

It was finally my turn to present. I scanned the room — a couple of tired students here and there dozing off, but good enough. Trying to contain the smile that was making itself onto my face, I cautiously pulled out my prized possession from its special spot in my backpack, making sure not to bend any edges in the process.

“During the summer, I went to Korea as the Content Feature Writer for Allkpop and interviewed famous K-Pop groups like Red Velvet, NCT, and SF9. Here are the press passes I got!” I exclaimed, hoping for a good reaction.

To my dismay, the same tired eyes stared right back at me, showing no evidence of a change in emotion. Embarrassed at my excitement and initial expectations, I quickly made my way back to my desk, feeling an unwelcome warmth creep up my cheeks.

“Was that weird?” I asked my friend sitting next to me.

“No, just very, very Korean,” she replied with a laugh.

It’s true that I am “very, very Korean.” Before I learned to say “mom,” I said “umma.” Before I ate cereal, I ate kimchi. But — is that a bad thing?

In my quest to preserve the Korean in my identity as a Korean-American, I’ve confused myself time and time again. Rather than watching *Friends*, I watch Korean dramas. Rather than listening to Drake, I listen to Zico. Everyday I get dressed in the morning, I practically violate every single high school “dress code.” No, I’m not wearing Brandy Melville. No, I’m not wearing Lululemon leggings. No, I’m not wearing white Vans. No, not today. No, not tomorrow.

In a community that seems to value assimilation, however, my Korean-ness stands out – in a bad way. When I am continuously told that I need to suppress my Korean identity in order to be considered a valuable member of society, I cannot help but feel self-conscious whenever I present myself in such un-American manners — at the end of the day, I too, am human. I care about how others perceive me and I strive to be recognized.

But ultimately, identity is not show and tell – it’s not about trying to get “good reactions” out of other people. Therefore, for me, there’s no exchanging one background for another. There’s no choosing one or the other because like with everything, there’s a gray between black and white, an intermediate between two extremes. It’s impossible to please everyone, and in my personal tug-of-war, I have decided to call it a draw. I am Korean and I want to be recognized not for how assimilated I am, but instead for who I truly am — a proud Korean. And so, I continue. Before I say “mom,” I say “umma.” Before I eat cereal, I eat kimchi.