying, “I am a girl.” However, whether I liked it or not, people constantly reminded me of my *Asianness*. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, ethnicity, individualism, stereotypes, Asian Americans, Asian Heritage

Disciplines

Asian American Studies | Asian Studies | Race and Ethnicity | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | Sociology

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

A CONFESSION OF A BLONDE ASIAN GIRL

January 27, 2014

I never realized I was an Asian.

Nor was I aware I was from South Korea.

The thought of identifying myself as Asian was redundant for I was, indeed, from Asia where Asian people lived. So when I no longer lived amongst “my own people,” I was immediately labeled, “Asian.” However, I wasn’t exactly excited about the new label. Not that I was in denial of my Asian heritage, but I didn’t comprehend people’s continuous need to point out the obvious. Yes, I am Asian, but you are only looking at a microscopic part of me. My ethnicity had no more significance than saying, “I am a girl.” However, whether I liked it or not, people constantly reminded me of my *Asianness*.

Similarly, saying that I am from Korea didn’t suffice. No, I wasn’t from Korea. I was from South Korea, because there are two Koreas, and you don’t want to be from the other side. It was also a way of preventing people from embarrassing themselves by asking, “Are you from the North or the South?” But then came the follow-up classic, “So, how’s North Korea?” as if I knew them like the back of my hand.

It wasn’t until a year later that I started picking up some racial jokes and managed not to be resentful. I still felt awkward checking the “choose your ethnicity” box. I detested when people swore, “Those damn Chinese,” or waved at me saying, “*Ni hao*,” with the biggest smile on their face.

Apparently, everything I did had to do with my Asianness.

She’s so studious—Oh, that’s because she’s Asian.

She’s so polite—Oh, that’s because she’s Asian and Asians respect the elderly.

She speaks Chinese—Oh, that’s because she’s Asian. We should take her out for Chinese food, too (NO).



Apparently, the Asia=China mindset predominated people's minds, trivializing the rest of Asia as some subcategories of China that spoke Chinese.

Thus, when I became blonde, or the blonde Asian on campus, people reacted as if I was going against the nature of the universe. My bloneness to them had nothing to do with crossing out one more item on my bucket list nor my eccentric nature, but my abortive attempt at being "American."

In fact, my "Asian" or "South Korean" side was fading away as I entered my fourth year in the States.

I could now go over the classic self-introduction, "I'm from South Korea, and no, South Koreans do not live under the fear of North Korean invasion," by heart. I also came to acknowledge that I was Asian, and that I possessed certain stereotypical Asian traits. (i.e. I am shamelessly a nerd.)

But gradually, I took less offense to people's obliviousness of my heritage. After all, I was from an exotic place, and it was a good thing that people were interested in learning about different cultures. Living as an Asian in a non-Asian country rarely bothered me anymore as long as I coped well with self-introductions and meeting new people.

However, living as a blonde Asian was a whole different story. On the one hand, yes, blondes did have more fun. I surreptitiously enjoyed the attention I got as I strolled through campus (at least for a while), and my bloneness was an excellent icebreaker that rescued me from the cyclical, political debate on North Korea. More people were willing to help and make conversations as if I were now a lesser threat or an objection of attention.

On the other hand, my bloneness quickly confined me to a single tag of the blonde Asian girl. It didn't matter what and who I was anymore, because my greatest and most obvious characteristic was my bloneness. I would wonder how people remembered me so easily, until I looked into the mirror and realized I was *the* blonde Asian.

As my undeniable black roots grew back, however, I was reminded of my Asian heritage, and felt grateful for it.

No matter how many years I live in the States; no matter how "Americanized" I become; no matter what color I dye my hair, my black hair was to grow back as the evidence of who I am and where I am from. After two months of living as a blonde, I dyed my hair completely black, which instantly turned me incognito as any other Asian on the street. At first, I nearly felt enfeebled by the normalness and blackness of my hair, but very soon I realized, thank god, I was finally NOT the blonde Asian. My black hair represented my blank state, in which now I could paint, color, write, cover, morph and doodle however I wished.

Michelle Lee '17
Editor

<http://surgegettyburg.wordpress.com/2014/01/27/a-confession-of-a-blonde-asian-girl/>