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Is That a Guy or a Gal?

Not funny when they're talking about you

By Kat Avila | Web Published 4.14.2006

Okay, I never would have won a beauty contest. Yet, it really annoyed me on a recent trip abroad that at least once a day I heard people muttering about whether I was a guy or a gal. I don't know if it was their curiosity or they were trying to exercise some peer pressure, that is, if they humiliated me enough I would get more girlie.

They say as you grow older you begin to look like your parents. I know my relatives used to say I was just like my father, except I never figured in THAT way.

On the train, a mother was trying to hush her young son as he commented about my pierced, earringless ears but how I had the face of a man. I pretended to still be asleep in my seat across from them; inside I was fuming.

Looking in the mirror, this is definitely not a delicate spring flower kind of face. It's more a hardy breed of cactus face, the type you might see at the end of a hard day's work.

Why should it bother me? After all, I know which box to check off. I blame it on the insecure little girl within who's had a lifetime of subliminal and overt pressure to



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emulate anorexic and Photoshop-beautiful models and actresses featured on magazine covers, billboards, TV, and in movies. Those cute and petite types are not only beyond my racial DNA, but I don't think we belong to the same biped species.

They wear their hair all poofy; exotic colors embellish their eyes, cheeks, and lips to form a living mask; their fingernails and toenails are artistic masterpieces. They don't gobble down food, but graze.

My hair is boyishly short, so you can't tell my gender by hair length. My eyebrows endure regular maintenance, but the individual hairs are coarse and thick. My Asian eyes are not coy. My Mexican Indian nose is bold and carved out of rock. I have sensuous lips, however age-related lines are sneaking in all around them. Moreover, I have more body hair than some people's pets.

My clothing doesn't help people identify my gender. Oversized tee-shirts and convertible hiking pants usually drape my five feet four, 170-pound frame. Since I travel alone a lot, my appearance has become protective camouflage.

The funny thing is it's not so much the girls having a problem identifying me as one of their own; it's the guys. Maybe guys can't handle the ambiguity as well, e.g., gay guys and boyish girls; real, unfamiliar differences scare some. Or chalk it up to women's intuition. Or after all the layers of makeup and accessories and social costumes are removed, we girls know we pretty much look the same (sort of).

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(323) 259-0388 Fax (310) 496-2972 info@latinola.com

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