



11-19-2014

A Difference of Appearance

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Moreno, Charlotte H., "A Difference of Appearance" (2014). *SURGE*. 254.
<http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/surge/254>

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A Difference of Appearance

Abstract

Appearance can seem like it's everything.

My father is from California; his parents are from Mexico and El Salvador. He has tan skin and dark hair and is bilingual in English and Spanish. My mom, though also from California, is a combination of Irish, Cuban, and Hungarian. She passed on her fair skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes to me. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, appearance, heritage, stereotypes

Disciplines

Race and Ethnicity | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | Social Psychology and Interaction |
Sociology of Culture

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 DIFFERENCE OF APPEARANCE

November 19, 2014



Appearance can seem like it's everything.

My father is from California; his parents are from Mexico and El Salvador. He has tan skin and dark hair and is bilingual in English and Spanish. My mom, though also from California, is a combination of Irish, Cuban, and Hungarian. She passed on her fair skin, blonde hair, and blue eyes to me.

I am proud to be Hispanic, but my physical features show little evidence of my genetic heritage. My appearance doesn't match society's expectation of what a Hispanic woman looks like.

People see me as white. There's a positive side to this. I don't often face the immediate social stigma like many of my peers of color who feel singled out as they enter a predominantly [white classroom](#).

I fit in. Or, so it seems.

Recently, I was walking with some friends and one of them mentioned that we probably look like a diverse

group to strangers. She pointed to my Vietnamese-Chinese friend as representing Asia, at herself as Hispanic, and then at me as white. I didn't take offense because I know what I look like and how people perceive me. But still, this is the disconnect that separates me from who I am. Living within a society that defines me based on appearance makes me feel powerless and detached from who I know myself to be.

In *Glam Belleza Latina*, Sophia Vergara revealed that she darkened her hair in order to look more "Latina". She didn't get cast in Hollywood roles at first because directors and producers didn't think that

she looked “[Latina enough](#)”. Vergara confessed that she changed her natural beauty to, “make it more in tune with [her] accent, and it worked.” In order to satisfy society’s stereotypes, a true native Colombian woman altered her physical features. I wonder if Vergara feels disconnected too.

Growing up, my dad didn’t teach me Spanish. This impacts the relationship that I have had with my grandparents. I can’t communicate on the level that I can with my mother’s parents. It also doesn’t help that my cousins on my father’s side inherited tan skin, dark hair, and were taught to speak Spanish at an early age. While much of this is out of my control, it’s has limited my ability to feel truly connected to my Hispanic identity.

While being at Gettysburg College, I’m still conflicted by these two identities and the way people perceive me. While I’m much more aware of how I come across to other people after participating in activities at the [Intercultural Resource Center](#), I still feel uncomfortable. Peers of color see me as white and I don’t think they truly accept me as being something other than white. But, I don’t feel completely white.

Students at Harvard produced a [video campaign](#) revealing their personal experiences of being categorized based on their racial appearance. One photograph shows a black woman holding up a sign with the comment she once received, “You aren’t black on the inside”.

Let’s join them and challenge ourselves to avoid the tendency to judge others, put them in a box, and tell them what they should be based on preconceived stereotypes.

While I can’t speak Spanish and, like Sophia Vergara, I don’t fit the physical stereotype, I can be true to myself. I don’t want to feel like I’m lying when I say I am Hispanic. I also don’t want to lie by omission when people assume I’m white. Despite all this conflict, internal and external, I want to be accepted for who I am.

As Fanny Brice once said, “Let the world know you as you are, not as you think you should be.”

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