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The Miles of Difference Between Us

On a bad day we are so far apart

By Kat Avila | Web Published 11.14.2004

I haven't heard from a black acquaintance in awhile, and the last thing we talked about was the ongoing antagonism between particular segments of the African American and the Korean/Korean American communities, a troubling issue that is not restricted to Los Angeles but affects the East Coast as well. It made me think of the ways we are different from each other and how those differences can sooner or later impact even longstanding friendships.



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MILE 100: PHYSICAL DIFFERENCES

Maybe my hair is darker and coarser, my eyes are shaped differently, my nose bigger, my lips fuller, and my skin has more wrinkles, and all these traits come together to compose a picture of what is hegemonically determined to be pretty/handsome or ugly.

Affirmative action demonstrated the politics of the physical shell; minority tokens could be pointed to as proof of visual nondiscrimination, though not necessarily of sympathy to others of that same ethnicity. Visual mimicry is not indicative of a person's spiritual or intellectual contents. Certainly looking Latino is no indication of English or

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Spanish language capabilities, minority-specific or assimilationist politics, or being a Democrat or a Republican.

MILE 200: CLASS DIFFERENCES

There is a world of difference between Latino-dominant Santa Ana and European-dominant Rancho Santa Margarita. It's hard to believe they are both in Orange County (home of the original Disneyland); Santa Ana is the county's geographical center and RSM is to the south. You can experience a big change in temperature traveling from Santa Ana to RSM where people seem a little colder (I've lived and worked in both communities).

According to the U.S. Census 2000, Santa Ana, California, is 76% Latino, the same percentage as El Paso, Texas; RSM is only 13% Latino. The median household income for Santa Ana is \$43,412, with 23% families below poverty level; for RSM the median household income is significantly higher at \$78,475, with only 2.4% families below poverty level. In Santa Ana, 24.7% carpool to work, 10.7% use public transportation or walk; in RSM, 9.9% carpool, 1.7% use public transportation or walk.

In RSM, I've been told to go back where I came from. I guess that would be to Santa Ana.

MILE 300: GENDER-SPECIFIC BEHAVIORAL DIFFERENCES

One autumn evening our running club decided to try another route. The guys took off at the usual time. The gals remained behind to discuss the safety of the route and who would run with whom to make sure no one ran alone, especially as it was now getting dark earlier.

Such behavioral differences remind me of a study I did of the body language of models in a conservative Midwestern clothing catalog. The female models kept their hands close to their bodies or touched themselves, and their eyes coyly avoided the camera by looking away or down. The male models were allowed more gestural freedom and could touch the female models, and they could challenge the gaze of the camera by staring back. It makes you wonder how much of your own behavior is subtly influenced by what you read or watch daily.

MILE 400: PEDESTRIANS VS. CAR OWNERS

Crossing a sidewalk in Southern California means look then dash as quickly as you can across the street. Take a lesson from the road kill. And not having a car is career suicide since most of the good jobs will always be at least a half hour away by car and two hours away by bus. On the other hand, you don't have to worry about making car payments or paying car insurance.

MILE 500: "DIVORCE" POEM FRAGMENT, (c) 2002 by K. Avila

The distance between you and me
is normally the space a butterfly
steals
as it slides around us.

But on a bad day
we are so far apart
that a ship traveling the speed of
light
cannot catch up to deliver a
message
to the other.

*Kat is currently reading Marilyn
Frye's "Willful Virgin: Essays in
Feminism," which makes more*

*sense than the results of this last
presidential election.*

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