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**EXOTICISM AND EAST ASIAN WOMEN:
MOVING BEYOND GEISHAS AND DRAGON LADIES**

by

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BA, Ryerson University, 2006

A Major Research Paper
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In the Program of
Immigration and Settlement Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2006

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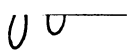
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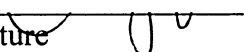
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ABSTRACT

This major research paper relates my experiences as a Chinese woman to those of other East Asian women while exploring why East Asian women continue to be sexualized and ethnicized. My paper is based on the feminist standpoint and anti-racist feminist theories, and feminist and post-modern methodologies. The focus is on the Chinese immigration experience to North America, and on Chinese women's lives, with some consideration of Korean and Japanese women because the latter two share similarities in experiences of homogenization of East Asian women. I argue that the experiences of every woman are unique because of their race, migration and settlement experiences. I borrow Ang's (2001) term "togetherness in differences" to describe our experiences. The stereotypes of East Asians and East Asian women are not created in a vacuum; rather they are the direct result of the dominant culture oppressing the "other" in the effort to subordinate them.

Key Words: East Asian women, racism, feminism, identity, the other.

Acknowledgements

My MRP would not have been made possible without these people:

I owe thanks to my very loving and supportive boyfriend DJ Eric Ling for his applying his reverse psychology for all the times I threw my hands in the air and said, “I cannot do it anymore”.

I would also like to thank Dr. Judith Bernard for introducing me to the program when I arrived at her doorstep quite lost right before finishing my undergraduate degree.

I thank Vappu Tyyskä, my MRP supervisor for believing in me when I doubted myself, her guidance, intelligence and her abundance of courage for deciding to take me on as her student.

I thank June Yee for being my being my second reader.

I thank my brothers and my family, who believed that I would be the first person to finish a MA in the family.

Table of Contents

Introduction I- Academic Voices	1
Introduction II: Personal Voice	5
My-Social Location: Then and Now and Ever Changing	8
Methodology	11
Problems of Categorization/Definitions of East Asian Women	21
Theory and General Concepts	24
White Privilege	25
White Privilege in Relation to White and East Asian Women	28
Race and Gender Discrimination in East Asian Immigration to North America	30
Stereotyping	35
Stereotype #1: “Yellow Peril”	36
Stereotype #2: “Dragon Lady”	36
Stereotype #3: “Model Minority”	37
Stereotype #4: “Passive and Traditional”	38
Stereotype #5: “China Dolls”, “Sex Dolls” and “Geishas”	39
Diverse Experiences and Resistance: Identity of some East Asian women	45
About Japanese Women	46
About Korean Women	48
About Chinese Women	50
Authenticity	55
Conclusions and Reflections	56

Many of these [Asian American] representations embody binary oppositions. Hence, the porcelain, exquisite, and docile character of the Asian woman as a China doll contrasts with her representation as a dragon lady who typifies an ‘inherently, scheming, untrustworthy and back-stabbing’ woman (Jiwani in Hellwig & Thobani, 2006, p.169).

Introduction I: Academic Voices

My thesis is that race, gender and sexuality are intertwined for women who self-identify and are identified as East Asian¹ in North America. These women are not seen as individuals but based on stereotypes that are both created and reproduced in interaction with a society that has placed and continues to place them at a disadvantaged position. Historical research of the immigration policies of Canada and the United States, toward Chinese immigrants, will demonstrate this discrimination and my research shows how it affects specifically Chinese women socially as well as institutionally. Issues of identity, stereotypes, and disadvantage are examined while I engage in an autobiographical narrative and commentary as an “East Asian woman” living in present day North America.

The topic relates to immigration and settlement studies because of the long racialized immigration history in North America. Hellwig & Thobani (2006) stated that

¹ For the purpose of my paper, East Asian would only involve Chinese, Japanese and Korean women. However, it is important to point out the different regions of Asia. They include South Asia, East Asia, as well as South East Asia. “South Asia comprises India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh; the Himalayan states of Nepal and Bhutan; and the island nations of Sri Lanka and the Maldives. East Asia includes China, Mongolia, North and South Korea, Taiwan and Japan. South-East Asia encompasses the mainland countries of Myanmar, Thailand, Lao (Laos), Cambodia, and Vietnam, in addition to the maritime states of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, East Timor, and the Philippines” (Weightman, 2006, p.2).

in Canada, many women of colour have been subjected to working in jobs they are overqualified for and that usually require little skills. Due to the discriminatory immigration policy in North America, many women of colour who originally had professional jobs in their home country are subjected to low-paying jobs with few opportunities of upward mobility in their new home. While the racism may not be as overt as it used to be a couple of decades ago, covert racism continues in immigration policy both institutionally and socially. The North American (Canada and the United States of America) focus is because of the ample literature available as well as the parallels in immigration policies between USA and Canada. This topic is pertinent to immigration and settlement policy because it illustrates the issues of hindered social mobility and disempowerment for these women by de-humanizing them as sexual objects and ethnicized characters. East Asians make up a significant percentage of immigrants entering Canada. In 2005, 128,537 Asian immigrants from all categories entered Canada (Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, 2006). East Asian immigrants entering into Canada continue to face challenges today. I believe that it is an important issue that needs to be addressed in order to “re-humanize” the East Asian women living in North America since they have traditionally been viewed homogenously as sexual objects, as docile and dangerous, apparently the complete opposite of Western white women. In my paper, East Asian women would mean East Asian women living in North America. In my paper, some authors have used South Asian as well as Asian in their works, and I have left the terms as is to show how labels are applied differently by different authors.

The significance of this paper is that East Asian women have been living in North America for many centuries but have been historically viewed as more of an extension of

their family rather than individuals. A lot of them were illiterate, making them further invisible. The absence of literature on their experiences is somewhat disturbing because it ignores, discounts, and belittles East Asian women in North America. It is only in the last few decades that East Asian women in North America have come forth and become part of a literary discourse. These literary works have allowed them to expose their experiences in North America—in particular how they perceive themselves and are perceived by the dominant culture. In addition, second generation East Asians born and raised in North America are not really regarded as North Americans. They are seen as a separate entity from their peers.

A lot of stereotypes have surfaced about East Asian women and I will show in my paper how inaccurate but powerful they are. These stereotypes will be discussed in greater detail as I examine their historical construction, their current metamorphoses, and how this, in turn, produces barriers for East Asian women who are trying to integrate socially and economically. East Asian women are constantly being pigeon-holed into a few stereotypes and viewed as not authentic when their behavior proves contrary. White outsiders are often the ones who set standards for the authenticity of another race. By setting these imaginary standards of who qualifies as “East Asians,” they create the doubt in the “other” that they do not belong either to the dominant culture or their own ethnic or racialized group.

During the course of my research, certain stereotypes and conceptions of East Asian women living in North America were also demystified for me. I too am East Asian and was not aware that as early as the 1920s some Chinese couples living in the US were not coupled by arranged marriage (Chang, 2003, p.195). Instead of accepting their

parents' decisions of arranged marriage their parents either allowed them their own choice of partner (some parents preferred their children choosing either the Chinese or Asian race while other parents respected their children's choice) for marriage, while some Chinese people simply went against their parents' wishes. The discovery was both shocking and comforting to me because it shows that even in the 1920s stereotypes of Chinese were incorrect. The idea of Chinese people portrayed as backward and traditional was an effort to make Chinese people appear stuck in their traditional ways. I was convinced by the society and my surroundings of the false stereotypes of the Chinese people. I too am aware of my personal biases and stereotypes of East Asians.

Three groups of East Asian women are examined in general in my paper: primarily the Chinese, but also Japanese and Korean. This paper will explore the experiences of these different groups in the United States and Canada. I argue that North American society places labels on East Asian women that are inaccurate and homogenize them in stereotypes of East Asian femininity in order to make them feel inferior to their white counterparts. I will explore Chinese women in greater detail since I am ethnically Chinese and feel that their experiences relate closer to mine. I am including Japanese as well as Korean women because historically, some of the stereotypes have been lumped together and by illustrating the three groups, one can see similarities as well as differences. However, I have no intention to represent the experiences of all Chinese women. The experiences of the East Asian women that I have chosen help strengthen my voice in this paper.

My personal experiences will be linked to the available literature on East Asian immigrants to Canada and the United States including an overview of discriminatory

immigration policies and inequality as they pertain to the intersection of race and gender. I will also follow up the theme of sexuality and exoticism in the lives of East Asian women. I will also examine East Asian femininity and sexuality through popular stereotypes such as Geisha, Dragon Lady, and China Doll. I will discuss the ways in which different stereotypes are reflected in and influence the lives of East Asian women. The initial focus was originally on the sexualized and ethnicized stereotypes of East Asian women but I realized by following along this vein I would only be re-emphasizing the stereotypes. Therefore, I have included a variety of East Asian women's experiences in an attempt to dispel the stereotypes about them.

My research methodology will be comprised of feminist as well as post-modern approaches. My theories are premised on standpoint feminism and anti-racist feminism. The rationale for these approaches is because of the interconnectedness of the roots of racism and sexism that still exist in North America, while moving from blatant acts to more subtle ones. Why, despite greater access to knowledge over time, has North America not been able to move beyond Geishas and Dragon Ladies?

Introduction II: Personal Voice

An interesting thing happened to me: the more I read on my dissertation topic the less I feel I know about this topic. Initially I thought that if I could convince people that stereotypes prevent people from really getting to know somebody, I would have the answer to fixing racism and sexism. But, it turns out that it is not that simple. While I scrambled to find books and articles on East Asian women deviating from stereotypes, it finally occurred to me that it is not necessary for me to find a "cure" or redeem East Asian women because there might not just be one solution or any as a matter of fact.

After that epiphany, I started to look at things from another perspective. It is one of the most difficult things to do when you are brought up with having to find “the one right answer,” to suddenly have to learn to let go and see where your research brings you. There is not just one right answer for everybody.

Thus, I start by exploring my life experiences; my own point of view and explain how certain racial and sexual stereotypes have affected my actions and reactions in my daily life. “To write is to commit oneself to an interpretation; like any commitment, it closes off possibilities” (Devault, 1999, p.190). This kind of writing both scares and excites me because it gives me ownership of my writing and my views. Having grown up being the only girl in the family with two older brothers, I learned at a young age to fight for what I want or else end up with what I do not want. If I have to fight to let people find out who I really am, it will neither be the first fight nor the last one.

I discovered my interest in this topic academically only recently when I presented an article in school. It was on a short story entitled “Seeking Special Chinese Lady” by Fiona Tinwei Lam. The story was about a white male posting a newspaper advertisement seeking a special Chinese lady which eventually led to a blind date. He had an ex-wife who was Chinese and everything about her was perfect and he was trying to find a replacement for her, thinking all Chinese are the same. He had a pre-conceived notion of the Chinese and his date did not match up to his standards. I was very curious and disgusted after reading and presenting the article which encouraged me to do more research on this topic.

I realized that there is actually a widespread phenomenon that has been around for some time. It usually involves white men from Western countries looking for sexual

relationships with East Asian women. This usually involves more than just a sexual relationship between two individuals and is part of a global phenomenon, pertinent to a lot of “isms” like racism, sexism and feminism and the power structure in our society. This phenomenon actually came to my attention after arriving in Canada.

Socially, I noticed a heightened interest of White men trying to engage in relationships with East Asian women in Canada. I have encountered more than my fair share of this phenomenon. While at a social event or even sometimes just walking down the street, you will hear someone (usually a White man) going through with lines of East Asian greetings like, “An-yung Ha say you, Koni Chi Wa, Ni Hao Ma?” You look around and discover that the stream of greetings have been delivered purposefully at you. It is just like having a mini multiple choice quiz, you get to pick a, b, c, d, or all of the above, in a string of greetings in several East Asian languages. In the back of my head, I wonder if they understood the complexities of the languages and cultures that they have just evoked. Feelings of being ridiculed overwhelmed me, as if I am supposed to belong to one or all of the culture. At the same time, I felt I was being objectified into some docile pleasure, some form of cheap entertainment. Besides, what right did they have to invade in my private space, speaking to me not as an individual but more so like a joke? Did they even know or care about the different East Asian cultures?

They all appeared to be very interested in the culture; or rather what they perceived about it. The preconceived notion of an East Asian woman’s personality is viewed as homogenous, something actually understandable. Many of these white men, from my personal experience, assume the “expert” role of East Asian culture, which I find condescending. I am by no means an “expert” in the East Asian culture, but having

someone else who does not belong to the culture assume the role of “expert” and try to educate me just underscores how invisible and powerless we are perceived to be.

By homogenizing the East Asians the dominant society has essentially condensed us into hybrid², borderless identities. If anyone was to create the hybrid identity the particular individuals alone should dictate how they choose to be perceived.

Unfortunately, this is not how it works. Although more and more people with hybrid identities are negotiating and carving out their own identities, I think that the hybrid identity is reassuring to the dominant culture, as it conveys that we are all the same – successfully assimilated and harmless.

My-Social Location: Then and Now and Ever Changing

I was born and raised in Singapore which, despite being a small country in South-East Asia, is a developed country. I immigrated to live in Toronto within the last decade. In Singapore, I belonged to the dominant race because ethnically, I am a Chinese female and ethnic Chinese Singaporeans account for the majority of the population. I hardly heard the phrase: “Where are you from?” directed to me before I migrated to Canada. I was probably very oblivious to the body politics in my society since I was so young. I was a teenager when I moved to Canada; a time where I was constantly seeking peer approval and wanted to fit in. While I was quite proud to self-declare as a Singaporean when asked where I am from, it soon became my downfall. People around me found it difficult to understand me with my Singaporean accent and that was a blow to my self-esteem. The more people asked me to repeat myself, the softer I spoke. I felt

² Hybrid identity is defined as “celebrated and privileged as a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the consequent ability to negotiate the difference” (Hoogvelt, 1997, p. 158).

as if the softer I spoke, the faster I could disappear and not face the humiliation of not being understood in English, a language that I have spoken my entire life. An example of how racism affected me socially and institutionally was when I gave a presentation in my grade twelve English class. I had put in a lot of effort in this particular presentation and was extremely excited about presenting it. At the end of the presentation, my teacher came up to me and said, “That was a really good presentation, but unfortunately, I have to give you a ‘B’ because I did not understand your accent. You should really work on sounding Canadian.” In the back of my head, I was puzzled. If he had not understood my accent, how come he understood enough to tell me it was a really good presentation? Instead of telling him what I was really thinking, I silently nodded and accepted his grade shamefully as I blamed my “accent.” I was made to feel and look inadequate for not sounding Canadian, a highly debatable concept. Looking back, I wished I had said something to him. Something that would have made him realize he was being outright racist for penalizing my accent, something out of my control.

I am still in the process of trying to move from being in the dominant group to being in the minority group although I do not agree that Chinese in Toronto are a “visible minority” nowadays. I say this because firstly of the significant number of Chinese immigrants living in Toronto as well as the economic contribution they bring forth to the society. I accept and self-acknowledge as a transitional intellectual. I am allowed to move rather fluidly from one place to another, translating and mimicking the behaviors of the different groups but not allowed feeling that one place is home. “[D]iasporic (migrant) intellectuals are ‘transitional figures’, ‘constantly translating between different languages, different worlds’” (Clifford in Ang, 2001, p.4). Therefore, for the purpose of my paper, I

include East Asian women who live in North America who question their sexuality and identity or who are simply not putting up with the stereotypes imposed on them.

Having said that, in a society where I am constantly being asked “Where are you from?”, I have allowed peer pressure time and time again to push me into being “visible minority,” “the other,” the “immigrant,” basically everything that says you are not “us” but rather “them.” The way people from North American society view me and other East Asian women is as if they are implying, “I know you are not really from Canada, so tell me, so I can put you into a box”. The labels affixed onto us are highly problematic and will be looked at in a different section later on. Looking at the collection of supposed personal traits for East Asian women, I have at times wondered about breaking out of them. By breaking out of them, I have chosen to create my own identity and space instead of wondering where in the two worlds I will fit into. This is a task that I have to work on daily as at times it is better to just associate with one or the other.

Throughout my research on a topic that continues to affect me daily, I have to admit that at times, strong emotions were stirred up. I felt angry, insulted, humiliated, and even embarrassed to be an East Asian woman living in North America. I would deliberately at times choose to be more “white” so as to prove my successful assimilation into a primarily white society by being a “model minority.” I am learning to internalize “[w]hiteness as a normalized and normative way of being” (Lee in Hellwig & Thobani, 2006, p.28). To behave otherwise and “non-white” would reveal my oh so exotic/ bad “ethnic-ness,” my incapacity to assimilate, and prove to my white peers that I am in fact, inferior to them. Ethnicity is similar to culture in that it becomes something “backward, rigid and irrational” (Henry in Hellwig and Thobani, 2006, p.230). Notice how these

concepts continue to be stagnant, frozen in time, so that the whiteness³ can continue to dominate it because of the presumed East Asian inferiority. It is puzzling to me how a “superior” apparently intellectual (white) race would think of other races and cultures in ways that do not grow mature or change.

From my experiences, whiteness or white/dominant culture is made up of people who look white or Caucasian physically. They possess superiority mainly because of the history of North America’s immigration policy. The preferred immigrants of European descent and according to Canada, these immigrants were successfully assimilated that they “naturalized” into Canadians. The identity of these immigrants transforming into Canadians has normalized/universalized what they think a Canadian should look like. This in turn, creates the other category- the other beings that do not look white.

Whiteness can also be seen in our day to day lives in terms of the values, cultures and mannerisms that are white. An example of whiteness would include not being asked, “Where are you from?” because the assumption of a white person is that they are usually Canadians unless the white person has an accent that gives away their whiteness.

Methodology

I will approach this scholarly and personal task with a methodology that builds on feminism and postmodernism.

Feminism is a movement, a set of beliefs that problematize gender inequality.

Feminists believe that women have been subordinated through men’s greater power, variously expressed in different areas (DeVault, 1999, p.27).

³ Ferber (in Andersen & Collins, 2004) has stated that whiteness was a normalized way of being and that race only applied for people of color. The term whiteness has historically meant supremacy of other races, and it came about when their hierarchy in the race was being threatened. Lee defines whiteness as “ nothing but a dominant cluster of class-specific and race-transcendent cultural habits” (2003, p.295)

Feminism raises questions about gender inequality, yet at the same time is not powerful enough to make changes to reverse the oppression or allow women to play at a level playing field. I argue that East Asian women along with being disadvantaged for being female through patriarchy are at the same time faced with discrimination for being “ethnic”.

The choice of topic is without doubt due to my personal interest and experience. I realize that all knowledge is biased in that there are values, norms and assumptions made but the difference is that my methodology makes the perspective I take explicit (Yee, 2006).

Feminists seek a methodology that will do the work of “excavation” shifting the focus of standard practice from men’s concerns in order to reveal the locations and perspectives of (all) women. The aim of much feminism research has been to “bring women in,” that is to find out what has been ignored, censored, and suppressed, and to reveal both the diversity of actual women’s lives and the ideological mechanisms that have made so many of those lives invisible (DeVault, 1999, p.30).

This form of excavation work intends for women who have been silenced for a long time to take ownership and center stage of their own experiences. I disagree though that it has been able to uncover experiences of all women. Feminism has been criticized for not integrating race into its analysis, as will be discussed a little later in this paper. Even written experiences may mean little to those who have not experienced them directly. It is a deep, thorough process, intended to dig out all that has been hidden for a very long time. This, for a lot of women, implies being taken seriously as well as being validated as

intellectuals. I certainly feel validated as an intellectual in a literary discourse after reading so much and then being able to take ownership of my own writing. It provides me with a sense of empowerment like nothing that I have ever felt before.

The standpoint of women is towards a methodology “which place women as ‘subjects’ of the study and which takes into account both structural processes and individual negotiations” (Man, 1995, p.309).

[F]rom standpoint theories, the grounds for knowledge are fully saturated with history and social life rather than abstracted from it. Standpoint knowledge projects do not claim to originate in purportedly universal human problematics; they do not claim to perform the “God-trick” (Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 45).

It has only been recently, with the fighting of women’s rights that women’s research has been pointing towards “[I]ssues of difference, the questioning of social power, resistance to scientific oppression, and a commitment to political activism and social justice (Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004. p.3). This statement provides some relief. Think for a minute, if research allows for only sameness, everyone is perceived to be treated equally despite knowing otherwise. Because of differences, people who feel and think differently are finally allowed to do so without being made to feel abnormal. Differences also allow me to look at the validity of the experiences, as well as the many layers of societal effect on East Asian women.

On the other hand, the issue of differences is contradictory. While recognizing differences because everyone is unique, differences are not always understood or acknowledged. The differences are what allow the dominant white group to invent excuses about the inferiority of East Asians. By assuming themselves as the norm, they

can then refer to anyone else unlike them as the “other.” Differences to be addressed about the “other” also include race. For the purpose of this paper, anti-racist thought would be defined as “body of literature that positions the lives and experiences of women of colour as the starting point for a feminist analysis” (Dua, 1999, p.9). For an East Asian woman, racialized experiences cannot be divorced from the gendered ones. I employ my own life experiences as well as those of other East Asian women because their stories help create my reality and reinforce my experiences as continued systemic and institutional discrimination. “Feminist epistemologies suggest that personal perspectives are valid and perhaps even essential elements of any systematic attempt to know the social world” (DeVault, 1999, p.105).

I believe that the important word here that is missing (for the purpose of my paper) is “female personal experiences” because we live in a world that is fundamentally male dominated. Very often, women’s experiences are not considered to be valid. In addition to being the weaker sex, women of colour have a harder time getting their voices heard. This is probably because since the dominant group felt that that East Asians were inferior, then their experiences really would not be quite significant as their experiences. It is still frustrating even when I try to explain my experiences and the reasons pertaining to why I do not wanted to be treated as an ethnicized, sexualized object.

Reflexivity ensures that the process of producing knowledge is made visible. In reflexive research, difference is neither ignored nor simply added. It is analyzed and understood to be an important factor that significantly impacts all aspects of the research process from beginning to end. ... Within feminist research, studying across difference and asking “which women” have given researchers a tool to see

into different realities that were previously invisible to the positivist, objective researcher. ... Feminists continue to struggle with issues of differences. And they haven't always agreed. But by accepting the idea that there are multiple truths and multiple realities, feminists have also gained the courage to disagree with one another surrounding these issues (Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 117).

Even as I am writing this paper, I somehow feel peculiar about the whole experience because I am obliged to use English, the tool of the dominant culture that has categorized me into the "other" to combat the stereotypes. Equipped with the tools to write, I find myself often at a loss of words and at times unable to accurately articulate exactly my feelings about certain experiences. It is as if I get close to expressing my thoughts about the encounters, and then the words suddenly evade me. Feelings of betrayal and shame creep up mysteriously when I write, as though mocking me for even considering writing about my experiences. By using a foreign language to express my views, does it always fairly and accurately express my emotions as well as allow my reader to understand my oppression and experience? Does it also not provide another opportunity to point out my "otherness" and difference?

Lugones in Devault (1999, p.183) argued that the experiences of women of colour vary from the Anglo-Saxon women so much so that it is not possible to translate it into the English language, and even more impossible to use their own native tongue to explain something they are experiencing because of the language barrier. She continues to state that even if the experiences were being voiced, very often they were not getting heard or acknowledged. It is very often though, that the meanings of experiences are lost in translation allowing Anglo-Saxon women to refer to the "other" as being backward,

traditional and attribute it to the “culture” factor. My own experiences are those of being sexualized, ethnicized, and then ignored! The feelings of having to assimilate and conform towards the dominant culture paired with feelings of inadequacy and knowledge of “othering” provide me with the power and strength to write this paper. Very often, I feel like I am standing in the lake on two boards under each foot. Every move I make has to be pre-calculated, precise as well as risky. A false move will cause me my dignity, my footing to shift and the need to stand back up again to balance on the two boards.

Many East Asian women who live in North America face real life struggles of trying to break out of the stereotypical mould and be recognized as individuals rather than be constantly tied in with their culture, and very often the wrong one as well. Time and again, they speak but do not get heard. I feel that this is because they are not being treated seriously because of their race and gender.

Approaching my interest through the feminist approach allows for a multitude of truths. Initially, it may be hard to see the different truths, but it is only through the acceptance that the “other” feels that they can be heard. The advantage of having more than one truth allows one to question the “universal truth”. You start to not take knowledge for granted, but look for your own to accept.

A feminist approach to knowledge building recognizes the essential importance of examining women’s experience. It often takes a critical stance toward traditional knowledge-building claims that argue for ‘universal truths’(Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p.3).

There can be more than one way to feel, and women are finally able, when deviating from the norm, to feel that they are not constantly being judged.

It is hard not to have a bias, especially with constant reminders in society about my “otherness” or “exoticism”. When I think of East Asian women being viewed as “exotic” or “Oriental” I can’t help but think of these women (including me) as being like trinkets on sale in a store. It is extremely impersonal, “fashionable,” as well as dehumanizing. The attention that I have received is not something that I have earned, but one that is imposed on me; and at most times I would like to be disassociated from it. With postmodern research methods, East Asian women have been able to challenge the beliefs of the dominant culture on the stereotypes produced and voice out their own opinions.

Postmodern feminists often use texts (in varied forms), the products of dominant culture and signs of postmodernity, in conjunction with the view of the oppressed, as the starting point of cultural interrogation...[they]unravel the social processes and relations that have constructed the social world in hierarchical ways...(Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004 ,p. 19).

I personally find it difficult and I almost feel apologetic while writing because often it feels like I am playing the “blame game” meaning, I feel like I might be pointing my finger at the dominant “white” culture for demonizing East Asian women. Having realized my “forced” visible minority position upon arrival in Toronto, I had almost by societal expectations, put myself “in my place”. With some exceptions of really feeling injustice done to me and speaking up, I have at times opted to play the silent “victim” because I had assumed this is just how the game is played. Very often, the silence is preferred because as much as one might feel alone and unjustified, the reality is that it is

she against the world – a battle not easily won. To unravel the social norms indicates resistance and dissatisfaction towards a situation. Yet,

Postmodern research is thus a “transformative endeavor” practiced in order to denaturalize and transform oppressive power-knowledge relations with the intent of a more just world.....postmodernism uses the voice of the “other” in highly reflexive and politically imbued ways in order to deconstruct “metanarratives” used in the domination of some over others (Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 18).

With various research methods, one can hope that there is one who will speak out to their experiences and validate them. The attention is shifted to the “other” when initially,

Many feminists conceptualized truth differently than mainstream researchers and assert that women and other marginalized groups can possess knowledge and also recognize that people may not always gather knowledge in the same way (Nagy, Biber and Yaiser, 2004, p. 11).

When reading the above statement, I had initially thought that the authors were just stating the obvious. For me, I am acutely aware that people process knowledge in various ways but only because I have learnt through experiences as well in school that where whiteness exists, the “other” do as well. I remembered in one of the classes where my professor commented that people of colour would have no problem understanding how “whiteness” affects and oppress them while at the same time, my white counterparts were having a difficult time comprehending the white privilege they “inherited” yet had maybe not given a second thought about it. People who are placed in situations that feel powerless are more attentive than those who are in positions of power when it comes to power-struggle or control situations. It is with little surprise though, that members of the

dominant culture often feel like they are being attacked when people of colour start questioning the societal hierarchical positions.

As women of colour had long pointed out, their position in western societies driven by racism is different from that of white women. Women are also positioned differently by their social class, their age and family status, by their sexual inclination, by whether or not they are able bodied (Mcdowell, 1999, p. 245).

East Asian women are such a small, voiceless group and often have their identities predominantly tied up with their families. Therefore, even if they write about and have their experiences validated, is it possible for them or for people to read about them to actually change anything?

I will in my paper to use my own thoughts as well as other people's voices to make mine heard since I feel that if someone else has written and published on similar experiences, then mine become reinforced and therefore more valid and believable. This method can also be viewed however as somewhat of a weakness on my part in that it may suggest that I have been uncomfortable and uncertain with my own emotions and feelings. I am very consoled and relieved when doing my research to find people writing about experiences and feelings that I was before, unable to put into words. For me, it was a revelation when I felt it was acceptable to feel confused, lost, angry as well as inadequate. "When you're in a minority, you feel different. And when you feel different, you feel kind of inadequate" (Women's Book Committee, 1992, p.171). I find myself relating to the above quote because even though you are fully aware that you have as much right as Jane Doe beside you to be there and treated like an equal, you cannot help but look

around and think, if only I looked, spoke and behaved just like everyone else(white), then I would be “normal”.

I believe that a lot of East Asian women have at least, on one occasion, wished they were white. They think that by wishing to be white it will make all their feelings of inadequacy disappear. White women apparently do not have issues with self-worth and self-confidence like this. Meanwhile, rigid societal standards make me as the “other” to have a constant desire to compensate socially even though I am well aware that since I am labeled as the “other” it will be very difficult to separate myself from that image. It makes me pity myself because no matter how much I try to compensate for the inadequacies society has imposed on me, it will not make me feel “normal. By writing this paper, I hope to explain my feelings and perhaps, allow other people to see things in a new light.

“By speaking in ways that open the boundaries of standard topics, we can create space for respondents to provide accounts rooted in the realities of their lives” (DeVault, 1999, p.63). Furthermore, I believe in strength in numbers. If enough people write about their experiences, then there is a higher likelihood that East Asian women can feel free and be truly themselves. Then these women will not feel restricted by societal expectations and in turn not be pigeon-holed as much.

Even though feminist methods of approaching non-mainstream topics are occurring within the last few decades, it is rather ironic that by discussing women’s topics instead of men’s (standard) topics, that we are deviating from the standard. Even though women make up half the human population, any thoughts on our own experiences are treated as special and not standard. This goes on to re-emphasize my point about how

we as women are beginning to get our voices heard in society. Even so, having been ignored for so long creates doubt of worthiness. I tell myself that I am worthy, I know I am worthy, and that despite being a visible minority, my experiences are valid.

Yet at the same time, I find myself second guessing my emotions, my instincts, wondering if anyone thinks what I say and write matters. Even in work settings, I find myself being oppressed because I know I am “ethnic” and the “other”. And people assume you are easy going because of your culture, as if a certain culture somehow has genetic personality traits that others do not have.

Problems of Categorization/Definitions of East Asian Women

My paper is about women of colour, defined as women who are not of European descent as well as those who are born outside of Canada. By those born outside of Canada, I mean first generation Canadians as well as East Asian women who have migrated over to North America. I would like to point out though that I do not agree with the term women of colour because it is just another way to be categorized, placed in an awkward position to be made to feel inferior. It no doubt carries a negative connotation. Changing of the label would not work either because even if I was called the Chinese Goddess, it would still just be another name to categorize and differentiate me. My point is that no one is going to agree on a collective term, so only for the purpose of this paper, I am going to call myself and the East Asian women the “other.” “Other” would be used interchangeably with women of colour as well as East Asian women.

Women trapped in their bodies and marked by inappropriate gestures, are defined as ‘Other’. Their confinement is exacerbated through the construction of an

idealized female body (currently young, slim and white) that most women fail to measure up anyways (Mcdowell, 1999, p.48).

The other has little control of how their body is being perceived and many a time gets misunderstood. The other is being controlled by ethnocentric people; people who usually belong to the dominant culture. “Ethnocentrism is the belief in the inherent superiority of one’s own ethnic group or culture” (Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 46).

The constant emphasis on the term East Asian women is necessary in order to situate the subjects and provide them with an accurate social location. If I appear dogmatic about the constant referral of my race, it is because I have been coerced by society to self-label as an East Asian. I am conscious that the term is used regularly but the lack of it does no justice to the paper. At times, it feels like the more explaining is done, the more confusing this issue becomes.

If ethnicity is not made explicit, for example, outsider listeners may miss its significance entirely; when it is, there are other difficulties, including vulnerability to various kinds of understanding that cannot be taken for granted elsewhere (DeVault, 1999, p.100).

Names and labeling are highly problematic.

One speaks, and one speaks for another, to another, and yet, there is no way to collapse the distinction between the other and myself. When we say ‘we’ we do nothing more than designate this as very problematic (Butler, 2004, p. 20).

It is because of the uniqueness of everyone’s experiences that it is hard to relate with one another’s experiences, but it can also cause no unity in goals. There is no other way to

distinguish “them” and “us” when one group is made to feel superior to the other groups. Yet, it is not realistic for everyone to hang an identity tag so that there would be no misunderstanding or misperceptions, especially since identity is such a fluid concept. Differences should be acknowledged but at the same time, similarities should be shared amongst one another so as to show how people are really similar.

[N]ot differences that are separating us... our refusal to recognize these differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and their effects upon human behavior an expectation (Lorde in Andersen & Collins, 2004, p.65).

In most cases, similarities are what bring people together and differences bring us apart. What should be the emphasis then, the things that bring us together or the things that separate us? Since there is no one “universal” truth, whose truth bears more weight? With separation comes isolation and my argument is to acknowledge differences, yet at the same time provide a voice that can be heard. My feeling is that if everyone insists on their differences, then they will just be viewed as “unassimilable” and “backward” once again. Understandably so, misrepresentations of East Asian women have caused frustration and thus some continue to choose silence as a form of resistance. The purpose of having voices is so that one can get heard, and even though it can get misinterpreted, it can always serve as a stepping stone to opening up many doors as well. There will always be more than one version of an experience, which is what makes us humans. Yet differences are often treated with skepticism.

To add more difficulty to the situation, women’s voices have not always been regarded as significant especially in our society.

[W]omen speak in ways that are limited and shaped by men's greater social power and control, exercised both individually and institutionally (and exercised to control less privileged men as well as women) (DeVault, 1999, p.61).

The censorship and lack of opportunities for women to have a voice have done a huge and major disservice for women so much so that even with only gaining their voices now, who is to say that they will actually be taken seriously? When you live in a society that regards women as subordinate, how do you make yourself heard in ways that affect and touch people? East Asian women face a double jeopardy in that they are disadvantaged by both their gender and race.

Theory and General Concepts

In my paper, I will use a general structural framework of inequality. This means that I will approach the subject first and foremost from a perspective that appreciates how social class, gender and race operate in North American society. Nagy, Biber and Yaiser (2004) state that "race, class, gender and sexuality are contextual." In other words, they are never fixed, but are undergoing changes. The three concepts are socially constructed by the dominant group and made distinct in order to create social hierarchy.

"[T]wo people of the same race living within the same society and culture will experience race differently if they are of different class, different genders, and/or different sexualities" (Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p.114). All these factors make up a different someone with different reactions when dealing with any situation. The goal of these social concepts is to "organize, process, reward, or penalize people" (Lee, 1998, p.11). The penalization and rewards are highly arbitrary and follow societal and political

trends. It leaves those who are being penalized feeling self-blame and unworthiness. The motto for new immigrants” If you work hard, you will succeed” ceases to exist.

It is necessary to talk about gender and sexuality, for the obvious reason that the subjects here are women. “[G]ender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1999, p. 55). Gender is a socially fluid concept that means different things for people in various social, economic, as well as class and racial settings. It is however, still restrictive because the acts are sometimes imposed on women rather than a natural act. There is a social obligation and expectation to act. According to George Dei in Razack (1999, p.165),

Terms like gender, race and class are concepts that society has chosen to engage in conversations. They are socially constructed categories whose meanings are historically specific and change in different political and cultural contexts. They are contested notions and yet it is race that appears in quotation marks. Why?

These concepts are more readily discussed today, but how about treating people who are obviously different, as equals? The superficial act of acknowledging them as well as well discussing these concepts is evident, but how about actually recognizing the real people that are being affected and asking them what could be done about the situation?

White Privilege

The whole idea of “othering” takes form when the white group is viewed as the norm that leaves the rest to be the outsiders. It is a social discrimination that leaves many feeling incomplete. The white group is composed of the preferred immigrants to North America historically, usually of European descent. They are white people who, at first glance, are considered “Canadian”, because of their skin color. They are not seen belong to an ethnic

group or a racialized minority because their race has been normalized to become the standard human race. “Being blinded by (white) privilege is not uncommon and it is one of the factors that can lead to research that ignores difference” (Naggy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 103). If the researcher does not see a problem because of his or her social situation, can they try to solve it when they think there is no problem or the “challenge” of examining your social position and stance doesn’t apply to them? This kind of thinking could potentially serve as a barrier for white women to understand “other” women’s experiences. “Women are white, middle or upper class, heterosexual and Western” (Naggy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 104). Women tend to be seen universally as white women. While that might seem very harsh, the reality of it is that they set a standard and people who fall short of it find themselves confused. The above statement rings true in the Western society, although changes are coming along to acknowledge women from diverse backgrounds. In spite of other voices speaking up, the “women” that have the loudest and most powerful voice remain the Anglo Saxon women because they are often made to feel like they are knowledgeable and superior. Until then, Western women are viewed as the norm, the average and anyone else is not regarded as “women”.

Whiteness is a potential resource for all whites that others (who perceive their whiteness) confer and even impose on them (us) whether or not they (we) seek it.

Even whites who abdicate racial privilege can readily reclaim it at the moment they cease to actively reject it (Lewis, 2004, p. 628).

The society (those who participate in the creation of the dominant culture) constructs those they deem valuable to the society. The society places this invisible “power” on

people who are born into whiteness, as if it is their birthright. Some who try really hard, achieve part of it and some others just try and never get close to it.

Only members of the powerful groups in societies stratified by race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality could imagine their standards for knowledge and the claims resulting from adherence to such standards should be found preferable by all rational creatures, past, present, and future (Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 48).

Being an “other” allows me to be more empathetic towards other newcomer immigrants. I currently work in a huge company where I am considered “ethnic”/ visible minority. This has often resulted in some supposingly innocent/racist remarks from them towards me, but the irony of it is they seem to genuinely believe that they are paying a compliment to me when they pass a racist remark. My initial reaction is shock and outrage, but remembering that I am in a professional setting and that my minority position in trying to debate a controversial as well as political issue is not appreciated or condoned. In addition, it was not as if I was going to start a discussion about how I thought their comment was racist. On occasions when I have suggested it, they either looked apologetic, attempted to explain how the sexist or racist remark was actually a compliment, or continued making a joke out of it. There was no intention of taking my feelings or me seriously.

In this paper, I do not attempt to provide any quick and easy solutions, but constantly question what is it that makes the “other” constantly feel uneasy and what causes them to cringe standing out time and time again against their will?

White Privilege in Relation to White and East Asian Women

Anglo-Saxon women seemingly find it difficult and possibly feel guilty when discussing women of colour and their struggles. “Western feminists continue to claim that feminism aims to “empower” women, all the while ignoring the glaring differences between their lives and those of most of the world’s difference” (Carty, 1999, p.43). They fail to see that their privileged situation is actually achieved by exploiting women of colour.

Their (Empire’s feminists) own oppression taught them nothing about the universal condition of women under patriarchy... Their preoccupation with, and support for the belief in, the superiority of the British ‘race’ and its Empire kept them from imagining any other relationship with colonized women (Carty in Dua & Robertson, 1999, p. 38)

Their reality is that they see themselves as the saviors of the savaged “other” by civilizing them thus making themselves more superior. Hellwig and Thobani state that “in Western ideologies, including some feminist ones”, it is “argued that the cultural and social ‘backwardness’ of Asians” is “most visibly demonstrated in their oppressive attitudes towards women” (2006, p.4).

Despite the continuing fight in the feminist movement, Western women are still not equal with their male peers. My point is that, if they have not found equality with the other gender, what justification do they have deeming East Asian women as backwards? A “kick the dog” mentality comes to my mind, whereby the white feminist women go down the hierarchy and blame the last person there. Anglo-Saxon women are not ready to give up the power that they have gained since they have fought so long to gain equality with their white peers. If having that power means having to take advantage and exploit other groups, then

they will have to do it. Butler (1999, p. 7) says: “We all act in relation to our intentions and beliefs, which are culturally shaped and historically and spatially positioned.” For Anglo-Saxon women to believe otherwise appears to compromise their superior position in society.

In recent years, with the introduction of the third wave feminism, more diverse experiences of women of colour assuming the role of the expert have been more widely available in academic literature.

The adding of colour (into feminist research) and stirring created more specific, multiple, ‘universals.’ Although it was recognized that the use of the lives of the universal woman could only produce a partial and distorted account of the lives of women and that difference mattered, each difference became its own universal (Naggy, Biber, & Yaiser, 2004, p. 105).

These narratives of other women’s lives provide inspiration and hope for other women in society that their daily lived experiences are being recorded and actually heard. On the other hand, it also provides a blanket explanation that the differences between the different ethnicities of women boiled down to culture instead of other intersecting factors like background, experience, socio-economic status, etc.

When women of colour write, they write from within their existing gender, sexuality, class and lived experiences. To view them as fragmented parts destroys the whole experience. Even by only understanding parts of their experience, Anglo Saxon women have now been exposed to experiences they would not have known otherwise.

[F]eminist empiricism conceptualizes thought, reason and the emotions as fundamentally properties of individual persons. Yet other epistemologies have

identified patterns of these that appear to be characteristic of cultures rather than in any interesting way of individuals in them (Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 180).

Feminist research, while quite widely circulated in North America still deviates from mainstream research.

Race and Gender Discrimination in East Asian Immigration to North America

The ideology behind the supremacy of the white men created by the white men is so convincing that everyone else believed that they were subordinate to them. This is despite the fact that a lot of Asian immigrants were in North America the same time or even before some Europeans migrated to North America. East Asian North Americans have been exploited for their cheap labour and not viewed as suitable immigrants of the country.

Asian Americans have been here for over one hundred and fifty years, before many European immigrant groups. But as 'strangers' coming from a 'different shore,' they have been stereotyped as 'heathen, exotic and unassimilable' (Takaki in Andersen & Collins, 2004, p.55).

Asians, especially Asian women have had an extremely difficult time in migrating to North America. This is largely because the immigration policy in North America in the beginning of the century was extremely racist, and only regarded immigrants of European descent as desirable and "others" not as desirable.

The Chinese arriving in British North America and Canada between 1858 and 1880 entered a land already conditioned by a tradition of racism implanted by the European empires as they sought to extend their dominion to the New world (Chan, 1983, 11).

Asians who have obvious physical difference to the Europeans along with the language barriers were often deemed unassimilable, inferior to the Westerners as well as a possible threat to the racial purity in both Canada and USA. My question is if they were really that worthless, how was it possible that they posed such a big threat.

Li (1998) stated that Chinese immigrants alone were restricted in their admittance into Canada and were the only group to have to pay the head tax of \$50 during 1885, raised to \$500 by 1903. All these actions were done in an attempt to ensure racial purity in Canada by controlling the number of Chinese men entering. Lee (1998, p.65) shows that the number of men to women was highly unbalanced in that in 1911 there were 2,790 Chinese men but only 100 Chinese women. It was clear that the government cared little about the well-being of the Chinese men outside of their work. Lee (1998, p.23) states that 4564 Chinese immigrants entered Canada between 1885 and 1903. Labourers comprised 72.5 per cent of them while merchants and storekeepers accounted for 5.7 per cent. Among these immigrants, only about 50 were women and 30 of them were wives. The percentage of wives of Chinese immigrants was 0.0066, a tremendously big disparity between the two sexes (Lee, 1998). It was apparent that there was a great shortage of Chinese women in Canada and there were limited opportunities for them to come over. In addition, Chinese immigrants were treated with great skepticism and as socially inadequate when compared with the European immigrants (Lee, 1998, p.24). This was mainly a strategy employed by the government to ensure that the Chinese continued to provide cheap labour as well as remain inferior in the social hierarchy.

It was harder for East Asians to be accepted socially because their appearance differed so much from the Europeans and human beings tend to always treat differences with

more fear and discrimination. Since their appearance was so different and they didn't have a voice, media were able to stereotype them as the lowest forms of human beings, which fed into an emerging anti-orientalist sentiment.

Institutional racism involves social institutions that give a sustained meaning to superficial features of 'race' and use 'race' as the justification for disqualifying subordinate members of society from equal participation. ... By removing the political and civil rights of a racial group that is already marginalized, racist policies restrict the bargaining power of that group vis-à-vis employers and other words and thereby further reduce the market value and social standing of the group being discriminated against (Li, 1998, p.37).

East Asian who have been living in North America for a long time have not been readily accepted by the mainstream society. They were encouraged to stay in the country, along the fringe of the city for as long as there was employment for them and also because they were useful to the economy. With a huge number of Asian men entering into North America as contractual workers for their labour and a disproportionate number of Chinese women and the taboo-ness of inter-racial relations, Chinese men struggled in their new host country socially and economically. In addition to these challenges, they were not perceived well. One of the earlier perceptions included,

[A] column in the September 29, 1854 edition of the New York Daily Tribune described the Chinese as, '... uncivilized, unclean, filthy beyond all conception, without any of the higher domestic or social relations; lustful and sensual in their dispositions; every female is a prostitute, and of the basest order; the first words

they learn are terms of obscenity or profanity, and beyond this they care to learn no more..." (Jiwani in Hellwig & Thobani, 2006, p.164).

I cannot even attempt to express my sheer horror and shock with regards to the above quote. The quote appears to be describing someone savage and nonhuman. This is precisely how anti-oriental feelings were being created.

Laws pertaining to immigration were deeply raced and gendered such that Asian women and other women of colour were not permitted entry and, if they did enter it was within restricted categories as dependants and/ or chattel labour (Hellwig & Thobani, 2006, p. 164).

Chang (2003) states that during the 1900s, Chinese American women were not encouraged by their family to pursue school and were therefore often stuck in low-paying jobs. The dominant society was acutely aware of changing societal and political trends and would then exploit the Chinese women for their marketability.

White firms hired young Chinese women simply to capitalize on their physical appearance, outfitting Chinese department store salesladies, elevator girls [...] in Asian costumes to provide an exotic atmosphere for white customers (Chang, 2003 , p.190).

This is in essence, a macro/societal example of society manipulating race and gender.

The small number of Asian women who did migrate to North America in the last century ended up with less than desirable jobs, often jobs like prostitution.

Chinese prostitution, the exploitation of young Chinese women by both Chinese and white men, flourished in Chinatown in the mid-and late 19th Century. The large number of Chinese prostitutes and the notoriety of prostitution must be seen in the

context of capitalize interests, racial discrimination, and the immigration policy in the United States (Uchida,1998, p.163).

It is easy to see how society viewed all Chinese women as promiscuous and immoral, so that they could compare them to the pure, chaste white women. It is also obvious that the view was manipulated because with the language and cultural barriers, Chinese women looked so different from the rest of the immigrants and had little credibility. “Wherever these white women went in the colonies, she went as the symbol of purity and defencelessness...” (Carty, 1999, p.38).

White men created this perception of white women as well as the “other” to remain in power. “A defense of community, morality, and white male power was achieved by increasing control over and consensus over among Europeans, by reaffirming the vulnerability of white women...”(Razack, 1999, p. 12). At a time where white men had all the power, white women were made to believe that they were vulnerable, yet at the same time they were going to be more superior to the “other.”

In addition, some Chinese male migrants only considered women from China as the “real thing”. “The [Chinese North American women] do not have virtues whatsoever. Chinese women who come over are so taken with them that they do not try to learn what they should. In China no women are immoral” (Chang, 2003, p.195). Above is an example of how a bachelor, even though he regards himself as assimilated into the society, is discriminating his own kind and firmly believes that the authenticity of a Chinese girl exists only in China. There, they are not tainted. It is to be noted that I am not denying that there are differences and it is not uncommon to discriminate against your own race. “People of colour come to

believe misinformation about their particular ethnic group” (Yamato in Andersen & Collins, 2004, p.101).

Stereotyping

A stereotype is a belief that a group of people will act in a certain way because they belong to that group. “Stereotypes are ‘mental cookie cutters’ – they force a simple pattern upon a complex mass and assign a limited number of characteristics to all members of a group” (Nachbar, J & Lause, K, 1992, p.236). These stereotypes have caused the oppression of East Asians both ethnically as well as sexually. The various stereotypes for East Asians include the “Yellow Peril”, the “Dragon Lady”, “Model Minority”, “Passive and Traditional”, “China Dolls”, “Sex dolls” and “Geishas,” which will be discussed in greater detail in this section. These stereotypes have done little to justify the presence of East Asian women living in North America. They have pigeon-holed, ridiculed as well as obstructed East Asian women socially as well as professionally.

Stereotypes, irregardless of them created in a positive or negative form conceals the true self of an individual. Instead of perceiving an individual as who they really are, stereotypes causes selective perception in the individual’s personality traits based on the knowledge that a person gets about their ethnic background as well as their culture either from the media, friends or their own experiences. Espiritu in Andersen & Collins (2004) had stated that stereotypes of East Asian women have essentially caused them to be voiceless, because their voices have been represented by the white men. For East Asian women, stereotypes are based on both their ethnicity and their gender.

It is still very common for East Asian women to be viewed as a homogenous group.

[A]sian women have been reduced to one-dimensional caricatures in Western representation. The condensation of Asian women's multiple differences into gross character types- mysterious, feminine and nonwhite obscures the social injustice of racial, class, and gender oppression (Espiritu in Andersen & Collins, 2004, p. 181).

Stereotype #1: "Yellow Peril"

[T]he "Yellow Peril" – the threat that Asians will one day unite and conquer the world. This threat includes military invasion and foreign trade from Asia, competition to white labor from Asian labor, the alleged moral degeneracy of Asian people, and potential miscegenation between whites and Asians (Espiritu in Andersen & Collins, 2004, p. 176).

The dominant culture's fear of the East Asians when they first came to North America makes little sense as they were afraid of a group that could not even speak their language (English). However, by creating this stereotype, the dominant culture controls the East Asians by making sure that they will not get far socially and professionally. This stereotype is specifically rooted in the racist treatment of East Asians in immigration policy, as described above.

Stereotype #2: "Dragon Lady"

[T]he Asian woman was portrayed as the castrating Dragon Lady who, while puffing on her foot-long cigarette holder, could poison a man as easily as she could seduce him. 'With her talon-like six inch fingernails, her skin-tight satin dress slit to the thigh', the Dragon lady is desirable, deceitful, and dangerous (Espiritu in Andersen & Collins, p. 180).

Here, the Dragon Lady is a woman who is both dangerous and seductive at the same time. The illustration of the dragon lady is almost cartoon-like, but this image allows many to treat them more like an illusion and less like a human. This might explain why there are many sexual desires and fantasies perceived by white men about East Asian women. The contrasting traits of dangerousness and seductiveness create a woman who is treated as a bestial figure. Moreover, this Dragon Lady is mysterious and conjures up the unknown. This historical stereotype can be linked to the other sexualized themes, as will be explained below.

Stereotype #3: “Model Minority”

The term ‘model minority’ is an imported American term that refers to Asian Canadians as an exotic, collectivist, and homogenously successful group who are not hampered by the effects of racism. (Ho, 2002, p.15).

If I were not Chinese, I would jump at the chance of being a model minority. After all, it is a common desire to be successful and well to do. Being ethnically Chinese comes with the burden of expecting to do well because you are a model minority and this stereotype just adds on pressures both from my own race and other races. It is as if one immigrant Chinese family succeeded in their new life in Canada despite all the hardships. Therefore there is no reason why another family cannot tolerate racism and succeed in the same manner. The term “Model Minority” given by the dominant culture ignores all form of systemic racism and sexism by believing that the race was made to succeed. The term also suggests loneliness; jealousy because not everyone gets to be a model minority, and certainly those who do not succeed are envious of those who are.

The stereotypes of East Asian women have historically and repeatedly been produced to benefit the white culture. By re-emphasizing negative yet seductive traits in East Asian women, they continue to be treated like a group of women who do not deserve to be treated like human beings. While it is true that we have gone from being undesirable to desirable or even the “model minority”, I argue that it continues to create the “Other” out of East Asians, both women and men.

Indeed, as Yu suggests, Asian Americans have been transformed from being an “Oriental Problem” to “model minority” (1999, p.454). Further, he argues that Asian Americans have both “suffered and benefited from definitions of their exoticism” (2001, p.10). The point to be emphasized here is that Asian Americans have little voice or control in what has been said or labeled upon us. It almost appears as though East Asian women over the decades have somehow “cleaned up their act” and stopped being a nuisance to the society and are now viewed as the “Model Minority”.

Stereotype #4: “Passive and Traditional”

East Asian women are not viewed as equals to white men and/or women in their new home, thus hindering not just their career, but their social, mental and in fact all forms of development and advancement. “The conditions of privileged, white women’s lives were – and are – directly linked to the absence of privilege in other women’s lives” (Carty, 1999, p.42). Even in the feminist movement in North America, they continue to struggle to find a voice that is representative of them.

Third World women, whether in advanced capitalist states or in the former colonies, find themselves cast to the periphery of Western (also known as liberal)

feminist theory, where they are positioned as a monolith, pitied as passive, dismissed as tradition-bound (Carty, 1999, p.41).

These stereotypes have been static for so long. How can one stay stagnant when the world is actually moving? By imposing these stereotypes of backwardness on East Asian women, I am inclined to believe that the dominant group thinks they are better and more “advanced” than the “other”. As defined earlier, “[e]thnocentrism is the belief in the inherent superiority of one’s own ethnic group or culture” (Nagy, Biber & Yaiser, 2004, p. 46). By maintaining this belief, the dominant culture controls the social hierarchy of the “other”.

The stereotypes of East Asian women are created from years of history, media, social construction, “otherness”, sexism, an imbalanced power structure between white men and East Asian women, as well as between white women and East Asian women. “Orientalist stereotypes of Asian women as docile, passive, and pliant have served the economic and social interests of these (Western) elites...” (Hellwig & Thobani, 2006, p.4). These obsolete inaccurate stereotypes only serve to benefit the Westerners and continue to pigeon-hole as well as freeze images of the East Asian women, making them inferior to the White counterparts.

Language and cultural boundaries are difficult obstacles to cross, so much so that there have been many misunderstandings between cultures for a long time. “For the Westerner outside looking in, Chinese sportswomen (in China) seem to defy all the preconceptions about the obedient, meek Chinese female who knows her subordinate place” (Brownell, 1996). There seems to be a disconnection in the above statement.

There is not really any correlation between being meek and being athletic. Despite being subordinate or not, one can still be a strong athlete.

Stereotype #5: “China Dolls”, “Sex Dolls” and “Geishas”

Stereotypes can leave very strong images in the hearts of people and make them believe what the media is hoping we will believe.

Portraits of evil Japanese again dominated the screen in World War II films. Then Communism became America's new ideological enemy, and China went Communist while Japan became Westernized, so the evil Japanese/good Chinese images were reversed. Japanese women began to be portrayed as Lotus e Blossom/Geisha Girls catering to the pleasures of American G.I.s stationed in Japan (Carole, 1995, p.10).

Even with these Japanese being the evil image for East Asians, many a time, Westerners have a hard time distinguishing Japanese and Chinese and have often mistaken one for the other. So much so that for Westerners, East Asians/Japanese women have been rubber-stamped into Geishas and in a sense dehumanized because their existence during World War II was to cater to the needs and desires of the America G.I.s.

[H]ouston recounts a post-war high school beauty contest. Recognizing that she couldn't beat the other contestants at their own game, that is, look like a 'bobbysoxer,' yet also knowing that dressing up in kimono would be 'too Japanesey,' Houston decides to turn the mask of Asian femininity to her advantage (Yamamoto, 1994, p. 176)

Houston (a Japanese American) wins the contest because she had found the fine balance between enchanting the Caucasian man with her “exoticism” but soon realizes that by

acting the way she did, she had only continued to reinforce her ethnicity as well as strengthen stereotypes about Japanese women and East Asian women in general.

As mentioned in the beginning, based on my personal experiences, sexualized images of East Asian women seem to be among the most common and most powerful. The notion of 'scaling bodies' –distinguishing social worth on the basis of bodily distinctions –was developed by a feminist political scientist, Iris Marion Young, who has argued in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* that

[T]he situation of any woman within a given socio-historical set of circumstances, despite the individual variation in each women's experience, opportunities and possibilities, has a unity that can be described and made intelligible (1990,p.142).

This unity, she suggests, is based in their "female embodiment" (Mcdowell, 1999, p.48).

Further, in discussing body politics, Butler (2004, p.21) stated

The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze other others, but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where 'doing' and 'being done to' for become equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies which we struggle are not quite ever only our own.

Exotic images are not real in the sense it has been distorted created by the westerner to stroke the white men's ego. McDowell (1999, p.43) has argued that

In our culture not one part of a woman's body is left untouched, unaltered... It is vital to the economy, the major substance of male-female differentiation, the most immediate and psychological reality of being a woman.

In our culture, women's bodies are often at the scrutiny of men and more so for women of colour. Someone else has control over their bodies, they are often not allowed to feel just because they want to, but because someone tells them how to feel and how they "should" feel. "Being female is not a 'natural fact' but a 'cultural performance [in which] "naturalness" [is] constituted through discursively constrained performative acts that produce the through and within the categories of sex" (McDowell, 1999, p. 54).

An East Asian woman living in North America has to first accept that being female is not natural and that she has to work on performing because of her gender, then she has to accept that being Asian as well as a woman entails more performance.

This highlights the aspects of power, as stated by Butler (1999, p. 4)

Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial- they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience.

East Asian women are made to feel that they are subordinate because of these rules. In addition, if Anglo-Saxon women were to be the superior race, they had to find a race to be subordinate in order to effectively show the hierarchies. The power relations created are so compelling that it can allow East Asian women who were born in North America to feel subordinate to strangers in their own land.

McDowell (1999, p.48) has found the following,

Bodily distinctions are crucially important in the production of inferiority as dominated groups are defined as nothing but their bodies, and seen as imprisoned in an undesirable body, whereas the dominant groups occupy an unmarked neutral,

universal and disembodied position which is white and masculine by default.

Women trapped in their bodies and marked by inappropriate gestures, are defined as 'Other.' Their confinement is exacerbated through the construction of an idealized female body (currently young, slim and white) that most women fail to measure up anyways.

McDowell, (1999, p. 39) also asserted that,

Sexuality is therefore, as the French Philosopher Michel Foucault (1979) argued, 'concerned with the body and its pleasures'. It is now widely recognized that sexuality is as much as a matter of custom and practice as it is of 'natural' instinct.

Yu (1999) talked about how "Oriental" women were turned into white men's sexual desires. They were sensual compared to the chaste, Christian like white women, yet desirable because of their supposed differences. (Jiwani in Hellwig & Thobani, 2006, p.164) stated that in colonial literature it was not just that Asian women were sensual, but that they were overly sensual in a freakish, barbaric way that deemed white women so pure and chaste in comparison. If man made is it not merely a fantasy? How can one create a fantasy when they themselves are the creator? Where is the mystery and fantasy behind something you have created, if you have stepped into the unknown, but know all about the unknown?

Asian Americans "have been valued for being exotic and different at the same time that they have been marginalized for the same reasons" (Yu, 1999, p. 455). This over-used, inaccurate stereotype has over-stayed its duration and should be long gone. The negative stereotypes were most likely created in order to preserve racial purity in North America. East Asian women will have to work doubly hard if they want to break out of the stereotypes that

are imposed on them. It is not sufficient for these women to just prove to their peers that they are worthy to be treated like an equal. There is a need for white men and women to treat them like equals as well because otherwise they will not be accepted by society as a whole.

To simply view East Asian women for their sexuality takes away the complexity of their identity and almost makes them non-human since their identity really consists of their experiences based on race, gender and sexuality. East Asian women themselves have at times acted on these stereotypes that society has imposed upon them. There are also East Asian women who resist the dominant stereotype. This will further show the differentiated dimensions of stereotype re/production. This serves to further complicate the power dynamic in the reproduction of stereotypes. The maintenance of stereotypes is not merely an enterprise imposed by North-American society but also carried out over time by those who are subjected to these stereotypes themselves. By using the North-American standard to be both viewed as authentic and have stereotypes imposed on them is both unreasonable as well as inaccurate. Human beings are not robots, and there is no one universal standard to judge if they are assimilating successfully or measure how “Chinese” or “Asian” someone really is.

One recent example of my being ethnicized and sexualized wrongly (which obviously did not matter to the person who made a comment) was when a coworker of mine had a hard time remembering my name. Instead of asking me what my name was again, she decided to give me a nickname, and started calling me to my other co-worker in front of me, “China Doll”. If her intention was to be witty, it failed miserably. When she finally told me about my nickname, I told her, “I am not made in China.” Her response was, “Let’s see the sticker on the bottom of your feet so I can verify”. At that point, I was speechless; having just been reduced to a globalized sexualized object (since

China is such a big manufacturer in the world) despite knowing it was a joke. Since she had considered it funny, she figured that I would too. I did not even attempt to tell her I was originally from Singapore, because I was afraid she would think they were just the same. While some may comment that this really was a compliment, I do not view it as one. I see this sort of comment as akin to me jokingly telling white people that they look like a Barbie doll and asking if I could see if there was a Mattel© tag under their feet.

Regarding the act of not acknowledging that it is a racial slur when calling me a China doll, Andersen & Collins (2004, p.82) remarked that “instead of seeing them as components of institutional racism, we experience these interactions as ordinary occurrences.” I am unsure of how or where to explain that by categorizing me sexually and ethnically, she views me as less than an individual. It is a disadvantage to me because I wonder often if I am in their eyes, a frozen, factory made, “ethnic” person. Non-East Asians seem to assume things of me that are inaccurate. Am I seen as an equal, a threat, a subordinate, or an ally? Instead, they justify it by implying the statement as a compliment, and I press no further with the issue because of the complexities and possibly shame of my own ethnicity and sexuality. It’s the unwanted attention (guilty by association) that people pay that makes it very uncomfortable.

On days like these, I feel defeated and demoralized. I feel like no matter how great of an effort I put into assimilating and not “rocking the boat”, the results are the same; guilty of being the “other”. It’s like if you assimilate and behave just like them, they pass remarks like, “Oh, you speak English really well, I thought you grew up here”. I used to think of it as a great compliment, and gave myself a pat on my back secretly inside, because I had finally become like one of them. Later, I re-considered that I really

wanted to explain my own racial identity and would like to keep it because it more accurately represented who I was.

Diverse Experiences and Resistance: Identity of some East Asian women

Constituted by receiving countries as perpetual outsiders, immigrants have to negotiate their own multiple subject positions on a daily basis as they straddle different cultures, and move in and out of more than one language, culture and location... Eurocentric thinking in North American societynot only marginalizes Asian women as invisible and otherized visible minority based on race, but also ranks them in position of second-class citizens based on gender hierarchies (Hellwig & Thobani, 2006, p.20).

How can you make yourself “normal” and therefore not the “other”? I think these thoughts are not so “abnormal” and many who are not “normal” have questioned how to behave, especially in a new country where they try to be accepted or assimilate quickly in the society since assimilation means success. I constantly struggle with my gender/ethnic performance in my day-to-day social and professional interactions. My struggle consists of whether or not I wanted to succumb to the stereotypes that have been created for my “Asian” ethnicity or if I should just deviate so far away from the stereotypes just to prove that they are inaccurate. None of the two options really justifies my identity and sometimes I wonder if I can be both ethnic and a woman instead of just being one and not the other simultaneously. These questions will continue to live in my subconscious and though sometimes I may think I have the answer, another facet of the argument enters my mind and that answer is no longer valid.

Representations and or stereotypes of East Asian women are really quite diversified and it is very likely that white women too can or do possess some of these traits as well. I argue that the stereotypes are not valid and the traits that East Asian women possess are not limited to their own culture. What follows are glimpses of the experiences of some Japanese and Korean women, and a longer discussion of Chinese women, based on their definitions of being East Asian. Ideally, the narratives attempt to reach out to a wider variety of “types” than those that we supposedly fit into. The women’s experiences that I have included in this section while random are, I believe, somewhat reflective of my own experiences. They are mainly snippets from second-generation East Asian women. Stereotypes are broken in the snippets displayed below, and racism and discrimination appears very real in these women’s lives.

About Japanese Women

A snippet of the experiences of the Japanese American woman was given previously in the section on stereotype #5: “China Dolls,” “Sex Dolls,” and “Geishas,” (Yamamoto, 1994). The woman in that narrative recounted her experiences as the “other” and her struggles with her identity.

Yamamoto(1994) has stated that the "Japanese self" has been characterized as a being that exist with the co-dependence of another human being. Japanese women are always viewed as someone’s child, someone’s mother or someone’s wife rather than just as a woman. They cease to exist unless accompanied by another human being. There is a definite disparity with how the Western woman is viewed. In her comparison of autobiographies collected from white American women and Japanese women, Yamamoto (1994) has found significant differences between the two. It is found that individualism

and independence are the predominant narratives in the American accounts, whereas Japanese women construct self as an integral part of social structure. In other words, these two contrasting narratives of self-construction reveal two fundamentally different definitions of self and its relation to the social world.

Identity then is performative but its ability to function as performance, is itself unstable and contingent upon the extent to which one can and cannot delimit how the racially marked and gendered body signifies to those other than oneself (Yamamoto, 1994, p. 412).

The recurring theme points to how the “other” while able to shape their own identities is unable to control how they are being perceived. Identity performance is behaviour displayed intentionally to please a specific group of audience as if seeking approval and permission to continue being the “other”. To be completely ignorant allows one to not question about one’s identity and live a life without having so many doubts. The questioning allows one to think about where and how one chooses to present oneself in different settings.

About Korean Women

Professor Chung, a Korean American woman, spoke of trying to find footing in Korea and USA, only to find “challenges” in the private and public sphere.

When meeting with friends or family members, there were no problems. But in public situations, my being a woman and living in the U.S made Koreans refuse to embrace me. I realized that I embraced them, but it did not work the other way around (Choy in Hellwig & Thobani, 2006, p. 88).

Professor Chung had originally lived in Korea and then moved to America and then back to Korea. Upon moving back, she realized that while she did not notice any changes in herself, other Koreans in Korea were not very accepting towards her.

The fluidity of gender is further magnified here when there are different standards for the private and public sector. It appears as if once deviated from the “norm”, one is exiled from the outskirts and not allowed in, literally. Professor Chung went from being “us” to in the Korean people’s eyes “them,” but in the American people’s eyes she was still a “them.” The experience of having lived in America and then going back to their home country was not something that was accepted by Koreans who were still living in Korea.

Dora Yum Kim, a Korean American woman shares her experiences about being questioned about her own ethnicity.

Ironically, Kim now often found her Korean identity questioned, not only by whites for whom ‘Asian’ meant either Chinese or Japanese, but also by recent Korean immigrants, whose perception of her as an American initially blocked their ability to communicate with her. She tells Chin of an encounter with a Korean woman one day at the hospital. “I said, 'I'm here to translate for you.' And she says, 'Are you Korean? You don't look Korean.' I responded, 'Well, what do I look like?' 'You look American. Can you speak Korean?' So I asked, 'What language do you think we're speaking?'" (Chin in Wexler, 2000).

For some East Asian women, their identity as well as race and ethnicity get scrutinized. Race is biological, but at the same time social. I am assuming from the above incident that the Korean woman knew from Dora’s physical appearance that she

was Korean or East Asian of some sort; but thought she was American since she perceived Dora through her mannerisms as well as how she dressed, in other words by ethnic/cultural markers. Mannerisms and clothing of an individual can explain quite a bit of where you think someone may come from. Chin (in Wexler,2000) writes,

For American-born Koreans, not only is Koreanness interpreted and modified their parents' turn-of-the-century constructions of Korea, but much that constitutes Koreanness has been invented in response to the American context.' For Dora Kim, growing up in one of the few Korean families in Chinatown in the 1930s and 1940s, Korea was mainly a landscape of the imagination. As she tells Chin frankly, 'being of Korean heritage was something we were told about more than experienced'.

There are so many expectations of how to be Korean that it is forgotten that all these expectations are socially created and monitored. The importance of trying to keep "Korean" or true to your own race, I believe is somehow related to being oppressed in your new country. You are being viewed as an outsider because you are different, yet in the beginning it is the only way you know how to view yourself. You try hard to hold on to the images and the way things are done back home, because you want your children to know their roots, and how you as a Korean person in Korea lived. It is almost like a romanticized relationship with your home country.

About Chinese Women

Sharon Lee, a Chinese Canadian woman, in Women's Book Committee (1992, p. 93) talks about her childhood in Port Alberni. "I had my own friends...We were the clique of poor Ethnics – Italians, Japanese, East Indians. There were enough of us from the wrong

side of the tracks that I didn't suffer too much..." The "others" congregated because they shared similar experience of oppression and rejection and probably because they were not made welcome with the other Anglo-Saxon children. The "others" formed their own social network and learned at a young age who they could associate with. In more ways than one, they were learning about the social hierarchies and the harsh reality of real life in a racially stratified society. They learned to adapt and strategize in order not to get picked on by staying, for lack of a better word, their own "kind."

When Lee was growing up, she was distinctly aware of the "them" and the "us". She relates her experience of being called a "Chink" and said: "there was such a polarized stance, no middle ground for us" (Women's Book Committee, 1992, p.93). It was not something that she could choose not to be, because her parents were Chinese and she was a prisoner to genetics and biology. Her physical appearance stood out from the "norm." Yet the awareness of being the "other" causes guilt and make one acutely aware that she is different – different in a way that was not accepted and also in a way that leaves her powerless because of the inability to change her physical appearance.

On how she dealt with the racism:

Pretending was a form of self defence. But as soon as you got outside, you had to quieten down – to become invisible and non-threatening to whites. .. friendly on a superficial level, but not too friendly, in order not to get hurt (Women's Book Committee, 1992, p.93).

While I do understand that pretending deflects any form of unnecessary attention, I can only imagine the frustration that Lee felt when smiling at white people. She learns to hide her true self, and in a way thought that her true self was not acceptable in society.

It boils down to a game of survival. It is also pretending that there is no problem and that everything is fine. It also creates the public and private self. The public self is the one that is harmless and accepted. As long as you leave your “ethnicness” at home, we will not fear you. If she is the friendly, harmless Chinese woman, we will not feel intimidated by her.

Shirley Chan said that:

Racism here is not overt like it is in South Africa. It’s insidious in our culture. You’re supposed to be equal, but you really don’t have equal opportunities if you’re not white. ...My husband is Caucasian...I’m the major breadwinner. He looks after the baby... Sometimes, it’s hard to shake the socialization...I guess I’m more outspoken and aggressive than most Chinese women (Women’s Book Committee, 1992, p.87-88).

In the above snippet, Lee breaks the stereotype by letting us know that she is aware that she is not like “most Chinese women”. I am arguing this same point, namely there is not just one type of Asian woman. Lee is aware of the stereotype imposed on her and how her White husband (of the superior race and gender) being the primary caregiver of the baby at home is deviating from the norm.

For Suzzane, being a Chinese American was something that she was born with, something she was stuck with. She tried all means to be non-Chinese. In that when it comes to the “[M]odel minority myth that Asians are ‘passive robots who like tedious work and are not much fun,’” Suzanne says she had early in life determined to be the opposite of everything that was “stereotypically thought to be Chinese” (Carole, 1995).

The dominant culture has so much power that it transforms positive traits into negative and is so convincing that it allows people, even people belonging to the own oppressed race to believe it. The stereotype of the model minority really came around because of the treatment that the host society has given to them. Career opportunities were few and far between in the past and the Chinese people who came to North America did not want to come to fail. Instead the Chinese work hard and try to adjust in their new society while sending money back home for their family still in China and other parts of Asia. Asians are made to feel bad or misunderstood for working hard.

It appears that even though Asians were law-abiding contributing citizens to the North American economy, they somehow were never going to be accepted and they were never going to be good enough. Sometimes, It feels like a lose-lose situation because the Chinese do not decide the rules of the game, the society does.

As for me, my racial identity is constantly evolving. I am learning that I have little control over what is said and perceived about me and should make a more conscious effort to just be myself. "...racial identity is not just an individualized process but involves the formation of social groups organized around material interests with their roots in social structure" (Lewis, 2004, p. 625). Racial identity gets re/produced by the trends and current affairs which are occurring in day-to-day life. Racial identity is being constructed on a daily basis both on the macro and micro level to the extent that I feel like a chameleon; highly adaptable. I change colours according to my environment in order to keep my predators away.

An example of an everyday experience would be one that includes, "So, where are you from?" I cannot help but think, "I feel like you want me to justify my existence in

Canada, where it is perfectly normal for you to call it home, but not me, AGAIN!!!” I think the reason behind my frustration is because I question the motive of their question, and even if they do find out where I am from, does it change anything? However, I am still unable to accurately determine my exact source of frustration with this question. I understand the curiosity of people, and very often I reciprocate the question to the curious individual out of courtesy.

Other times, I will just be so frustrated that I will just agree with the answers they have so eagerly provided for me. For me, it is quite important to try my best to assimilate and not try too hard to “rock the boat” and stand out. Yet, despite my attempts, I seem to always be visible. It is as if the more I want to be just like everyone else, the more often I am being reminded that I am not like everyone else. If people guess that I am Chinese, they ususally say something like, “Wow, but you are really tall as a Chinese girl. Are you sure you are not mixed?” At times, it is comical while other times infuriating because if I did not know I was mixed, what makes a stranger so sure that I am of mixed identity?

“Having an accent sounds more cute, and looking ethnic is unique. Ethnicity is politically speaking, a privilege, and it is political capital” (Choy in Hellwig and Thobani, 2006, p. 84). The move from “Yellow Peril” to “Model Minority” is finally paying off. It took two centuries for the stereotypes to be broken from undesirable to cute. We didn’t have to go through two centuries to earn a “cute” reputation. Listen, we are here to stay, and honestly, and we are not going to settle for some cover up, inaccurate, flavor of the month only to be decided that we are not going to be worthy, AGAIN!!!

Having said that, I think of how political capital provides leverage that is useful and manipulative, to help one climb up some social/career ladder. I feel like I am once again

in high school again, when if the popular kid decides to enjoy your company, you suddenly become cool by association. It isn't that anything about you has changed but since a person in power has "approved" you, you transform into someone desirable.

My point is that I want to be judged and treated more on how you think I am as a human being for my own experiences rather than just be clustered into just another East Asian woman? I will determine on my own terms what kind of "other" I am. Then again, if someone only wants to get to know you because they think you as an East Asian woman is all exotic and such; I ask myself if I really care to get to know them? If I act all "East Asian" like they would expect, I would be playing right along with the stereotypes and if I don't, then I just wasn't "authentic" enough to begin with.

Authenticity

The concept of authenticity comes in when one decides who is East Asian, or as one puts it, if they are "real Asians". A sense of authenticity can be broken down in two ways; interpersonal and intrapersonal.

Taylor (1991) states that initially '... one's authenticity stems from the inside, from inner reflections upon one's personal identity. Second, it stems from one's relations with others. The second way that authenticity is shaped is fundamentally dialogical in nature, and the public's recognition of one's worth is a key component' (Moses, 2002, p.26).

One's authenticity is developed from an individual's perception of what works as well as how they choose to be perceived with direct relation their experiences. To reflect on one's personal identity requires the individual to have encountered some earth-shattering or disturbing incident that makes them question their identity. An example of this is when my

English teacher discriminated against my accent. He made me reevaluate my identity and considered changing it to something less subtle. This thinking is of course absurd, but this is how much power the dominant culture has.

Luckily, there is no “real” checklist to check the authenticity although some people consider place of birth, language, upbringing, food and other knowledge to determine authenticity. Many face power struggles and relations with the dominant group as they try to settle in their new home because they are only perceived as the “other”. One foot will be in their “ethnic” side while the other tries desperately to step into the “norm” side. It is a juggling act with one’s identity, self-esteem etc. In addition to being the “other”, they will often find it hard to become Americans/Canadians since their physical appearance stands out from being “American/Canadian”. Even if they assimilate and consider themselves “naturalized”, they constantly face resistance from the dominant society. Their identity is shaped not by themselves but rather constructed socially by the dominant society.

Conclusions and Reflections

I started off my paper initially with the intention of “saving all East Asian women from all stereotypes.” I started to go from being idealistic to being realistic. Halfway through it, I realized that while I am able to present facts, histories, and multifaceted experiences, it is hardly up to me to come up with the solution. The focus of my paper has really been on the sexuality and identity of East Asian women living in North America.

North America has a long history of discriminatory immigration policy of presuming inferior attributes to East Asians. Despite the changes in the last few decades and East Asians moving from the yellow peril to the model minority, East Asians still have little say in how they should be perceived. It is easy, and perhaps very convenient

to regard East Asians as a homogenous grouping order to categorize and view them as a non-threat.

The truth is, since my arrival into Canada, I have been treated like an outsider, understandably so because of my obvious physical differences. Post-secondary education and life experiences taught me to not just simply regard a “compliment” as a simple compliment anymore. I question anything and everything and scrutinize the comment, politically and socially. Perhaps turning into a “Chinese/East Asian” in Canada has caused me to question more about my identity and definitely my space. I want to reemphasize that while other East Asian women might have shared similar feelings from reading my experiences, it is not my intention to represent all East Asian women.

If it were up to me, my paper would be written in English, Mandarin and Cantonese to be able to fully capture my experiences and voice. My being ethnically Chinese does not have anything to do with not being as good a scholarly writer as I would like. Rather, I lack interest in writing scholarly papers. Throughout this whole writing process, I have procrastinated, dreaded, wondering why in the world did I set myself up in this situation. On good days, I try to convince myself that writing this paper is for the good of me and for other East Asian women who might be feeling similar thoughts. I am happy to know as I am typing this that I am nearing the end.

In choosing Vappu as my MRP advisor, while being conscious that she belongs to the dominant culture, she has always encouraged me to “keep it real.” While it does seem contradictory, she has this way of understanding my standpoint and has always supported and made my points stronger. I was initially skeptical because it would almost seem like we are rooting for different teams, but having worked with her, I would not

have changed it one bit. I have however, tried really hard at times to not disappoint her because in my eyes, she is authority, even though I am clear that I own the paper. I guess there is some power structure in our relationship, but a good one at that.

In the hybrid culture predicament, as McLennan (1995, p.90) puts it, we have to ‘Learn how to live awkwardly’ (but also wisely and critically) in a world which we no longer have the secure capacity to draw the line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – in which differences and sameness are inextricably intertwined in complicated entanglement (in Ang, 2001, p.201).

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