

Listener Lyric Interview Transcript

Me: Ok, so I think I'll start with a general question, have you ever felt discriminated against because of your race?

Her: No, actually, and I think that's something I'm really lucky to be able to say, and it also a lot of the time has to do with the fact that the people who are most often discriminating against people are not very good at telling that I'm not white, so I haven't really had any experience with that and I consider myself to be very lucky that I haven't.

Me: Alright, have you ever felt judged due to something cultural?

Her: definitely. When people realize that I'm not fully white, sometimes that can lead to some weird questions and that kind of thing, and when I was younger, especially in elementary school, there was a time when I didn't like to talk about being part asian because I felt like a lot of people, when I did, a lot of people just acted like I was talking about how I was special all the time, and like- I don't know, I'm trying to find the word. It was like I was trying to prove I was better than them in some way when in reality I was just trying to talk about my culture. And so I eventually realized that it wasn't something people were happy with me doing and I didn't like being judged for it, so I kinda just stopped talking about it and mentioning it in conversation. And then definitely one time when a teacher who I met outside at a Japanese American summer camp started working at my elementary school, and at the summer camp she'd always call me by my Japanese name because a lot of the kids went by their Japanese names, and she started doing that in class and people one, were really weirded out by it, and two, weren't really very nice about it, because my Japanese name was Junko and there was a lot of room for American people to mispronounce it in not flattering ways, and that happened a lot. At first on accident, but once they realized that it sounded funny, and that they could do it... so that's probably the first two things that come to mind.

Me: for your name, I guess you were pretty young when that happened, did it make you feel ashamed? How did you feel about that?

Her: a little bit, it did make me feel a little ashamed, and I think that partially lead to me really heavily pushing back against that side of myself in 5th and 6th grade, and a little bit of 7th grade too, because I just didn't feel comfortable with people knowing that about me because of how heavily they judged me. Like, every time she called me by that name, people just stared at me, and it was like very unnerving and I did not like it at all, so I think that effected me, I felt very ashamed, and I think that lead me to, kind of like trying to push back against my culture, just like taking advantage of the fact that I look more white than I actually am and hiding that side of my self.

Me: Did you ever stop doing [obon dancing?]

Her: Yeah

Me: What was the story behind that?

Her: That is one of the things I was implying when I said I went back against my culture, I still went to Obon because I've always done that and it just felt like I couldn't not go, but definitely avoided the dancing after that, I always tried to make sure we were leaving early, and my parents would be like "oh don't you want to go out there" and I'd be like "nope, nope, I'm fine" and that kind of thing, and it probably wasn't as dramatic as a shift as it seems now, because I hadn't really been doing the dancing much before then, but they were also surprised because I had never been so vehemently opposed to it until like that point onwards, probably until about 8th grade. And I continuously said "I don't wanna do it, I don't wanna do it," It was like from a point of indifference of like, "yeah it's kinda fun, I like to watch it, I don't really like doing it" from around like 4th grade to 8th grade of like "no" just like any time my parents tried to bring it up I was like "no"

Me: how do you feel about those events now, now that you're like, older, like when you look back on them how do you feel about them now?

Her: Again, I feel a little bit ashamed that I was so like, trying, taking so much effort to try and hide a part of myself that shouldn't need to be hidden necessarily, I definitely feel a little ashamed about that, I'm sad because I lost lots of years trying to be somebody that I wasn't, and because when I started doing the dancing and getting more involved, it was really fun and I'm sad that I didn't take those chances sooner, and feel like, not let those feelings take over. So, I was ashamed, if I think about it for too long, but I try to think "oh at least I'm getting it now" sort of thing.

Me: so you definitely feel happier now, accepting your culture?

Her: I mean, it's a pretty big part of me and it always has been a pretty big part of me, and I'm just glad that I've come to terms with the fact that that's ok, and other people can judge me for it or whatever, or other people can think "oh that's kinda weird" about different things that I do that are like, something I've always done, but at this point I like, don't care what other people think as much anymore.

Me: That's good.

Her: took a while to get there though.

Me: Was there ever a turning point for you, when you stopped rejecting your culture, or was it more gradual?

Her: I want to say a little bit of both. There's a friend that I've known since second grade who is also not white, she's brazilian, she's fluent in portugese and stuff, and so I've known her since second grade and it's kind of been our thing, we always went to Obon together, since probably around 3rd grade, and like, I didn't do the dancing probably around until 6th grade, which was when she decided "why aren't we doing this? That looks so fun" and you know from what I said earlier this is still when I was very much "no, I don't wanna do it," and kind of seeing her have no judgements and actually really liking Japanese culture and wanting to gain a good understanding of it so she could be respectful of it kind of made me go "Oh. Not everybody thinks this is weird." And then made me think "Why am I forcing myself not to do these things, why am I forcing myself not to talk about it at school" and that sort of thing, because I used to talk about it a lot when I was younger, because it was like, my mom, you know, like my dad's white, and my mom's japanese. So I would talk equally about both sides of my identity if it came up. So, I guess seeing her do that and realizing that I have all of this stuff already, I have all of this understanding, to see someone else who didn't [have that] really want that kind of made me realize "Whoa, not everybody has these kinds of judgements" and maybe I should be grateful for all the stuff that I have instead of like, trying to hide it from other people around me. And she's actually in AP Japanese at Mountain View now and has stayed with a host family in Japan, she probably speaks better Japanese than me.

Me: Nice.

(Pause for returning calculator time)

Me: Changing gears a little bit because this is something we've talked about before, how do you feel about representation of your identity in the media?

Her: Well. When I was younger, it wasn't something I ever noticed, because I'd never seen anybody like me on screen, I never saw it as an issue, I just assumed all actors looked a certain way, and that way was white. So I didn't really feel anything while I was younger. Actors, especially asian actors on screen, definitely put things in perspective for me because I was like "oh, those people kind of look like my mom." Obviously they still didn't look like me, and hadn't gone through the same experiences as me, but that was definitely a partial like "oh, so not every actor has to be like this way," there's variety, there's different races, there's diversity. And then definitely when people really have been pushing for more diversity in hollywood, and seeing actual success at it, has made me really think about the representation that I'm getting and people like me are getting, because there's a lot of half-asian people out there, especially around this area. I mean I don't think people realize that, I don't think they realize that that is a very unique experience, being mixed race, in any sense, in any shape, is a very unique experience and I don't think people realize that it's very liberating to see someone like you, and say "wow, I could be that person, that person is like me, people now know what it's like to be like me" If that person is, for example, a superhero, I can be like "I can be that" sort of thing, and it's been very powerful for a lot of people to see these changes, especially with like, Black Panther and the success of that movie, and that's really made me think, why aren't we pushing

even farther for more change and more representation? I did a lot more research because I was like “ok well there’s gotta be some people who look like me out there, right?” and- oh, backtrack a little bit, I think the first time it really hit me that I had never seen anybody on screen who looked like me, you were actually there, it was f***ing endgame, don’t put the swear word in the transcript.

Me: I have to! I’ll bleep it out, I’ll bleep it out

Her: Just say freaking. Anyway, just seeing all of the excitement for Brie Larson, before all of the haters came out of the woodwork, we don’t talk about them, and how we’re finally getting a female-led film, a female movie, and seeing all the women in endgame, and seeing how excited everybody was for all this representation, I couldn’t fully relate to any of it. I mean you know my whole thing about how basically every asian woman in marvel is represented as some form of alien and that’s totally a different argument for another time, but, yeah, I’m excited for Captain Marvel, because oh my god it’s a female superhero, but like, she’s white? And pretty much the exact opposite of how I look? So there was excitement and there was empowerment but there was always this nagging feeling of like, but it would be different if it were someone who looked like me. And, I spent a lot of time thinking about that after, especially because I saw endgame, it had literally the most amount of superheroes that had ever been in one movie at one time, and there was no one who looked like me. And it kinda seemed like, if there was any movie that was gonna have at least somebody who looked like me, it was going to be the movie with literally the most amount of characters on screen, ya know?

Me: Boo Marvel

Her: Yeah, I mean, no, cause I was talking to one of my teachers about this and she goes, “oh, have you ever seen agents of shield?” and I went “No?” cause that’s a TV show that didn’t really get much hype, and apparently the ratings crashed after the Winter Soldier was released because everyone was like “wait, they’re Hydra” Marvel was just like “wait, we didn’t think that one through” but basically, one of the main characters and main leads in the show is half-chinese I believe, Chole Bennet, and I started watching the show, and it was like, wild. Because I was like, she kinda looks like me. Of course she had slight highlights and her name was full white, so like if you didn’t know, you might think she was white, but she looked like me, she looked asian, and it was like a very interesting experience that I think would be different if I saw it on a huge movie screen for the first time, but I think it was very, cause it was weird for me, cause it had never happened before, so yeah that was definitely an interesting experience, and I would like to keep up with the show I haven’t really been keeping up with it as much because it’s harder to, just since like there’s episodes you have to stick with and you can’t watch things out of order. That’s another thing I was thinking about.

Me: That’s cool. Yeah I’ve never seen agents of shield, so.

Her: Yeah, well Chloe Bennet is amazing and beautiful, stunning, we love her.

Me: alright. What do you love about being half-japanese?

Her: That I get to be white and part japanese, that I get japanese culture, I was somewhat part of that since I was born, that I get understanding and access to all these kinds of things that a lot of people are maybe never going to experience in their lives, and I also get the american side of things, ya know? Like I get to be a part of two different things, instead of seeing that as a burden I kind of see that as like, a really lucky thing that I get to have now. And I think that's a thing that a lot of mixed-race people go through, is first seeing it as a burden and an issue, and then eventually growing to see it as a gift. Yeah, because I get to have all these holidays, I get to have all these different shoes and stuff like that, and then I still get all the american things, and stuff like that, and it's nice to have two places to feel kind of at home at, it's weird because I feel at home in america and I feel at home in japan, but I also don't feel at home in america and I don't feel at home in japan. Does that make sense?

Me: You're in between

Her: Yes, because, like, in America, like obviously I feel at home because I speak English, there's no barrier for me there, I've lived here my whole life and I understand the culture, that kind of thing, but if you take me to Japan, yes I'm gonna have issues reading the street signs, yes I'm going to have issues communicating because I don't speak Japanese. But like, people do things in a way that I expect things to be done, and oftentimes I express frustrating with like, public transit and like airports in america, because it's very annoying compared to how things are done in Japan, so yeah there's always a thing I feel comfortable with in each of the places that I feel like are kinda home for me. I'd rather have two homes than just one, in my opinion. I feel lucky now, now that I know to appreciate it and I know that a lot of people really don't care or think it's really cool.