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Learning Korean Culture

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Seoul, Korea

April 15, 2019

Learning Korean Culture

I interviewed my building's Resident Advisor Kim Sung-kyung. He's 23, in his final year, and is majoring in international business. When I first met him, the first thing I noticed was a ring. I thought that he was married and after asking him about it we had a really interesting conversation about Korean Couple Culture. The ring he wears is the equivalent to a promise ring in the US. There's much more weight to it I would say, as it's promising that they will get married within the near future. It's also a sign for other people to know that he's taken – similar to the use of matching clothes since PDA isn't common in Korean society. There weren't many differences between the two of us. I found it interesting that here in Korea, you work really hard in high school to get into a good university, and once you're there, everything is much more laid back. I thought that was funny because I feel like I'm stressed all the time at Linfield, and here people look at university as a place to have fun before having to get a job.

Both of us like sports; he explained the importance of baseball to his family, how he's been playing since he was five, and although I don't share a love of baseball, I can understand the passion for a sport. Throughout the interview he also shared with me his favorite snacks – jellies. At first, I was like, "You just *eat* jelly?" and very quickly realized that jellies in Korea are gummy bears for us in America. A little bit into the interview his girlfriend showed up and I got to ask her some questions about her life. She goes to Ewha University, the women's university across the street, and she goes by the name Sally when speaking with foreigners. We spent a long time talking about the stress of having to wear makeup all the time. She seemed quite content with these underlying social rules and explained the complexity of being looked down at for not wearing any makeup, versus wearing too much and inciting the same feelings from the people around her. I was very thrown off because I would be extremely stressed if I had to deal with social pressure like that, but it's different when you grow up in it.

Ultimately it was good to have an inside look into aspects of Korean society I have had a hard time wrapping my head around. Big city-wise, the US and Korea share many similarities. We as people have the same interests, dreams, and fears. The thing that stood out the most to me is that “looking good” in Korea is a demand; if you don’t look presentable, you’re disrespecting the people around you, whereas in the States, I feel like it’s much more about personal preference.