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Do The Eyes Have It?

Lorraine Acker, current Assistant Dean of Students for Minority Student Support Services and Women's Programs at UNC Charlotte, grew up in Brooklyn, New York (Acker). She received her Bachelor's degree from the State University of New York at Brockport in Political Science and African American Studies. Furthermore, she received her Master's at Western Illinois University in College Student personnel (Acker). Her discussion was based on her concentration and experience while working with minority students.

Throughout her time at UNC Charlotte, Acker has spent a lot of her focus on the stereotypes that many people presently experience. Her pitch presented in Dinkins Auditorium was particularly based on April's "Asian Awareness Month", specifically in regards to the stereotypes seen and experienced today with Asian American women. Acker's discussion was intended to answer the following questions: what kinds of misleading information about Asian American women are present, and what can we do to break the stereotypes (Acker)? Acker was able to answer her question at issue by providing examples, elaborating on stereotypes and by including her audiences' input.

As part of her presentation, Acker showed a video performance of Adriel Luis's poem "Slip of the Tongue," directed in 2005 by Karen Lum (Acker). The video clip included the dramatization of a poem in which a young Asian male who was trying to

“pick up” an Asian female by asking her about her “ethnic makeup” (Acker). The male is unexpectedly shown a valuable perspective about the female’s experience with racial stereotypes and the importance of staying true to who you are. I have included lines from Adriel Luis’s poem that stood out the most to me:

Makeup’s just an anglicized, colonized, co-modified utility
that my sisters have been programmed to consume...
I wear the foundation laid by my indigenous people.
It’s the foundation that makes it so that past being globalized,
I can still vocalize with confidence that I know where my roots are.
I wear this foundation not upon my face but within my soul...
So what’s my ethnic makeup?
I don’t have any,
because your ethnicity isn’t something you can just make up. (Luis)

The video portrayed a powerful concept about how significant it is to be yourself and to not mimic or feel pressured to fit into “normality”. Acker’s choice to start her presentation with a video was an effective way to prepare the audience for what she had to say. I think Acker touched base and caught the attention of those present, which in turn helped to intrigue her audience. Acker’s choice of introduction was different, effective and memorable and provided the audience a strong foundation leading into what she was going to discuss.

After being shown the video, audience members were asked to name stereotypes typically associated with Asian American women. Volunteers raised their hands, naming and assuming what they thought average Asian lifestyles were like, such as Asians are

good at Mathematics and Science, are bound to play the piano or violin and probably eat rice every day. Acker pointed out that although someone may be of Asian descent, it doesn't automatically mean that he or she is associated with the typical "label" or portrayal some people may think of Asians as. By including her audience, the discussion became more interesting and successful because it didn't just involve Acker's stance or opinion. Acker was aware that everyone has a different point of view and comes from a different background, and she incorporated that into her presentation by allowing the audience to comment and express themselves. Acker didn't just stand behind a podium and lecture to her listeners about what she knows and what she's experience; she made her presentation more interesting by reaching out for input and getting the audience involved.

Acker mentioned issues with body image. She noted that in comparison with all the women in the United States in 2003, Asian American women between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four had the highest number of suicides among the same age group (Acker). In 2005, Asian American females had the second highest rate of suicide in comparison to other age groups (Acker). Acker claims that high expectations and pressure to "fit in" had an effect on the statistics presented. In association with body imaging and fitting in, Acker stated that particularly many Asian American women in the United States have blepharoplasty, also known as eye lid surgery, performed (Acker). According to the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery, blepharoplasty supposedly "improves" the appearance of a person's eyes by removing excess skin from his or her upper eyelids, lower eyelids or both (Blepharoplasty Information). Acker claimed that blepharoplasty is known to revitalize the appearance to the surrounding areas of a

person's eyes, making him or her look rested and "more attractive" (Acker). "Many Asian American women feel pressured to fit in and to look like everyone else," Acker claims. "Many Asian American women have blepharoplasty performed in order to look more western and beautiful" (Acker). Acker made the assumption that in most cases, patients have the surgery performed in order to feel more accepted and more comfortable about their body image (Acker). Acker showed the audience photos of two patients who had blepharoplasty performed; however, I have included different before-and-after photographs below of two patients who also had eye surgery performed. The first set of photos is of a Vietnamese woman's eyes, while the second set of photos is of a Korean woman's results (Meronk). Both patients underwent low tapered creases of the eyelid (Meronk).

Before



After



Meronk, Dr. Frank Junior. "Cosmetic Blepharoplasty for Asian Eyelid." 2000-2008. <<http://www.drmeronk.com/asian/asian-eyelid-photos3.html>>.

Before



After



Meronk, Dr. Frank Junior. "Cosmetic Blepharoplasty for Asian Eyelid." 2000-2008. <<http://www.drmeronk.com/asian/asian-eyelid-photos3.html>>.

I think without having to say it aloud, Acker suggested that a select number of Asian American women have blepharoplasty performed in order to look "more American". I

think she touched the assumption lightly and got her idea across without having to bluntly state her point. Acker provided accurate and relevant information by mentioning Asian American suicide statistics and the eye surgery. In addition, by including photos in her presentation and stating the issue of blepharoplasty, Acker successfully demonstrated the reality and intensity of how some Asian American women react to stereotypes and to pressure placed on them to feel accepted.

Acker also tied in stereotypes with Asian American women with her own personal experience with body image. She compared her frame to her sister's, stating that although they were both raised in the same household and lifestyle, they inevitably had different figures. She assumed that others occasionally looked at her and judged her, yet she is not as insecure with her figure as she was in the past (Acker). I believe Acker demonstrated her awareness of what used to be a barrier for her. She has accepted that she will never be a size two or have a "perfect" frame. Furthermore, Acker expressed the hope and necessity for everyone to find something to love about themselves and to not judge or stereotype others for being who they are. By providing a personal example, I believe Acker was able to touch the audience at a different level. Many of the audience members admitted to comparing themselves to their siblings, friends or celebrities. Acker was able to use her personal experience to assist in making her point; she knew what to say to intrigue her audience and used relevant information in order to persuade the audience to agree with her.

Acker's key subject matter was to speak about Asian American women and body image; however, further into her presentation, she incorporated stereotypes portrayed with all races and genders. Although I believe Acker answered and provided relevant

information about her question at issue, she seemed to steer “off subject”. Her presentation was based on stereotypes with Asian American women; however, near the end of her presentation she began talking about stereotypes as a whole, which I assume was to include everyone who attended the presentation. It seemed like she was trying to address and discuss other matters outside of her question at issue, which made the concentration and discussion about Asian American awareness weaker than it could have been.

John L. Mason, a national best selling author, wrote a book called *You're Born An Original, Don't Die A Copy* (Mason). I believe his book title ties in well with Acker's presentation because her points stressed the importance of accepting and being confident with who you are instead of impersonating or trying to look like someone else. She reminded the audience the significance of being original. Her main pitch articulated the stereotypes of Asian American women present in today's society, along with the stereotypes associated with everyone. Although Acker did steer off topic during her presentation, I think that she overall did an effective job at intriguing and including her audience, as well as answering her question at issue.

Works Cited

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