

Asian? American? Asian American?

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You are Asian. Almost immediately after meeting someone, you are asked if you are Chinese. However, when there's a new girl around who only speaks Korean, everyone looks at you, as if all Asian languages are the same. They assume you understand her. When you tell them you only know English, they look disappointed, as if you shattered their expectations...as if you are not Asian enough for them. But then, sometimes they tell you, "your English is so good."

You think, "Well, I've lived here my entire life." And then it hits you. They don't think you belong. They ask you where you are from. "Here," you say. They stare at you, probably thinking, "no, where you are *really* from?" Sometimes they actually ask that question, as if the possibility that you being born in America is impossible.

Don't you see? They assume that you belong to the group, "Asian." Chinese. Korean. Japanese. Vietnamese. It's all the same. It's all clumped together and viewed simply as "Asian." It wouldn't matter if you moved here fifteen years ago from Taiwan. It wouldn't matter if you were visiting for a week from Singapore. It wouldn't matter if you were fourth generation Asian American. You are simply Asian to them. Apparently, it's all the same.

Because of the human habit to label and categorize things, we tend to clump groups of like individuals into one category, one-size fits all. Through doing this, we fail to acknowledge individuals and their unique narratives. We take away aspects of their individual personalities and life experience. We disregard their culture and their history. By grouping them all together, as if there are no differences, we are essentially saying Chinese culture is synonymous with Japanese culture, and that Korean culture is the same as Cambodian culture.

This is not always the case. Some individuals do know and understand the differences between the various Asian cultures. They simply choose not to acknowledge the differences and continue to group us together. They are willingly blind. On the other hand, there are some individuals who acknowledge and validate your identity as part of a *specific* Asian group. They recognize that while you *are* Asian, you are specifically Korean. They understand that not only are you Korean, but you are Korean American. Each layer of your Asian identity has various facets.

In fact, there are many identities that come within the term "Asian." It's not as simple as being "Asian." It goes much deeper. It is nuanced and layered. The majority of the time it's forgotten that individuals can be 'Asian American' and not just 'Asian.' It is assumed that the two terms are synonymous. However, the human experience is vastly different for each individual identity. How one experiences life being 'Asian American' and growing up in America versus how one experiences life as a Japanese individual growing up in Japan are greatly different.

It is important to know and understand these differences to help validate and empower individuals who are labeled incorrectly. It allows for more inclusivity, empathy, and connectedness. It allows these individuals to share their stories and be further humanized.

How to we achieve this type of inclusivity? We ask individuals questions when we are unsure. We research. We take action to educate ourselves. We take action to educate others.