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Funny Girl?

“Bad tempered, hardworking, talkative, mom’s baby...” Those are just some of the words that have been used to describe me. Even though the words might be really different depending on the different relationship I have with the person who says something about my personality, “funny” was never among those words. However, since I came to the United States, I always receive the comment: “You are so funny!” I could ignore that the first time I heard other people call me “funny girl”, because I assumed they might have strange perspective, but the question “Why do I seem funny?” began to annoy me after I heard people describe me as “funny” several times. Have I changed to another person within only 3 months? Definitely not! None of my Chinese friends think that I am a funny girl. Then what are the reasons Americans call me funny girl?

Maybe language is the first reason. Since I do not have as good a command of English as the native speakers, sometimes I can be really funny in English. For example, once I was reviewing the biology for the exam the next day with my American friend. During the break, realizing the frustrating fact that we still had a lot of confusing notes to go over, I just said, “There are too many things to memorize. If we forget a point that will be on the exam, that would be a disaster!” Almost immediately, my friends started to laugh loudly, tapped my shoulder and said twice “funny girl!” As he was laughing, I was so confused. The feeling is just like what I had at the age of five when my mom laughed loudly because I said something funny

unknowingly. Did I say something that's not normal? Didn't I say the truth? Exploring what he thought was so funny, I guess it might be the word "disaster". I did not choose the right level of the English word. I just wanted to tell him my worry about the exam and reminded him that we needed to work harder when we continued studying, or we could fail the exam. However, "disaster" was a big word for failure on the exam. Thus, it gave the native speaker different feeling – I was making fun of the exam. Honestly, I was totally serious. I used that word because I would use the corresponding word in Chinese I was speaking Chinese. The gap between my first and second language makes me amusing to Americans while I am not considered funny to Chinese. Besides becoming funny, there are two more side-effects. The positive one is that I am aware of that I need to know the difference between Chinglish and English, so I pay more attention to what American say so that I can learn more authentic English. Yet the negative one is that I become less confident in my English. I am more struggled with how to pick the words and organize the sentences, which makes my English seems more broken.

In addition to the grasp of English, the more important reason is the difference of the culture. Just as people who like cats and people who hate cats will have different responses when they see a homeless kitty on the road—The former may take the kitty home, but the latter may just walk by, different people have different feelings to one thing since they have different attitude. Influenced by different culture, my American friends have a lot of different standards than I do. Still take the exam as the example. When we knew the grade, my friend told me, "I got 85% on

the exam!" I thought "Oh, I need to say something to comfort him. He did so bad on the exam." So I just replied, "Don't worry. Just work harder and you will be fine." Surprisingly, he looked surprised and then laughed, "I like you. You are funny" I could not say anything for that. Not until then did I realize that he thought he did ok on the exam. I just used my own standard, which is supposed to be the standard for most Chinese students. In China, if we get grades lower than 90%, we would feel so ashamed to see our parents. We believe every "good" student have potential to get the t at least of 90 if we work hard. So it was natural of me to encourage him to work harder when he was actually not frustrated. In that case, he thought I was joking when I was sincere and serious.

Basically, I do not think being funny is an annoying thing, I knew that my American friends are all friendly and they say "funny" in a positive way. Anyway, it is an exciting thing for me to make others feel happy. However, I do not want to be a gagger. That is to say, I do not want to only make others laugh all the time, but I found sadly the fact that since I have left an impression on my American friends that I am a funny girl, some of them began not to take what I say seriously and they would laugh because of whatever I say. Last Wednesday, I went to the dining hall and the food there was pretty good, compared to the food of most of time. When I tried to get more food, I ran into my floormate. She asked me, "How was your dinner?" I was excited about the food and wanted to share my feeling, so I said, "It was sooooo good." Instead of telling me her feeling as I expected, she laughed fairly loudly. I have absolutely heard other Americans say that way and they did not get response of

always find the “funny” point whenever they talked to me. I even can tell they are waiting for my funny words when they look at me during the conversation. The worst thing is that I could not help others when I am funny. When my friend was sick, I want to help her feel better and recover more quickly. Therefore, I told her to keep warm, drink more water and sleep more. I swear I was serious. I did those things when I have a cold and they turn out to be really helpful. I told her those things since I knew how she felt when having a cold where mom was not with her. As you can imagine, she just laughed and told other friends: “she is like my mom” I felt so upset. I gave her my hand but she did not hold it. I want to be a friend close to her heart but I got nothing but the sound of laughing.

I could do nothing to change my situation. I could escape from my first impression of being funny. It gradually becomes a label on me, showing who I am and I have no idea how to take that off. I have more empathy to Brent Staples when I read what he wrote and knew that he always scared people when stalking sleep because of his skin color. He could only employ the way to whistle so that he could give others caution and prevent himself from being pulled over by the police. I can feel his sadness better after I knew how hard to pull something out when it is deep in their mind. The first thing occurred to people twenty years ago when they saw a black man might be “dangerous”. He did not have enough power to change other’s mind so he could only whistle to protect himself. So similarly, I am not able to change the fact that when my American friends see me, the first thing came to them is that I am a funny girl. Thus, I can only smile and say nothing when they laugh. If I try to

explain, the most possible situation is that I will make more funny words which make me funnier. If you do not believe in this assumption. Let me tell you truth. A few days ago, I was reading the books with two of my American friends. There is a word "lateral". Since I never saw this word before, I looked it up in my dictionary and then went on reading. After a while, my friends discussed this word and said this word did not make sense there. I am always silent when my friends say something about the English words, but that time, I really cannot understand why they are confused by a so little word. Then I just told them what I comprehended according to my dictionary. To my surprise, after I explained, they said, "Cool. That made sense. I did not know that it can refer to the trees being thicker. Your English is better than ours!" I knew they were joking, but I just did not want them think I really know a lot of English words, so I said, "Because I have a dictionary, it is really good." Believe me. I really did not want to make them laugh. But they laughed, very loudly. Then I just explained, "I just wanted to tell you this dictionary is really good. You can use it when you are confused. It is English-to-English." They just seemed even more excited, "Stop making fun of me! You funny girl!" I was very regretful that I said something more!

However, I am still lucky than Brent Staples. Though being a funny girl has some bad impact on me. It brings a lot of friend to me. Chinese people are always considered "reserved", but thanks to my impression on others that I am a funny girl, I get out of that untrue stereotype. Logically, reserved girls are not funny. Thus, I am not a reserved girl. That perception makes my friends more willing to know me and play with me. Unexpectedly, I get more friends.

Even though I am sometimes still annoyed by being funny, I will not doubt myself and try to change myself. I cannot take off this label, but I can make it become my decorations. I am still who I am.

Work Cited

Brent Staples. "Just Walk on By: Black Men and Public Space" Ms. Magazine 1987.

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