

What influences and challenges our ways of expressing differences between ourselves and others?

In *Exotic, or "What Beach Do You Hang Out On?"* Tara Masih is struggling with what it means to be called "exotic". She is a woman of multi-racial lineage. In the world today it is very hard to be accepted by society if you are a person of mixed-race. I think that is what Masih is trying to represent in this passage.

The essay gives four different meanings of the word *exotic*, all coming from *Webster's Ninth Collegiate*.

The first being, Introduced from another country: not native to the place where found. Most of the people in America during the settlement of the States were exotic. By this definition the only people in America at this time that weren't exotic would have been the American Indians.

The second definition is defined as, archaic: outlandish, alien. This meaning is why Tara Masih says, "It's why we seek to erase differences in this culture." Middle schools and high schools around the country are lined by clicks and trends. For example if a trend is set out in Los Angeles by some movie star it is portrayed by teens throughout the world. With the trends come the clicks. If you don't talk or dress a certain way, you can't hang out with a certain group of people. This was very obvious in my four years at Catholic Central High School.

The third definition is stated as, strikingly or excitingly different or unusual. Tara Masih talks about different cultures concepts on beauty. "In the States it is considered an asset to be tan, though the tan shouldn't be natural. It should be achieved through leisurely hours of sunning on tropical beaches or through the assistance of artificial

means.” How true that statement is. I know several people who go tanning at least once every other day. They live to tan. They love being tanner than other people.

Last but not least, the final meaning of the word exotic is, of or relating to striptease. This meaning gives sexual connotations to foreign-looking woman. As I look through my girlfriend’s magazines it seems to me that there are more and more “exotic looking” woman. As I talk to some of my friends they seem to be changing their views on what they think a beautiful woman is. Most of them describe the looks of their ideal woman as tan, dark eyes, and dark hair. I would consider those characteristics as exotic looking.

It is amazing how different these four definitions actually are, but at the same time how they are all connected. In the first definition about nativity, Masih talks about how our fear of foreigners is essentially the fear of ourselves. She illustrates the fear of the unfamiliar in the second definition when she talks about trying to fit in. The third definition also illustrates how the unfamiliar can be frightening even though it’s exciting. Finally, in the last definition she describes Visions of Salome. She does this to express the fear of what is deferent, or in this case, the fear of woman.

I believe the four definitions listed above have a lot to do with why some people of foreign decent abandon the manifestations of their heritage. I think many of the reasons lie within the second definition about alienation. I feel that people will do just about anything to fit in. People don’t like to be different especially in the United States. This country is a trendy one where fashions are set and followed by just about everyone. Nobody likes to be an outcast. This is why many people of foreign decent abandon their ways of life.