

WINTER 2007 WINNER

Jocelyn Jiao

Instructor's Foreword

I was a bit concerned heading into the Winter quarter that my new class, “Chick-Flicks and Break-Up Songs: The Rhetoric of Relationships,” would only yield arbitrary explorations of dating and social life at Stanford. Jocelyn Jiao’s essay is perhaps the best example of why my concerns were unfounded. Although class discussions were largely based on the amorous pursuits of Stanford freshmen, our research and writing often tackled issues of identity, communication, and sociological pressures—all serious issues covered in nearly every academic text. Jocelyn’s paper took the same course, initially exploring the seemingly light-hearted issue of “yellow fever” (the unspoken fascination of Asian culture/people by other races and cultures) and turning her inquiry into an argument about what it means to be Asian American and female in the context of a socially diverse environment like the one present at Stanford.

In order to explore these issues, Jocelyn spent hours researching data-heavy doctoral dissertations, antiquated books written on forgotten subjects like Orientalism, and conducting focus groups and surveys to gauge the impact that such issues have on fellow students. It was a tiring, and trying, months-long project that pushed Jocelyn into discussions that she probably never intended. I was never worried about her ability to complete the project, but I was becoming more conscious of how big her inquiry had become when she began applying her primary research results to the findings in her contextual analysis. Again, my concerns as an instructor were ameliorated after I received a wall post on my Facebook account from Jocelyn the night the paper was due. When she should have been putting the final touches on her essay, she instead took the time to write: “I should let you know that this monster of a paper has taken over/ruined my life. And I’m kinda enjoying it. Thank you.” After reading through Jocelyn’s final paper though, there’s no doubt who should be thanking whom.

Chris Gerben

Madama Butterfly Gave Birth to a Monster: Exploring the Internalization of Racial Stereotypes within Asian American Women

Jocelyn Jiao

I used to read out loud to empty rooms in houses that were not mine. When I was in elementary school, my parents spent every Sunday cruising around the city, looking for open houses, condos, or renovated apartments. I had no interest in those freshly painted dwellings; often, as some real estate agent pitched towards my eager parents, I would wander around listlessly or lean against some spotless counter. Sooner or later, I started bringing along books with me to read so that I wouldn't be so bored—anything from Nancy Drew to *War and Peace* (which I did not understand a word of). Stumbling around those often-unfurnished rooms, it was oddly consoling to feel the worn spines under my palm and even the sting of the edges of the paper: I received countless comforting paper cuts on those Sundays. While my parents floated to one side of the house, I would sit myself down in the furthest, smallest room and read. The silence, however, would soon get to me. So, sooner or later, I began reading out loud.

Growing up Asian and female was not easy. *Why don't your eyes slant up*, cried some boys at school as they pulled at my hair. *Why are you ugly*. When I hit them in retaliation, they yelled back: *you're so violent, you're not even a girl, you ugly boy*. It only drove me to strike back quicker and harder, but I could never verbally defend myself. I was helplessly voiceless, silent even as the words pounded at my teeth, stretching my vocal chords taut. The boys' taunting seeped into my skin with no trouble at all. I was unarmed, exposed. The only thing I could think to do was to hit them and then run away to some corner to cry. *She's dumb too*, they would snicker. *Can't even talk*. Strangely enough, reading out loud saved me. Whatever grievance I had suffered during the week, I would weave into the words of the book I read on Sunday. When the villains howled with rage, so did I. When the heroines whispered in grief, so did I. By fifth grade, my voice started taking on a life of its own: I started composing speeches, rants, and delicious one-liners that I could use against my torturers. "You don't hurt me," I would shout towards wood-paneled walls, at the cream-colored armchair. And one sunny Monday morning, fresh from practice, I faced my bullies on the blacktop and snarled: "You can't hurt me; I don't care what you say!" I screeched and railed until every drop of bitterness had spilled out of me, onto concrete, into bright air. The boys backedpedaled and stared. That moment, my voice, their faces: glorious, glorious.

Yet, one question begs to be asked: why did I have so much trouble speaking in the first place? Why was my first instinct to feel ashamed, as if my mouth were too unworthy to fill with words? For years, I have struggled to answer this question. I have even come to know other Asian American girls who have felt or do feel the same way. In fact, my experience was in no way unique or as truly horrifying as it could have been. As exposed by research of the sociological development of the Asian American female

identity, a sizable portion of Asian American women find themselves voiceless during social or intimate situations. This repression of the self has been institutionalized and normalized by prevalent racial stereotypes that define Asian women as either obedient, docile mutes or exotic toys. These stereotypes even form the basis of the concept “yellow fever”: non-Asians, usually Caucasians, claiming a sexual or romantic preference for the Asian race. Even more startling is the fact that most Asian American females do not defy their own subjugation; whether out of apathy or ignorance, Asian American women do not actively work to challenge or neutralize the labels placed upon them.

The Birth of Something Terrible

The female half of the Asian race suffers a long history of fetishization in the West. In his article, “Orientalism in America during the Latter Half of the Nineteenth Century: Portrayals of Marriage Guides,” the author Heasim Sul explores Orientalism through the lens of the marriage guide, a popular literary genre that “represents and deals with sexual information in Victorian America” (Sul 31). Though Sul claims, “American Orientalism portrayed Europe as well as the Arabs, Islam, the Africans, and the American Indians...” (Sul 31), East Asia is often also associated with the exotic, the backwards—the classically Oriental. Therefore, one can presume that East Asia and the Middle East would identify similarly to the average nineteenth-century American. Sul presents a highly specific test case, the marriage guide; yet, their writings can speak for an entire country’s disgust for the Orient and all its peoples. While the typical Victorian marriage guide typically contained guidelines for choosing a spouse, proposing marriage, and enduring pregnancy, it also included “medical information about sexual organs and behaviors.” Orientals supposedly had “abnormalities of women’s sexual organs,” especially “dealing with deformities in... particularly the vulva” (Sul 31). Such “deformities” directly correlated with “a lower stage of evolution” and that “the moral maturity of a society was thus said to affect anatomical development of the body” (Sul 32). As a result, the marriage guides presented the Orient as “a place full of sexual energy where emotion and the physical senses were so pervasive that they took over the realm of reason, justice, and morality” (Sul 32). Orientals became, in many senses, the “Others”—crude, ignorant, and sub-human compared to morally sound, scientifically enlightened Americans.

Patricia Wong Hall’s article on historical Asian roles in American visual media presents another distinctive outlook on racial stereotyping—through the lens of motion pictures of the twentieth century. Her research shows that the flux of Asian typecasting often has depended upon the political relations between the United States and Asia. During World War II, “Americans considered the Japanese ‘the bad guys’ and the Chinese, ‘the good guys’” (Hall 1)—they were portrayed accordingly in the films of the time. But what is especially interesting are the roles that Asian women often played in early films. Anna May Wong, the first Asian woman to be featured in American cinema, had roles that were “exotic,” “sensuous”—but always “villainous” (Hall 1). She embodied the prototype of the “Dragon Lady”; movies of the following decades would typecast Asian women as similarly “evil, coy, mysterious, and cartoon-like” (Hall 1). One film of particular interest, *The World of Suzy Wong*, debuted in 1960. In *Suzy Wong*, Nancy Kwan played Mei Ling, “a Hong Kong prostitute with a ‘heart of gold,’” who embodied the new female Asian stereotype: “docile, passive, and living to please their men” (Hall 1–2). This “deferential,” obedient Asian female waits on her masculine, dominant Caucasian lover. Her individuality and intelligence have been infantilized; her passive

nature renders her helpless and marginal. Furthermore, there is an implied role of sexual passivity and servitude as well; Mei Ling and the other roles Asian women played were “geishas” or “lotus blossoms” (Hall 2). Though one would think that being well-versed in carnal knowledge could have lent these women some measure of clout or authority, the psychological infantilization of their characters deems them morally “beneath” and utterly dependent upon their lovers. Coinciding with Sul’s claims about Orientalism, the sexually exotic again seems irretrievably linked to the ethically, intrinsically inferior.

One can perceive the unmistakable connection between films’ racial typecasting described by Hall and the Oriental “Otherness” evident in Sul’s marriage guides. Both depict the Asian race as foreign, sexually deviant, and morally unsound—intrinsically inferior to the Caucasian race. The Asian stereotypes in Hall’s article clearly draw upon the attitudes toward Orientals presented in Sul’s article: to nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Americans, Orientals were beings not only curious or amusing, but inferior physically and mentally. Such classification formed the basis for the racial stereotyping of the Middle Eastern and East Asian races. One can even infer that contemporary “Asian fetishes” trace their roots to this sinister precedent, this overtly bigoted view of the Orient as a place of sexual vulgarity and deformity. The blatantly racist teachings of the Victorian marriage guides reveal that the “Asian fixation” stems not from simple sexual lust but from this twisted taxonomy of the races.

The Monster Hides Beneath My Bed

If one simply attempted to be aware, one would immediately recognize that America’s attitude towards Asians has not changed much during the past century. Current everyday popular American media and culture still batter and flatten the Asian woman’s identity into that of a marginalized, lesser creature. For example, *Miss Saigon* and *Madama Butterfly* are beloved, contemporary works of art that are sadly indicative of this long-standing bigotry. In both cases, Asian women are portrayed, as Hall points out in her article on Asian roles throughout twentieth-century cinema, as intrinsically inferior to their Caucasian male lovers. These Asian women cannot even be respectable wives; they must embody the lure of the strange, the obscene—the devious, exotic seductresses who lead decent white men from the yellow brick road. The patronizing roles they play do not give them any measure of independence or intelligence. Even 2006’s box office hit *Memoirs of a Geisha*, which grossed hundreds of millions of dollars worldwide and featured a Japanese geisha searching for love, was still at heart a story about an Asian prostitute. Of course, in the end, these “lotus blossoms” do not retain any hold over their Caucasian lovers. These white men, for whom these Asian women have laid down their lives, ultimately abandon their “exotic” mistresses for the white “marriage material” back home. In both *Madama Butterfly* and *Miss Saigon*, the Asian woman—marginalized, abandoned—consequently commits suicide, while the beautiful music and production hide the horror of a life taken in despair. Sul would say that Mei Ling, Butterfly, and all similar characters clearly embody the sexualized, servile Oriental: less than human. Thus, these productions convey the same message as Sul’s nineteenth-century marriage guides and Hall’s sexualized, trivialized film prostitutes—that Asian women are marginal figures, that their needs and wants come secondary to those of white men.

Further evidence of the relevance of these stereotypes can be found in the oddest of places—for example, the recent trend in restaurants of serving sushi lying atop women’s bodies: “naked sushi,” or “body sushi” (R. Shin 1). Clearly, practicing restaurant owners

are attempting to sell more food by eroticizing its presentation, by bringing together two of the masses' most profitable passions: food and sex. The practice obviously objectifies the female body, but Cherry Cayabyab, president of the Seattle chapter of the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF), had another reason to object strongly to the trend: "...the reason why we're going after this is [because] there is a distinct way Asian women are being recruited for such a concept" (qtd. in R. Shin 1). Aileen Trilles, another member of NAPAWF, states that body sushi "...perpetuates stereotypes that Asians are exotic things..." (qtd. in R. Shin 1). Daniel Park of Bonzai Asian Pub and Bistro, which offers body sushi weekly, claimed that the practice does not objectify females nor Asians, but is instead "art in a restaurant setting" (R. Shin 1). Such a defense can only be viewed with skepticism, considering how the naked female body is inevitably a sex symbol, no matter how it is dressed or where it is placed. As Trilles asks pointedly, "If a guy were naked as platter, would that draw crowds to come in" (qtd. in R. Shin 1)? Whether restaurant owners will admit it, "body sushi" is not simply an erotic ploy. It has inherently demeaning implications—that the female body's practical function is that of an unassuming object. Furthermore, having an Asian female lie atop a table and allow food to be eaten off her furthers the expectation that Asian women are passive, voiceless—and they are willingly, happily so. Norma Timbang of the Asian Pacific Islander Women and Family Safety Center in Seattle reveals the detrimental implications of utilizing the body for commercial aspects so haphazardly: "When women are objectified, they are more likely to be victims of violence" (R. Shin 1). Violence against Asian women is a prominent, unrecognized issue that reveals the internalization of existing stereotypes; it will be explored further on in this paper.

Further proof of the merciless objectification of Asian women pervades American everyday life. *The Village Voice*, a free weekly newspaper published in New York City, contains a large section of adult ads in the back. In the April 12, 2002 issue, 33 percent of the ads were "Asian adult ads" (E. Shin 1). These ads attempt to remain politically correct by using "friendlier terminology like 'Asian' rather than 'Oriental,' 'Sweet' rather than 'Sweet-Smelling'"; yet, as Elise Shin writes in *AsianWeek*, "...who's reading these nuanced differences when one is undergoing a visual locked down on what looks like an exposed nipple" (E. Shin 1)? Shin illustrates her point further by exposing a similar trend in the *Verizon Super Pages*: in 2002, "Asian escort ads comprised only 8 percent of the listing...." In the most recent version, they consist of almost 50 percent of the ads (E. Shin 2). The widespread misconception that Asian women are exotic playthings leads to "a culturally sanctioned imbalance of power," according to Gill Greensite of the University of California Santa Cruz Rape Prevention Education Program (qtd. in Han 2). It allows "some white men [to] use racist stereotypes to enhance their dominant roles and reinforce the Asian woman's passive role" (qtd. in Han 2). From *Miss Saigon* to "body sushi" to "Sweet-Smelling Orientals," these Asian stereotypes have invaded popular media and daily life. Indeed, one could say that American culture actually reinforces the subjugation of the Asian woman.

The Monster Occupies the Heart

Every teenager struggles with his or her identity during puberty; often, youth will adopt and shed identity after identity while forging their self-conception. Countless self-reflections of Asian American women can be found simply by flipping through any local Asian American newspaper; in these first-hand accounts, these women recount

their internal struggles with their entwined racial and gender identity. In *A. Magazine's* April 1991 issue, Suzanne Wah Lee describes her insecurities about her appearance as a teenager: "I flipped through countless editions of *Vogue*, *Seventeen*, and *Glamour*, gazing at pictures of long-limbed, bird-thin, white models... I remember standing before the mirror and making the inevitable comparisons, feeling empty and insecure" (S.W. Lee 1). Such magazines exalted one ideal body: "tall, thin, blonde, blue-eyed... breasts out to there, and legs that went on forever," characteristics "...unattainable—if, by birth, you happened to be Asian" (S.W. Lee 1). Such messages can be shown to have direct negative consequences on the psychological development of female Asian American teenagers. Cong-suk Han's article for the *International Examiner*, "Distorted Images," explores the range and effect of negative media images of Asian Americans. He cites Paula Yoo's article "Troubled Waters" for the *Examiner*, in which she wrote how, as a teenager, "...she hated her nose, hair and eyes... she wanted red curls and freckles. She wanted to be anyone except herself" (Han 3). This institutionalized self-hatred, Han claims, is highly detrimental to the development of Asian American youth; according to him, "students who are preadolescent may not have the cognitive skills required to separate stereotypes from reality." Yoo's struggle with her own identity may echo that of many an Asian American youth, "the result of internalizing the media image that Asians were less than human" (Han 3). Compounding the problem, Asian role models were either inaccessible or unavailable altogether. "...Images of Asian women were scarce" in the first place, and Hollywood's version of the Asian woman included the likes of Suzy Wong and Anna May Wong—the Asian screen sirens of early American film described in Hall's article (S.W. Lee 1). Lee found their one-dimensional identities to be "as real... as Saturday morning cartoon characters" (S.W. Lee 1).

Dr. Diane Carol Fujino's dissertation, *Extending Exchange Theory: Effects of Ethnicity and Gender on Asian American Heterosexual Relationships*, unearths a similar point after she asked several hundred UCLA college students to rank the physical beauty of Asian Americans versus Caucasian Americans:

...both White and Asian subjects rated White Americans significantly more attractive than Asian Americans.... This finding is not surprising given the American standard of beauty that favors European features presented in the media... and evidenced by, among other data, the demand for double-eyelid surgery by Asian women. (Fujino 130)

An apparent preference for "European features" insinuates at the persistent influence of Sul's Orientalism, the nineteenth-century belief that Orientals were somehow physically deformed and evolutionarily inferior to the average Caucasian American. Yes, Fujino does not state that Asian facial appearances were necessarily found to be unattractive; yet, the very fact that Asian women would consider double-eyelid surgery suggests that they find their own natural features lacking. Furthermore, by undergoing the procedure, Asians themselves perpetuate the prejudice staked against them. Even in the globalized, highly connected world that we now inhabit, the Anglo-European standard of beauty ultimately reigns supreme. To this day, to Caucasians and even fellow Asians, the "Oriental" is still the "lesser."

The rest of Dr. Fujino's study attempts to apply exchange theory, "a learning theory that focuses on the rewards and costs potential mates and relationships can offer" (Fujino 37), to explain the high rate of interracial marriage between Asian women and non-Asian men. She finds that "...the majority of non-Asian partners are White" (Fujino 14) and that "a larger percentage of Chinese and Japanese women marry White men than Chinese and Japanese men marry White women" (Fujino 12). These assertions correlate with

the points presented in Hall's article: in movies throughout the early-twentieth century, Asian women were servile objects whose sole purpose was to please their Caucasian lovers—the Miss Saigon with her G.I. Joe. They were never paired with Asian men (Hall 1). These films created the expectation that Asian women aim to please and engage only with Caucasian men, and this expectation is clearly met in Fujino's study. Though one cannot claim that the films of the past century directly convinced Asian women to marry Caucasian men, they certainly reflect a certain attitude about whom Asian women do and should date—they propagate the expectation. Thus, one can see the current relevancy of the so-called harmless "yellow fever"; Hall and Sul's articles detail its extended history, but Fujino's study, done in 1992, illustrates racial stereotypes' unrelenting influence among even the country's youthful, college students.

This is not to say that all Asian women fulfill the prevailing expectations. Yet, even those who do find their own identity cannot escape the presence of such misconceptions. Lee's "cartoon characters," being the only Asian women in popular media, created false expectations in non-Asians about how Asian women should appear and act. As Lee describes, "even if I rejected these Hollywood icons, these caricatures had etched themselves into the collective mentality... some non-Asians could not—or would not—divorce the stereotypes from the reality and continue to view [Asians] as Suzie Wongs or Dragon Ladies" (S.W. Lee 1). This disconnect between Asians and the stereotypes placed upon them is expanded upon in Elise Shin's article in *AsianWeek* on her own experiences with Asian fetishization: "The other day, a coworker said it was his fantasy 'to have sex with an Asian chick like you.' Over a candlelight dinner, a first date confided he doesn't date white [sic] women and can only come on a woman's face" (E. Shin 1). While neither of these men directly expressed their hope that Shin would indulge predilections, they obviously confided in her with the expectation that she would not, at least, be instantly repulsed. Shin does recognize the perversity of such expectations: "While this is obviously an issue of power, what is fetishization but a form of sexual power politics" (E. Shin 1)? Yet, she ultimately does not bluntly reject the advances: "...I should have thrown wine in his face. I should have said something, but I didn't" (E. Shin 1). To recognize the implications of such sexual preferences illustrates that Shin is an astute, mentally capable woman. Yet, she does not take the next, seemingly natural step and openly express her disgust; she does not reveal her inner discomfort. While one could argue that such a decision is personal, this hesitation to speak seems to afflict Asian women *en masse*. Shin admits herself, "I think about the lesser things I've remained quiet about and it's a disease, I think. Our culture of silence is becoming a disease that is holding us back" (E. Shin 1).

As mentioned earlier, the most serious consequences of this "culture of silence" occur in the realm of physical abuse within a relationship. In 1991, "Asian women and children made up 13 percent of Massachusetts domestic violence deaths" (Furiya 2). In fact, throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, there was "a rise in domestic violence reports and deaths among Asian women and their children" (Furiya 1). Further, "Asian women are 2.3 times more likely to be murdered in a domestic violence situation than white women" (Furiya 1). In Australia, Asian women are six times more likely to be murdered by non-Asian husbands than are white women (Furiya 1). Yet, as Chairperson of the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence, Rev. Cheng Imm Tan points out that the battery of Asian women is "...such an overlooked issue.... Women don't have a voice" (qtd. in Furiya 1). This is primarily due to their own apparent reticence to confront their abusers directly. According to Tina Shum, a social worker at San Francisco's Cameron

House, “Asian American women are more likely than not to seek professional help” (qtd. in Furiya 2). Ernest Lew, attorney at Nihon Machi Legal Outreach, a San Francisco nonprofit legal agency, rationalizes this decision: “These women view legal counsel as their last alternative following fruitless attempts to turn their abusive relationship around on their own” (qtd. in Furiya 2). By refusing to actively fight their abusers, these women unconsciously choose to be voiceless. They have internalized the expectations that they must be docile and accepting. Furthermore, the Asian American community itself does not necessarily support the legal efforts of its battered women. When the San Francisco Cameron House, a multiservice agency based in Chinatown, started its Battered Women Assistance Program fourteen years ago, “the churches didn’t accept [the program] because they didn’t believe [it was] saving the marriage” (Furiya 3). By placing the state of a marriage above the well-being of the woman, even the Asian woman’s close community debases her social position and value.

One could say that most women trapped in abusive relationships must, to some extent, avoid confronting their abusers; of course, all consistently battered women must, at the least, feel insecure about their worth and value as human beings. Yet, only Asian American women find themselves in the position in which the surrounding culture—American culture—consciously forgives and even encourages their trivialization. This institutionalized prejudice afflicts even top government officials, the supposed role models of the nation: when three U.S. military personnel beat and raped a twelve-year-old Okinawan girl in Japan in 1995, commanding officer Admiral Richard C. Macke commented to reporters: “I think it was absolutely stupid, I’ve said several times. For the price they paid to rent the car they could have had a girl” (qtd. in Wong 1). Of course, these words led to his forced resignation. Yet, they reveal the prevalence of the perception that the Asian woman is “a saleable item,” “a delectable bargain” (Wong 1), and like an object, expendable. New York City’s Asian Women’s Center has long contested that violence against Asian women is directly linked to racial prejudice: “Over the years, the center has butted heads with specific industries that promote images or acts of violence against Asian women. For example, Asian mail-order bride catalogs, massage parlors that exploit women, and media stereotypes and images such as the ‘Miss Saigon.’” As shown before, the attitude that Asian women are trivial, are helpless, is prevalent on the screen, on the dinner table, throughout daily life. It is no wonder that Asian women have processed such messages about who they should be and have internalized them.

Knights Riding Out to Battle

Of course, one should not presume that all Asian American women passively accept the lot assigned to them—far from it. In fact, multitudes of Asian Americans are beginning to rise up in defiance of such stereotypes. One does not have to look far in literature to find accounts of Asian American women resisting their own subjugation and trivialization. At the end of her article, Elise Shin finally speaks: she lectures a cat-calling, sixteen-year-old boy. Shin calls out to all her fellow Asian women as she concludes, “We need to speak out.... Say something. Say anything. Every word is one of defiance that we’re not all whores looking for happy endings” (E. Shin 2). In addition, Asian women’s groups are sprouting and coming into relevance—the NAPAWF, for example, celebrated its tenth anniversary this past December at the Loyola Marymount University campus in Los Angeles. Founded in 1996 by one hundred Asian American attendees at the UN’s Fourth Conference on Women, the growing organization now consists of seven chapters

throughout the nation (Spees 1). Asian American literature itself continues to break down barriers as well: Geraldine Kudaka published in 1995 the first anthology of Asian American erotic literature, *On A Bed of Rice*. During an interview with *Yolk* magazine in 1998, Kudaka describes how “some of the initial reviews... regarding this book were negative.... People wanted more parlor/G.I. kind of stories, heavier on the sexual content, more populist in appeal” (S. Lee 1). Yet, she ultimately decided that the collection should consist of works about “the real experiences of Asian Americans... the human side of a people that have, for a long time, been regarded as objects of sexual desire, not a people of deep emotional and relational experience.” As a result, many of the included pieces do not simply contain erotic fluff, but instead focus in on the realm of personal struggle, shame, and sadness (S. Lee 2). *On A Bed of Rice*, like Shin’s piece of self-reflection and the NAPAWF’s work, bases the Asian American identity in true, personal experience instead of the banal. From the amount of available literature on the subject, one would imagine that increasing numbers of Asian Americans have begun taking active steps against the stereotypes. One would think that most Asian Americans must be, at least, conscious of the issue at hand. Yet, as my primary research indicates, this is far from the case. Even in the aggressively intellectual and politically correct sphere of Stanford University, non-Asians and Asian Americans alike actively or passively perpetuate the racist stereotyping of the Asian race.

Testing the Monster Myself

Because of my childhood experiences, so much of my personality is based off of the necessary fact that I am indeed Asian American. It is therefore inevitable that my personal feelings are intertwined with the issue at hand. I have always expected that other Asian Americans have had to mentally situate themselves in relation to existing stereotypes. I have always assumed that each and every Asian American has experienced some sort of “racial experience,” being preferred, ignored, maltreated—being treated differently, period—based solely on race. Therefore, I went into my primary research with the goal of configuring the various ways Asian Americans do confront their racial identity. For this purpose, I decided to utilize two methodological approaches: an online personal survey and a focus group. First, I wanted to test whether Asian American racial stereotypes truly exist; my secondary sources detail the possible effects of such prejudices but do not base any assumptions or conclusions in concrete numbers. Using a personal survey seemed enviable, because it presented an efficient method to rapidly gather responses; it would be impossible to perceive the presence of a established racial stereotype from only a few, sparse interviews from a limited number of people. In addition, since virtually all Stanford students find it imperative to check their e-mail in order to stay updated for classes and to keep in contact with fellow peers and professors, having the survey based off a website, *Surveymonkey.com*, required survey participants to simply take a few minutes off of their already compulsory e-mail checking to fill out a few questions online.

The focus group seemed like another enviable research method because of its emphasis on group interaction; since my secondary sources did not seem to address how Asian American females might rebel against or counter such existing racial labels, I decided I had to obtain the evidence myself. I assumed that if I could gather several female Asian Stanford students and other non-Asian Stanford students, I would have the required racial tension in the group to allow room for disagreement over the issue—I wanted to see how my fellow Asian American females would respond to the presented stereotypes

in the presence of non-Asians. After all, stereotypes are not founded and perpetuated by academic writings, but in daily life during normal conversation; it is too easy to express one's true emotions when hiding behind the inevitable disconnect of the written word. It is too easy to claim to be an independent, fearless woman on paper. I therefore wanted to re-enact typical normal conversation to observe the Asian American female's day-to-day coping with her racial and gender identities; in other words, can we Asian American women be brave and confident about our identity each moment of every day—when it is most essential? Also, since racist prejudice is naturally a sensitive topic, most Stanford students will not willingly admit to having racist presumptions. Therefore, the focus group proves even more useful because people generally speak more frankly when spontaneously responding to another person than when addressing a posed question.

The survey yielded expected results that correspond with the claims of my secondary sources: 70% of survey participants, when presented with a picture of a random Caucasian man, "Bob," and Asian woman, "Claire," and asked to describe their relationship, thought that Bob "made the first move" (Jiao, Survey). One respondent wrote, "Claire looks too cute and sweet and demure to make a move on a guy." Another wrote, "...whenever I've seen Caucasian men with Asian girls, they [sic] girls always really cater their boyfriends.... I would assume that 'Claire' is a VERY 'obedient' girlfriend" (Jiao, Survey). When participants were presented with a picture of an Asian girl standing against a wall, "Cassie," and asked to describe her physical appearance and possible personality, 55% imagined "Cassie" to be "shy." 27% described her as either "demure," "innocent," or "pure" (Jiao, Survey). Interestingly enough, the overwhelming majority of participants imagined "Cassie" to be either a student or in modeling or retail. Only two respondents wrote that "Cassie" was any pre-medical or pre-business track in school; only one thought she could be a "young professional" (Jiao, Survey). One cannot deny that there is an underlying trend running through the results: none of the participants placed "Claire" and "Cassie" in a position of power. For the former's case, not one person thought "Claire" could have initiated the relationship; not one person described her as the more energetic, sociable half of the couple (Jiao, Survey). "Cassie" was described in a similar manner; none of the survey participants imagined her to be an extrovert, and no one imagined her to be currently on any particularly strenuous career path (Jiao, Survey). While none of the survey answers were blatantly racist, the results obviously showed that Asian females are perceived to be passive. This correlates faithfully with the stereotype that Asian women are docile and compliant, that the "Oriental" does not act but is acted upon. What is more interesting is that 81% of the survey participants were Asian females and 64% were either undergraduate or graduate students at Stanford (Jiao, Survey). Even some of the most intelligent young Asian women in the nation have internalized this prejudiced, false view of themselves.

While the survey results were useful, the focus group interaction yielded far more curious findings. The group consisted of ten freshmen; the first question I posed was: "What are Asian girls like? Is there any particular way in which they act or present themselves" (Jiao, Focus Group)? I expected that at least one person, Asian or not, would venture out a politically correct disclaimer such as, "Well, I don't think any race or gender can be generalized...." This was not so. Instead, the non-Asian males (two Caucasians, one Hispanic, and one African), without a moment's hesitation, listed several descriptions that follow the exact stereotypes: "more down to earth than white girls," "sweeter," "humble," and "more innocent" (Jiao, Focus Group). One in particular revealed that he also thought

that Asian girls had “sideways vaginas” that were “wider” in some unimaginable way (Jiao, Focus Group). Overall, the boys did not seem to think that their words were in any way particularly limiting or discriminatory. When asked if “yellow fever” is in any way a “bad thing”—unfair or offensive to the Asian race—these same males shook their heads. They commented that it is simply a compliment to be the “preferred” race; one asked rhetorically, “If it’s working for you, what’s the problem” (Jiao, Focus Group)? Throughout this entire conversation, I remained silent. Though I felt compelled to explain some of the racially prejudiced implications of “yellow fever,” I wanted to see what the Asian girls, most of whom I would name as good friends of mine, would say. I waited for a reaction. Not one girl directly responded to her fellow male freshmen. One girl volunteered an example of a man approaching her with the words, “Konnnichiwa!” Another mentioned that she did not particularly identify with being “Asian” at all; it was simply her race and did not reflect on her development as a person (Jiao, Focus Group). Yet, ultimately, they said nothing. I felt like I was the only person who was offended by what I was hearing. At the end of the session, I offered my own opinion; I explained some of my research and demonstrated that such stereotypes are rooted in bigoted views of Asians that have been propagated through the past two centuries. After doing so, there was a long pause throughout the room. None of the participants in the group seemed to have thought about the origins of the “Asian fixation” (Jiao, Focus Group). From the sounds of it, both Asian females and non-Asian males did not feel altogether comfortable with the information I had presented.

It was only after the session had ended when, to my surprise, my Asian friends approached me and expressed their concern. One mentioned that some of the ways the non-Asian males described Asian girls was “creepy” (Jiao, Focus Group); they all agreed that they felt like such stereotypes did not have any real basis. They were also deeply disturbed by the male who had claimed that Asian girls had unusual genitals (Jiao, Focus Group). Yet, because the girls had not said any of this during the actual focus group, I had assumed that they had no feelings on the matter. I did not understand why they had not felt compelled to speak—to speak when their very right of self-creation was being questioned. It deeply disturbed me that the self-repression I had read about in books had manifested itself in those close to me. By not speaking out, my fellow female peers had let their silence be taken as agreement; they let the non-Asian males walk away unenlightened, unchallenged. They had not spoken when it was most needed of them. Moreover, they did not feel it was necessary to do so. My friends aided in their own enslavement.

We Are All St. George

If even Stanford students—some of the most educated, intelligent youth in America—can fall prey to racial stereotypes or will remain voiceless in the face of such prejudice, then surely this only demonstrates the precarious position the Asian American woman occupies in the minds of fellow Americans. She has been systemically marginalized and trivialized by American culture and media; her institutionalized repression has existed for two centuries, and one can only presume that it will take just as long, if not longer, to set her free. I do not imply that Asian women should begin rioting in the streets. Instead, I call upon Asian women of every age, ethnicity, and background to first and foremost fulfill their duties to themselves; they should love themselves for their unique quirks, their own idiosyncrasies. Though stereotypes and false assumptions may seem untamable, they will only prevail in the face of silence. If we Asian American females refuse to indulge the

most unconscious bigotry and suppression, then no person can accuse us of compliance. We must raise our voices and speak truly, sincerely, without hesitation.

I own a quote book, an amassed collection of uplifting words I have come upon—words said by Neil Gaiman, Gloria Steinem, and Eleanor Roosevelt. I lend it to those I care about who are in pain, in need, in doubt. All these rich quotations say this: you yourself are the highest truth—let nobody tell you otherwise. But, I tell my friends, that is only half of it. You must use your mouth, that sorry messenger; your lips are not meant to conceal but to reveal, not meant to be stiff but open and sincere. You must shout these words, send them tumbling into silent rooms, into crowded buses. Most of all, I tell my friends to speak. Speak and it will all be yours.

I no longer read out loud to empty rooms. I do not need to.

Works Cited

- Fujino, Diane Carol. *Extending Exchange Theory: Effects of Ethnicity and Gender on Asian American Heterosexual Relationships*. Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services, 1992.
- Furiya, Linda. "The Special Problems of Asian and Asian American Women and Domestic Violence." *AsianWeek* 8 Oct. 1993: 1.
- Hall, Patricia Wong. "The Asian/Caucasian Connection—Our History in American Visual Media." *Interrace* 30 Nov. 1994: 32.
- Han, Cong-suk. "Distorted Images." *International Examiner* 16 Nov. 1999: 11.
- Jiao, Jocelyn. Survey. Stanford: Stanford University, 14 Mar. 2007 <<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=198113374650>>.
- Jiao, Jocelyn. Focus Group. Stanford: Stanford University, 1 Mar. 2007.
- Lee, Spencer. "On a Bed of Rice's Geraldine Kudaka." *Yolk* 30 June 1998: 56.
- Lee, Suzanne Wah. "asian and female." *A Magazine* 30 Apr. 1991: 6.
- "Orientalism." *Wikipedia*. Last modified 5 Feb. 2007. 25 Jan. 2007 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orientalism>>.
- Shin, Elise. "Fetishism on the Rise (Again)." *AsianWeek*. 15 Sept.–21 Sep. 2006: 6.
- Shin, Rena. "Activists: 'Body Sushi' Objectifies Women." *Northwest Asian Weekly* 21 Nov. 2003: 1.
- Spees, Hiroko. "NAPAWF Celebrates Its 10th Anniversary in Los Angeles." *International Examiner* 20 Dec.–2 Jan. 2007: 4.
- Sul, Heasim. "Orientalism in American During the Latter Half of the Nineteenth Century: Portrayals in Marriage Guides." *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 8 (2002): 31-51.
- "The Orient." *Wikipedia*. Last modified 15 Feb. 2007. 25 Jan. 2007 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Orient>.
- Wong, Bill. "Yellow Pearls: Paying For It." *AsianWeek* 24 Nov. 1995: 6.