

A. O. S. A. Newsletter

File

Asian/American Students Association

Volume 1 Issue 3

May 19, 1994

Assimilation

People often ask me what it is like to be half Asian and half white. Some people even look to me for some type of justification for their interracial relationships. I do not want to be the one that people look to for justification and if they want to know what it is like to be half and half, then I will tell them that they would never want to know.

Specific to Asian/White interracial relationships I feel that there are two separate cases. The first being an Asian American who has grown up American. In other words the parents of this Asian American have raised the child without any understanding of his or her cultural heritage because they themselves do not know their cultural heritage. An individual of Asian descent from this situation I feel will find no troubles in an interracial relationship.

In contrast, however, I believe that an Asian or an Asian American who still holds onto certain cultural values will at some point in an interracial relationship face troubles. I do not believe that there is anything wrong with interracial dating. As long as one of the individuals in the relationship is not giving up his or her cultural identity for that relationship. Interracial dating for this type of Asian or Asian American can be a very enlightening experience, but when marriage is introduced into this relationship there are serious problems that need to be addressed.

Religion, wedding ceremonies, traditions, and a whole array of other issues become a factor when marriage is involved. In all relationships there are compromises made, but in an interracial marriage the issues compromised are of culture and customs.

The compromises and submissions are not specific to the marriage itself. There are the issues of daily activities, be it religious or cultural. There is most often also a debate over responsibilities to the marriage due to cultural differences.

OK. So once again we have one partner giving in and/or compromises being made. Now a blessed event. A child is born. This is no ordinary child however. This child is a product of the American melting pot; this child is Amerasian.

What is it like to be an Amerasian child? It means not being truly accepted into either ethnic group. It means that your cultural upbringing was a duality, a mixture of two cultures that don't agree on very many issues. It means that you have seen nothing but giving in and/or compromises being made about issues of culture. You grow up without an identity until you choose one for yourself, but even when you do you are not truly accepted into that cultural group. You are half Asian: you are an Amerasian.

So what do I think of interracial dating and marriages? What type of role model can I be to those individuals that choose interracial relationships? I can't offer a solution. I can only stress that no individual should ever give up his or her cultural beliefs in order to stay in a relationship. I also feel that the issues of culture need to be addressed especially when it involves marriage and children.

Asian Assimilation is a source of pride for many Asian Americans.

Is it assimilation or is it sacrifice?

**What I just described is based on personal experience. I do not disapprove of interracial relationships in any form. What I do disapprove of is the loss of cultural heritage due to interracial relationships and its effects on children.

Kevin Sievert

“Asians are a minority in America,
but the majority of the world.”

Paradise

Young and inexperienced as we were, my brothers and I had not yet begun to encounter all of life's special quirks. That was of little interest to us then having just moved to our new house that was on a lake. This was a big change from our old town house in Pontiac. We were meeting new people, new friends. It seemed odd that they were all pale; not dark like before, but that didn't matter as long as they were friends.

The new house had a four and a half acre plot; however, more than half was under water. That left about two tree-covered acres for us land dwellers. To children who lived in cramped apartments or town houses it seemed as big as the world with all the possibilities along with it.

My brothers and I shared one room with one bed. We had sesame street curtains and bed sheets. The curtains glowed orange when sunlight passed through. We also had two big desks for my brothers and a small, run down writing desk for me. This was our paradise.

Ray was the oldest and self-proclaimed leader of the group. Though he was not a very athletic or agile person due to his flat feet, no one seemed to mind. He was by far the most resourceful and had a knack for creating an adventure. Ray was always first out of bed. I assumed that, as the leader, he had to plan the days' agenda. This suited me fine, I like to sleep in anyway.

Not to be outdone by our fearless leader, Rich would always follow Ray a few minutes later. Rich, along with the rest of us, enjoyed watching bad martial arts flicks. However, he would usually be the first to employ his new moves whether to the air or on me. He and Ray would invariably have the adventure and I would be the comedy sidekick along for the ride, their sacrificial lamb for any predators.

I was always the last person out of bed. I just could not comprehend why any sane person would willfully give up the warm refuge of the covers, I wouldn't. That probably explained why Rich had to return, by orders of Ray and manhandle me out. It seemed by the complaints of my brothers that I was always holding the trio up. I didn't notice very much.

Today, though, today was different. This was the day that one of our best friends was going to visit. I had even gotten up only a few minutes after Rich did, although the sounds of his returning footsteps did help. Ray had already planned the days' agenda. We were going to play in the lake after Chris got here. Then we were going to watch old kung-fu movies on the Betamax. After the announcement we went scurrying in different directions for our favorite play toys. We sat around on the couch anxiously waiting the arrival of Chris Marks. When he did arrive, we greeted him without pomp and ceremony. We told him to follow us and then ran down to the lake.

With loud war whoops Rich, Ray and I threw our

toys in and jumped into the warm summer water. I looked up to see Chris' bobbing blonde head following us down, trying with futility to remove his shoes and run at the same time. With a loud splash he jumped in a few moments later with his shoes still on. To my dismay Rich suggested we have a throwing contest with my G.I. Joe plane. During the contest a small conoe approached our dock, unnoticed and carrying two unexpected guests.

I was on the deck preparing for my toss when Chris noticed their approach. He nodded his head so Ray, Rich and I would notice them. The one in the front had reddish blonde hair and had a severe acne problem. The one in the back had brown hair and was chewing something, like a big wad of bubble gum on one side of his mouth, and was spitting liberally. Maybe they want to be friends I thought.

"Can I help you?" Ray asked.

"Y'all here Asian."

"Yes, Chinese and Filipino," responded Ray.

"Look here, Jim. A talking monkey," The second boy chuckled.

I looked around excitedly. I'd never seen a talking monkey before.

"Listen up, boy. This here is our country and we don't want y'all here. Ya got that?" When I noticed he was talking about my brother, my head suddenly became hot and I could feel the hairs on the back of my neck begin to stand. I took a small step forward.

"Look what we got here Steve." The second boy nodded to me.

"Stay where y'are." He glared at me. I stopped as if I had walked into a wall and my knees began to shake.

"Fuck you," yelled Rich.

"Whad ya say boy? Ya want me to bash your head in with this here oar?"

He raised his weather beaten oar and pointed at my brother. I had an image of the boy with the oar beating my brother into a bloody pulp, like in those kung-fu movies. After that I stopped thinking. I guess my instinct for self preservation kicked in and I turned tail and ran for help.

"Why don't y'all go back to your rice patties where y'all belong."

What were rice patties I wondered? But not for long, I had to get help. When I finally returned with my cousin who was twenty years older than I, the two had already left. Rich, Ray and Chris were just standing in the water looking very upset. Where was paradise?

Later that night we told our parents about the situation. They played it down and told us not to worry about it. They said ignorant people say stupid things. They said to pretend not to worry about it. I couldn't. It kept running through my head. First I became filled with anger at the two boys; but the more I thought it over, anger turned to shame. Shame for being a coward.

Ryan Utarnachitt

MAASU

The Midwest Asian American Students Union held a conference April 7-11 at the University of Michigan. Seven students from our Asian/American Students Association attended.

The entire weekend was a very positive experience in which Asian identity of self was reaffirmed and the need for understanding was emphasized. There were six hundred students that attended. These students attended workshops, participated in a protest rally and worked to end the stereotypes that plague the Asian American.

The theme of the conference, "Beyond face value," addressed most of the stereotypes and how we, as Asian Americans can work to change them.

Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual

I recently attended a MAASU conference held at the University of Michigan. One of the workshops that I attended was the Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual issues in the Asian Society. The experience was very interesting and liberating.

The panel included gay-lesbian-bisexual people who are counselors at the University of Michigan. We participated in a question-response exercise where we were asked specific questions of sexuality and beliefs in society, and we stood and moved to places that were labeled "agree or comfortable" and "disagree or uncomfortable." It was interesting to see how I, a "liberal egalitarian," differed from other Asian people as well as the panelists themselves. Some of the questions that were asked were: "Do you feel homosexuality is a Western disease?," "Are you comfortable seeing Asian people with interracial and/or homosexual relationships showing public displays of affection?," "Are you comfortable with the words fag and dyke?" and a lot more thought producing, provocative questions. We were asked if we wanted to comment on reasons why we chose being comfortable and uncomfortable with are movements, and on the first question I said I disagreed stating that "homosexuality existed before there was a western society." On the second question listed I answered that I was comfortable with those relationships, which differed from many of the more "traditional" Asian people who felt that they would be uncomfortable. On the third question listed I answered that I was uncomfortable because it was to my understanding that those terms were derogatory. However, this differed from the panelists who were very comfortable with the terms. That was interesting.

Finally we sat down and began to discuss real life situations and how the panelists had to cope with their sexuality. At first they felt it was hard, but once they came out they felt accepted. Just because it's not talked about doesn't mean it doesn't happen. I learned a lot from the meeting and plan on attending future conferences. Remember: it is ignorance that causes prejudice; learning and experiencing can enlighten whole new endeavors.

Manish Garg

Asians or Americans?

Most of the time, it seems that even if I call myself an Asian-American, or even if my ancestors were in this country before most other "Americans," I am not considered an American.

Michelle Kwan is 13 a year-old-figure skater; she placed second after Tonya Harding in the figure-skating competition in Detroit and officially made the Olympic team. Ms. Kwan was bumped to the alternate position in order to let Nancy Kerrigan compete in the Olympics even though she did not compete in the Detroit competition due to an attack. After the Olympics Ms. Kerrigan decided not to compete in the World Championships held in Japan, and Ms. Harding resigned from the American Women's Figure Skating Association due to her involvement in the attack against Ms. Kerrigan. Michelle Kwan then participated in her first worldwide figure-skating competition with the added pressure of having to place in the top ten spots or else the United States would not have been able to send three skaters the next year or be able to participate in the World Championships. Ms. Kwan did place in the top ten, making sure that America would be able to compete during the next championship.

In the Previous Olympic games, similar pressure was put on Kristy Yamaguchi, a Japanese-American. Ms. Yamaguchi had to beat her competition, Midori Ito of Japan, who was actually the leading contender for the gold metal. Ms. Yamaguchi won the gold medal and Ms. Ito won the silver medal.

These two women are American, yet, I'm pretty sure that they go through the same harassment that other Asian-Americans suffer – being told you are not American except when American pride is on the line. In my experience, I have been told to go home; isn't America my home as well? When will acceptance come?? It is a serious question because when will Asian-Americans not be foreigners and truly become Americans?? Just because I am visibly different, why do people come up to me and ask me what country I'm from? No one goes up to a white American and asks them what country they are from.

Haritha Veerasuneni

We're all Americans, right? How can we ever have a melting pot if we won't let go of our ethnicity? If we want this country to work, we all must assimilate, we all must become American.

The typical American represents people from all different occupations, all levels of education and all of the different shapes of eyes and noses and colors of hair that don't include mine. Moreover, the typical American does not include the Asian face, the Asian family, nor does it include the Asian experience. At schools like Kalamazoo College, Chinese, Japanese and Korean American students have only four history classes to learn about their heritage, while the Indian-American student population on this campus has none. Compare that with the seventeen courses offered to students that are descendants from Europe, and the discrepancy becomes obvious.

The media, while slowly changing, has depicted Asians as karate masters or geeks like Long-Duck Dong. Asian women are depicted as being submissive, sex-slaves that give massages at "Oriental" spas. Asian men are depicted as being asexual, emotionless weaklings... and I'm supposed to assimilate into a society that feels this way about me.

But let's say I tried, let's say I dropped everything that reminded me of being Asian: my family, my Asian friends, the Asian Student Association, my Asian history class; okay, now I'm American? No wait, I still would have to dye my hair, get plastic surgery on my eyes and nose...okay, now I'm finally a full-blooded American. I was born in Massachusetts, I went to school in Michigan, and I have blonde hair, blue eyes...Now, I'm part of a melting pot?

I can't assimilate into a society that refuses to compromise. I can't assimilate into a society that is constantly telling me that my features are undesirable, and my history is unimportant and un-American. I can't assimilate into a society that believes that if I have more Asian friends than non-Asian friends, I am being a separatist.

So if I'm so damn dissatisfied with America, why don't I just go back to Korea? Korea, a land where I can't speak the language, a place whose customs, traditions and values are all different than mine; Korea, a county where I am considered a foreigner, an American.

Grace Lee

Asian Studies

Kalamazoo College has committed itself to an educational standard that includes international issues.

In order to keep up with the ever-changing world it is important that Kalamazoo College begin to change also. This change should come in the form of an Asian Studies major and minor.

Asians makes up the majority of the world's population, but yet very little is known about this area of the world. Its economy, culture and history can no longer be ignored in a world that is becoming interdependent.

Please support the creation of an Asian Studies major and minor at a school like Kalamazoo College. It is in the best interest of all students that this type of education be available in order to truly understand what it is to be a world citizen.

A.S.A.

Asian/American Students Association

All of the articles submitted to this newsletter are the expressed view points of the individuals. They in no way reflect the views of the group as a whole.

I would like to thank all those people that have made A.S.A. what it is today. I would also like to specifically thank those professors and faculty that have supported the issues surrounding multiculturalism and would urge them to continue.

Any questions or responses can be made to the A.S.A. box located in the basement of Hicks.

Thank you,
Kevin Sievert
