Ajummas Have No Filter

So, I live in South Korea and am a bit of a gym rat (a major understatement). I know and talk to most people in the gym and love the people I know well. This is no different than how I would feel in America. Like America, I see people of all ages working out.

Now, here is where my experience between countries differs. Korea is typically a very strict and traditional culture. Everyone follows the rules to save face. Women who are middle-aged in Korea are called ajummas, and they basically follow no rules. They lean towards unhinged (obviously not all, but if you ask someone who has experienced Korea, they will have a story). This is just an accepted fact. So now that you have backgruond, at the gym, I have these three ajummas that I have given nicknames.

The first is named English Ajumma. She is an adorable older lady who taught herself English. She always wants to talk in English, and she is actually not bad at speaking. However, she NEVER understands what I say in English. Plus, she gets annoyed when I answer in Korean. So, I have started answering with short answers in English and then explaining in Korean. As frustrating as this can be, I am super proud of her determination to get better.

The second I named Blind Date Ajumma. She is adamant that she needs to set up her daughter blind dates for her daughter to get married. She is always asking if I know some single American guys because she heard American guys are open-minded and don’t mind a fat girl (I don’t think her daughter is fat by any means). Now the actual odd part here is that I obviously live in Korea and her daughter lives in a part of America very far from my hometown. She is asking me to use my connections in America to set up blind dates for her daughter who does not want to go on blind dates with guys who do not know blind date culture.

The third is named Tteok Ajumma. Tteok means rice cake in Korean. So, one day I was showering in the locker room and this ajumma came up to me. She held out some tteok and told me to eat it. I was in shock. There we both were naked in the shower, my hands were covered in shampoo, and she told me to eat the tteok. I could not even think of a way to eat at that moment. She ended up feeding me a bite, and then putting the rest of it in a bag for me.

These are all very individual situations and normal in some, yet strange in some ways. I love all these women dearly and enjoy every conversation I have with them. But, their ability to say and do whatever they want, whenever they want is a perfect example of ajummas in Korea.