

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: Grace Hsiang wrote the essay below while she was a student at UC Irvine, majoring in international studies and literary journalism. The essay was published by the Pacific News Service on April 15, 2005.

“FOBs” VS. “TWINKIES”: THE NEW DISCRIMINATION IS INTRARACIAL

Today in my sociology class, the teacher asked the students to volunteer our own experiences with racism or ethnic harassment. I imagined the responses would once again feature the ongoing battle between white vs. minority. Instead, to my surprise, most of the students told of being discriminated against and marginalized by members of their own ethnic group.

In the Asian community, the slurs heard most often are not terms such as "Chink" or "Jap," but rather "FOB" ("Fresh Off the Boat") or "white-washed" (too assimilated). When Asian-Americans hit puberty, they seem to divide into two camps, each highly critical of the other. Members of the first cling to their ethnic heritage. They tend to be exclusive in their friendships, often accepting only "true Asians." They believe relationships should remain within the community, and may even opt to speak their parents' native language over English in public.

Members of the second group reject as many aspects of Asian culture as possible and concentrate on being seen as American. They go out of their way to refuse to date within the community, embrace friends outside their ethnic circle, and even boast to others about how un-Asian they are. "My coworker is Vietnamese," 19-year-old Carol Lieu remarked, "but she will yell at you if you speak it to her and pretend that she doesn't understand."

Second-generation Asian-Americans often face pressure from their parents, who believe that the privileges we are allowed in this country make us spoiled and ungrateful. Many of us very much want to belong to our parents' community, but we cannot completely embody one culture when we are living in another. The pressures we face force many of us to feel we must choose one culture over another. We can either cling to our parents' ideology, or rebel against it and try to be "American."

The problems start when those who have made one choice discriminate against those who have made the other. I've heard ethnocentric Asians speak with disgust about Asians who wear Abercrombie and Fitch (which is viewed as the ultimate "white" brand), or make fun of those who don't know their parents' language. "People act disappointed that I can't speak Japanese fluently," a student of Mexican and Japanese ancestry in my sociology class complained this morning. "I don't see anyone giving me credit for speaking fluent Gaelic." This ethnocentric perspective even made it into the recent hit movie *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle*. John Cho's character complains about a girl who is pursuing him despite his lack of interest: She "rambles on about her East Asian Students Club or whatever. Then I have to actually pretend that I give a s - - t or she calls me a Twinkie...yellow on the outside, white on the inside."

On the other side, second-generation kids who refuse to assimilate are called FOBs. The cars they drive are derided as "Rice Rockets," and their pastimes and ways of dressing are

stereotyped as exclusively Asian. "We live in America," one freshman political science major recalls more assimilated friends telling her. "Don't bring your culture here."

Not all young Asian-Americans buy into the dichotomy between "FOBs" and "Twinkies." Many, like me, understand the term "Asian-American" in all its complexity, and embrace all sides of our identity. Rather than identifying with one culture or another, my friends and I accept both. You should identify with your heritage "because that's who you are," Ricky Kim, founder of the online journal *Evil Monito*, has said. "But don't be ignorant of the culture you grew up in—that's being ungrateful."

Asian-Americans grow up experiencing enough difficulties living in a predominately white country with the face of a foreigner. The gap between races is wide enough without drawing lines within ethnicities and communities. We can avoid this internal discrimination simply by recognizing that we are of two cultures—and that in itself creates a new culture that should be fully celebrated.

ESSAY TOPIC

Why does Grace Hsiang suggest that recent immigrants to the United States should not choose between being "FOBs" and "Twinkies" (or some similar choice)? To what extent do you think her suggested course is advisable and achievable? In support of your answer, use specific examples, developing the content of your essay from your personal experience, reading, and observation of others.