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Dr. Foster  
Gender and the World  
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## Construction of Self Essay

### II. Squinty Eyes

“Alice Chang.”

*Silence.*

“Alice Chang. . .”

*More silence.*

“Alice Chang! Hello?? I am calling *your* name.” The new substitute English teacher who is taking class attendance is frantically waving her hands around in my face.

“I’m not Alice. My name is Caroline Foley.” Alice Chang is absent, but my teacher assumed I was Alice Chang.

The assumption of my “Chineseness” throughout life has happened so much, that I was getting annoyed very easily by people assuming I spoke Chinese, knew how to use chopsticks, or could play the violin. But the thing is: I *am* Chinese; I speak some Chinese; I know how to use chopsticks; I can play the violin. For years, I denied my ethnicity, fearing of being labeled an outsider, an immigrant, a Chink, squinty eyes, and simply Chinese. Despite these efforts, I was still labeled those nicknames, along with newer labels, such as a “banana” and a “Twinkie” –yellow on the outside and white on the inside. As a Chinese adoptee with white parents, I knew very early in my life that I was a Chinese female.

I was most likely born in NanChang, China. The story goes: my birth parents left me in a basket on a church step (insert Harry-Potter-and-Moses-references-from-others-when-I-share-my-story here). The church brought me to a hospital that brought me to an orphanage. When I was four months old, a loving couple from Wallingford, Pennsylvania adopted me. All of my neighbors were white. My parents were white. My peers were white. The dolls and books in my room had little girls with black hair and brown eyes – they looked like me. Some of my peers called me Squinty Eyes, while some of my neighbors called me “a little China doll.” From a very early age, I knew I was different.

I don't recall “the talk” with my parents about my origins, but I remember struggling to understand the concept of giving up a child you gave birth to. My peers would point at my adoptive parents and ask where my “real” parents were. When I was young, however, I embraced my uniqueness. My parents enrolled me in Chinese School at Radnor High School where I would join other little adopted Chinese girls to learn about Chinese culture and language. I loved these girls as my sisters, and I loved everything Chinese: pandas, lanterns, dumplings, my teachers, Chinese dresses, umbrellas, you name it. It was a sanctuary to be surrounded by girls who looked like me and were adopted, too.

In public school, I would doodle pandas and Chinese characters, and that's where I learned that being Chinese “wasn't cool.” Microaggressions quickly taught me I was being ostracized from my peers. As many Asian Americans have done, I began to ignore and deny my roots. I was proud of my “white” name. I snickered when a group of Asian students passed me. I would proudly show off my poor math grades to my friends, just to prove I wasn't like “other Asians.” I quit the violin. I refused to watch Anime. I insisted I

knew zero Chinese language. I laughed with my peers if a television show featured a racist and stereotypical Asian character. I was nearly offended when I received a personal invitation to the Asian culture club at my middle school. How could anyone tell I was Asian? My name is Irish! I considered it flattery when people thought I was half Asian, half white. I felt blessed to have been born with “the fold” –as it made me look more Western. I hated Chinese School. I hated the Chinese language. I told others I hated Chinese food.

In high school, I found a group of friends who loved me for who I was. Occasionally, racist jokes would pop into conversations, but as safe as I felt, I still ignored by ethnicity.

In college, I entered every class thinking two things: (1) I am the only Asian in this class, (2) There is another Asian in this class and my professor will get us confused. At Villanova, I have never been more aware of my race. When I took a cultural studies class, a professor told me I was not oppressed as an Asian, because Asians shared white privilege; Asians are smart –“it works in your favor!” Should I be surprised when instances like this happen to me in school? According to Evidence Of Racial, Gender Biases Found In Faculty Mentoring on NPR, “We see tremendous bias against Asian students and that's not something we expected. So a lot of people think of Asians as a model minority group. We expect them to be treated quite well in academia, and at least in the study and in this context we see more discrimination against Indian and Chinese students that against other groups.” I believe prior to that reading, this was something I always knew in the back of my head. On my applications for college, I filled out my information strategically. For my Temple application, I proudly checked off the “Asian”

box. For Villanova, I did not check off any race –I let the reviewers judge from my name. I had assumed Temple was proud of their diversity, while I also assumed Villanova had only accepted token POC, a role I did not want to be accepted on.

I thought joining the Asian Student Association would make me feel more comfortable on campus, but I felt like an alien at their club meetings. Yes, we had all experienced the usual Asian racism, but we grew up in different cultures from our parents. It was not until I attended ASA's performance of "Asian Expo" where I felt proud of my heritage for the first time in over ten years. The exposition featured traditional Chinese dance (I had quit this a few years ago), Chinese language (I was proud to understand half of the content and for the first time in my life I was thankful to my parents for dragging me to Chinese school), and Chinese culture. I sat in the audience watching stunning fan dances, proud to be apart of such a beautiful culture.