


[News & Politics](#)
[Latest News](#)
[Community Roundup](#)
[Opinions](#)
[This Week in History](#)
[Comics](#)
**DIASPORA:**


## Queer Eyes on Asian Guys

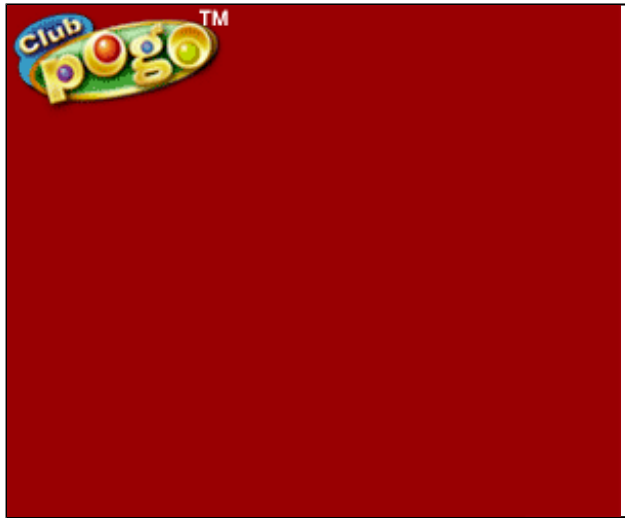
Source: AsianAvenue  
06/06/2005

[email this article](#)
[print this article](#)
[Go to Forum](#) (1 comment)

**Steve Kang** is a gay Korean American who was born in Korea and immigrated to the States with his family at age three. He told his parents he liked boys when he was 11, which turned out to be "both a good and a bad thing," and came out as a gay man at 20.

**Ray Hsia** is a Chinese-American who describes his coming out experience as "pretty positive . . . without a lot of the stereotypical horrors" associated with the process. His family and friends continue to be very supportive of his identity.

Both men are members of the [Gay Asian & Pacific Islander Men of New York](#) (GAPIMNY), an organization that has provided a safe and supportive space for more than fifteen years. We sat down with Ray and Steve to discuss some of the dynamics between gay & straight Asians in America.



**Ray:** I've had relatively little anxiety about coming out and being queer, but coming out to my straight Asian guy friends has been uniquely difficult.

**Steve:** Why's that?

**R:** My friendships with Asian males are very special to me, and my closest friend who I've known since childhood is a straight Asian man. The reason those friendships are so important to me is that, growing up, we had so much in common. As the few non-white people in school, people often tried to put us on the periphery. They made lots of assumptions about us, that we didn't speak English, that we weren't athletic, that

we were always foreign.

So when you've nurtured those friendships with other Asian guys, but realize you have all these things in common, except for this *one big thing*, it's much harder to point out this difference. I was separating myself even further.

**S:** What was it like coming out to your hetero Asian guy friends?

**R:** It was a little nerve-racking, even more than coming out to my parents and non-Asian friends. I felt anxious coming out to my parents, but was ready for whatever repercussions might come from it. I had a plan for what I would do if I felt their rejection.

With my non-Asian friends, I already had an established sense of difference from them. I've already had to explain why I went to Chinese school and why they went to Hebrew school, so what's another thing?

But with my Asian male friends, I was part of this brotherhood, and was now putting myself out of it by saying "I like kissing boys, and I'm pretty sure you guys don't. Do you still want to be my

Join the  
**NFO**  
survey panel!  
FREE Membership!

Take e-surveys,  
make a difference

Join and get:  
**250**  
MemberPoint \$

Entry into a \$10000  
sweepstakes

and more

friend?" Luckily for me, the answer was yes.

**S:** Your best friend was pretty supportive when you came out to him, wasn't he?

**R:** Totally. And more importantly, he was this jock in high school, top of his class, he had lots of friends. He had every reason not to be supportive, to separate himself from me, and he didn't.

**S:** My experience was pretty different. I never felt particularly bonded to most other Asian men, never felt like I measured up to these standards of what it meant to be a man, partly because I knew I liked boys, but also because I was the nerd in high school.

I generally have a harder time coming out to Koreans and Korean Americans. A lot of time has passed since high school, and I'm pretty public about my queerness; I'm out to my parents, all of my friends and colleagues. I always check myself when I meet a new K/KA person, whereas I feel like I'm fairly open and comfortable with my queerness in most other settings.

**R:** Why do you feel like it's more difficult to come out to other Koreans or Korean Americans?

**S:** The Koreans and KAs I knew growing up were pretty conservative. The evangelical Christian church was a big part of my childhood, not only because it was my place of worship, but also because it was where I went to find community with other Koreans. All the messages I got from peers and elders about being queer were pretty negative. Even now I associate a lot of those messages not only with my Christian upbringing, but also as coming from the Korean community.

I don't like feeling like I need to hide things from folks of my own ethnic background, and I don't like that I assume that Korean folks are going to be automatically homophobic or hateful. But it's hard to let go of those instincts. And I definitely feel more uncertain with guys of my own ethnicity.

**R:** Those relationships we make with other Asian men, straight or queer, can be more profound.

**S:** I can't say that I've had a lot of friendships with straight Korean men, but I have this definite image in my head of what a hetero Korean guy is like, and it's so removed from how I see myself. When I picture a stereotypical heterosexual Korean guy (not in a dirty way) I think about the guys I grew up with, who liked acting macho and tough. I never felt like I could measure up to that, or even wanted to measure up, but that image still affects me.

**R:** There's a lot of irony in that, because queer Asian guys and straight Asian guys experience so many common struggles in the U.S. We face media representations of Asian men that portray us as nonsexual, unattractive, constantly FOB-ish.

**S:** What I always question, even more than whether I have anything in common with hetero men of my ethnicity, is whether they're going to feel like they have anything in common with me. I expect homophobia and rejection.

**R:** Asian men often feel low on the totem pole, so when you're down, sometimes it makes you feel better to kick someone who's even further below you. Even a cool sistah like Margaret Cho seems to have very little to say about Asian men. She's this huge icon in the gay community, and to women, but I can't remember her ever talking very affirmatively about Asian men.

**S:** To be fair, I have come out to straight Korean American men and they've been more open than I was expecting. But I definitely agree that a lot of Asian men, hetero or homo, feel like there's a lot at stake in our masculinity, because so many times people put labels on us, which we have to fight.

**R:** That's why last year's *Details* Magazine piece "Gay or Asian" riled up so many folks.

**S:** What was interesting about the initial reaction to that piece was that you had all these Asian-American groups reacting really negatively to the idea of comparing Asian men to gay men. Basically, it was like one big macho-acting heterosexual Asian guy going "We're not gay. That's gross." Some of the responses to the piece, even as they pointed out its racism, had a lot of homophobic overtones.

**R:** What was amazing about the protest that resulted was that it became a protest against anti-Asian racism AND homophobia, and the best part was seeing straight guys protest both aspects of the piece, and stand in alliance with their queer Asian brothers.

**S:** On a different note, I think one of the best parts of being queer for me is that I don't feel like I have to try so hard to measure up to these standards of what it means to be a man. I identify very strongly as a man, but as a queer Asian man.

I like trying to be my own kind of man, without having to worry as much about all these definitions that I didn't create, and that don't speak to my experience. I still struggle with how I define myself in relation to my masculinity, but I feel freer being a queer person.

**R:** That's why it's so great to be queer, but ultimately everyone, straight or queer, should have that freedom.

**S:** What's sometimes neat about my friendships with heterosexual men, whether Asian or non-Asian, is that they know they don't have to play the role of "straight guy" with me. They talk about their feelings, and their hopes, and their neuroses, and expose all these vulnerabilities that a stereotypical straight guy isn't supposed to.

**R:** Right. See, we're saving straight men from themselves!

**S:** Hard work, being a queer Asian man.

Speak your mind. There is currently **1** comment in this [forum](#).