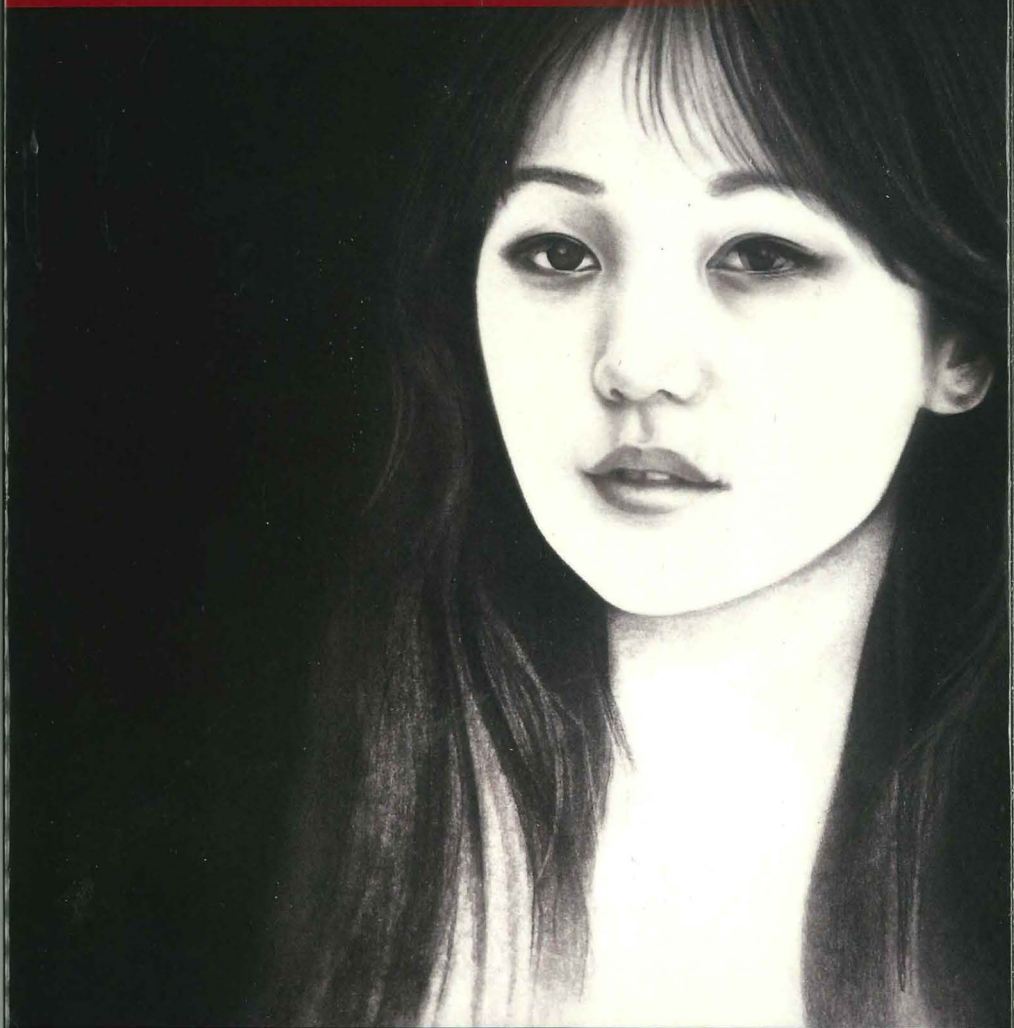
PASSING FOR PERFECT

COLLEGE IMPOSTORS AND OTHER MODEL MINORITIES



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as life's true meaning, driven to crisis by its ongoing insufficiency, and persuaded to persevere because love is the thing that will prevail. Across her seven chapters, Berlant shows sentimentality taking narrative hold of one realm of disappointment or failure after another—whether political, racial, or personal—and rerouting its anger or agency into generic explanations, generic (holding) patterns of response. Much the same can be said for the genre of model-minority identity. Whatever the arena of conflict—poverty or workplace discrimination, social isolation or emotional despair—to persevere as model minority is the "logic of rescue."[81] Utterly conventional, strictly normative, its vision of the "good life"[82] is reachable only via the Four Paths of Professional Virtue.

Among those tuned to this frame of reference, stories of fellow travelers are met like versions of the self at a casting call: all auditioning for the same part. In blogs, in chatrooms, in opinion or human-interest pieces long and short, were Asian American voices who answered to Sara's, Azia's, and Jennifer's stories as if someone were taking roll. But for Abe or Birva, Elizabeth or Akash, no. Scammers, we abhor or admire, as those who broke the rules or bested the game. Shammers, we see as players in a comedy, maybe laugh at their expense. But, in fellow travelers, we who have passed the same way read our own racial tragedies, narrowly averted or yet to come.[83]

chapter two

Exemplary

On May 24, 2007, just two weeks from the start of spring quarter final exams, the *Stanford Daily* reported that someone who had "seemed like a pretty typical Stanford student" had been posing as a freshman since New Student Orientation.[1] Explaining that she "was temporarily out of housing due to a technical mixup," Azia Kim initially managed to persuade a pair of roommates to allow her to stay with them, crashing for two full quarters in Kimball Hall. In April, she finagled her way into a vacancy on the ground floor of the Asian American theme dorm (Okada), which room she entered each day by climbing through a window she purposely left ajar. Azia crafted and tended her deception with the fastidiousness of an undercover agent: She learned the exam schedules for courses she claimed to be taking, "going as far as to buy textbooks [and] study with friends for tests she would never take," and posted of stress or excitement to her Xanga blog with the rhythm of classes. The audience for this ruse was, therefore, not only—and arguably not primarily—the Stanford freshmen; it included her sister, her parents, their extended

family, and also friends and church members back in Fullerton, California, where she had graduated from what the *Daily* referred to as "one of California's most competitive high schools." No reporter was able to obtain interviews with Azia or her immediate family, so none could shed light on some fairly basic facts about the ruse: What, for one, did she tell her parents about tuition payments? But still the story caught quickly—careening from the campus paper to national news in under a day—with a narrative frame that implicated race, named culture.

This chapter is about Azia, but it is also about a story of shared proportions: in which failure is too ruinous to admit and acceptance too narrowly defined. Picking up where chapter one left off, I next argue that Azia is exemplary of our particular sort of college impostor: the sort passing for her own racial type. In other words, this profile dwells not on what made Azia an outlier at Stanford but on what allowed her stunt to go unchallenged for so long. "Exemplary" begins with media accounts and responses, combined with a short story that fictionalizes her exploits. Public record captures some of the facts of the case, along with something of the genre and its readers: an "intimate public" that shares the narrative logic of her story, even if they themselves manage a more conventional plot. Starting as herself a reader of this genre, author Vanessa Hua backtracks the saga to its logical beginnings, such that her story "Accepted" furnishes us with one fully rendered imagining of how a person might come to be in Azia's predicament. Interviews have a part to play in this chapter as well, and we will get to them. Conversations I've had with people who knew Azia during high school and at Stanford afford certain glimpses of her beyond what appeared online: enough to confirm the collective wisdom in some ways and to test it in others. Nonetheless, the crux of the argument here has less to do with who that individual was (a biography this is not) than with what her story tells us.* After all, as a literary critic it

* Endnotes in this and remaining chapters periodically include supplemental instances from a collection of first-person essays on the condition of being Harvard undergrads. While bracketed from the main argument when redundant, that very redundancy bears some note, as attesting to the continuity between the Icon and the Impostor: *both* of them playing the part of "those who have achieved what every Tiger Mom (and Dad) wants." (Yano and Akatsuka, *Straight A's*, 9.)

has been my MO to look to novels or films for imprints left by the cultural moments that produced them. Even (or especially) when fictional, narratives are like amber for belief systems, emotional investments, social norms. In cultural studies, the work of identifying clichés of representation generally comes just before denouncing those representations as false: hostile, biased, misleading. In ethnic studies, it is a disapproving truism that readers always have their race lenses on. But this chapter holds that to see racial meanings, or to be attuned to clichés, is not always to see or hear what isn't there. Sometimes it is to receive the intended message, to recognize what has painstakingly been made visible.

about the reader

Azia's story was found newsworthy by publications as varied as *Fox News*, *Inside Higher Education*, and LaFlecha.net (a Spanish-language blog covering science and technology). Major outfits sought interviews with the resident assistant in charge of the Okada dorm during Azia's stay, Takeo Rivera, who obliged the *San Francisco Chronicle* but, as the press grew more wolfish, declined to appear on CNN.[2] Outlets attempting to do reporting sought commentary from Azia's peers in high school or college or from members of the Kims' church, and those interviewees who spoke on record gave positive, puzzled endorsements of her. Her youth pastor, Bert Yun, declared her "a motivated and diligent teenager," of whom "any deception would be 'out of character.' 'Why would she do that?' he asked. 'She's a very good person.'"[3] High school classmate Huy Nguyen, reported to have "just completed his freshman year at Harvard," described her as "brilliant," "hard working and a straight shooter. . . . 'She's one of the nicest people,' he said. 'She works so hard, and she wasn't terribly competitive. I don't understand how

this could have happened."[4] The overall portrait of Azia that thus emerged in the press, while fragmentary, is not idiosyncratic; it sounds commonplace and, in its vagueness, widely applicable. In other words, Azia seems to have been a studious, churchgoing Korean American who got into Stanford: Except that that statement contains three truths and a lie, she would be, as the internet remarks, garden-variety.[5] It is difficult to imagine a more textbook example of "the most unexpected or rare events—within those that are culturally familiar and/or consonant."[6] No wonder articles about Azia often opened, as if despite themselves, with this rhetorical cliché:

> Azia Kim was like any other Stanford freshman. She graduated from one of California's most competitive high schools last June, moved into the dorms during New Student Orientation, talked about upcoming tests and spent her free time with friends.
>
> [paragraph break]
>
> The only problem is that Azia Kim was never a Stanford student.[7]

One after another, reporters writing up this story staged it so as to recapitulate their own (presumable) surprise and perform the story's newsworthiness: Azia is the routine typification that defies expectations—personified.[8]

Admittedly, even as traditional journalistic outlets may thoroughly racialize a story, they are as a rule reticent about naming race—so much so that, while covering many of the impostors of the previous chapter, reporters often left race or ethnicity for readers to deduce from circumstantial details like surnames or photographs. And rather than cite racial narratives openly, such articles often allowed quotes selected from interviewees to do their racialization in code.[9]

> Several students [at Stanford] suggested it was because of intense pressure to gain admittance to one of the country's most elite universities. . . . [A freshman who lived in the same dorm is quoted as saying,] "I think she had told her parents, and she perpetuated the lie so far that she actually had to come to the campus to stay here."[10]

Readers tended not to be so coy, readily connecting the dots of familiar cultural scripts. Case in point, a question that appeared in a "live online discussion" about overachievement-style parenting:

> Often Asian Americans are labeled as an academically elite, hyper-driven group in America. Asian parents are accused of too aggressively promoting the academic excellence of their children at the expense of more "all rounded" activities like sports or a social life, etc. Do you think this rhetoric also embeds culturally-specific notions into classroom definitions of success?[11]

This discussion, hosted by the *Washington Post* in 2006, consisted of a Q&A with the author of *Harvard Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College That Is Best for You*.[12] Submitted by a reader of that major metropolitan newspaper, the question above speaks to what such a highly-educated and relatively affluent readership "knows": that is, it taps the social and linguistic lexicon that a paper like this shares and strategically builds on with its readers. Indeed, textbooks in journalism are matter of fact about each publication—whether tabloid, broadsheet, or blog—depending for its survival on cultivating such "lexical cohesion," entailing the "ability . . . to fit into a consistent worldview and longer narratives of social belonging and identification."[13] Which is to say that while editors and writers at papers including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Seattle Times*, and *San Francisco Chronicle* opted out of using identifiers like "Asian" or "Korean" aloud, their way of humming keywords does not make the narrative less racialized. Whatever the reason for their caginess, it does seem clear

that news reports did not *need* to cite the cultural scripts explicitly in order for their readers to draw the connections.

Because connect, readers did. Taking to the blogosphere or to discussion forums, they declared this an Asian American cultural narrative. That is, they gave it what media studies would call a model-minority frame, where framing is "the process of 'selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] them more salient in a communicating text . . . to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation' for the described phenomenon."[14] This reading trended on discussion boards:

> Both of the guys I knew who considered Stanford THE ONLY SCHOOL were Asian as well. I would guess, based on that and the fact that they have an Asian-American dorm, that it might be kind of a big thing for Asian descent kids.[15]

It bubbled up on personal parenting blogs:

> I couldn't help but think of possible cultural factors when I read this story. Asians have the "model minority" burden, they are expected to be ideal students and high achievers.[16]

And from all over—interview sources, comment sections, scattered discussion and response pieces—but with conspicuous consistency across established Asian American blog publications, came a diagnosis of Tiger parenting:

- Although the article does not specifically note it, I am going to guess that the student, Azia Kim, was rejected by Stanford but was too ashamed to tell her parents, who undoubtedly had huge plans for her going to such an elite school like Stanford. . . . [S]he obviously felt desperate under the weight of all the pressure and expectations foisted upon her by her parents and by American society's image of Asian Americans as the super-smart, high-achieving "model minority."
- Kim's desperation to attend an elite college crushes me. She probably needs . . . "help," but mostly in order to live down the shame of 1) not getting into a great college, 2) her own unreasonably high self-expectations and I would venture to guess, her parents.'
- While it's pure speculation, I can't help but wonder if parental pressures are involved here. Vong's article cites a number of anecdotes about the heavy academic demands of Asian immigrant parents. "For the bulk of Asian parents it is all about succeeding, and there is no middle ground." "Oftentimes Asian immigrant parents don't know how to give positive reinforcement or show their kids that it is OK to make mistakes."[17]

To be sure, the body of online commentary about Azia is motley and cacophonous, as online commentary everywhere is. But the chorus represented here is also clearly discernible from within that noise, as an aggregation of readers who see between the reported lines of her story a distinctly Asian American experience—oftentimes, their own.

Such a baldly racial framing might seem hasty or irresponsible were it not for the context provided by the previous chapter's discovery: that reporters and readers of college impostor cases overall have proven surprisingly restrained in its use. The mere conjunction of Asian person + Ivy League longings has proved insufficient to trigger cultural scripts: Out of nine Asian impostors, coverage of four invoked no race or family speculation whatsoever. This is especially remarkable considering that said "coverage" includes social media such as blogs and Reddit threads, an online world hardly known for its measured or discerning discussions. But the beauty of these types of informal and viral media is that they

aggregate comments direct from an "intimate public"—a concept that I think serves well here, even though using it means taking some liberty with Lauren Berlant's original definition.

A cultural theorist out of literary criticism, Berlant invented the term by way of explaining how a given strain of mass-market narrative (e.g., chick lit, self-help books, fashion magazines) forges its audience or woos its niche into being. The focus of her book *The Female Complaint* is squarely on commercial "women's culture" and its way of taking women's felt sense of a "share[d] worldview and emotional knowledge"—a sense "derived from a broadly common historical experience" of, well, gender oppression—and turning that into a marketing opportunity. Readers who see their lives reflected in the stories and advice dispensed by "women's culture" are strangers yet imagine themselves bonded over intensely personal matters: sex and disappointment, domestic strife and bodily insecurities. . . . That paradox makes them an "intimate public," an identity much like "fans of *XYZ*" in that, however ardently held, it is unfortunately a marketing construct: They are consumers hailed by their common sorrows, drawn to pay over and again for catharsis or sedation. These hits of *feeling heard* or *feeling part of something bigger* are absorbed into readers' ongoing "'bargaining' with power and desire," however unsatisfying the results. Hers being an argument about the culture industry, Berlant is necessarily cynical about consumers' feelings of "recognition and reflection" in objects designed to part them from their money.[18] Under lights this harsh, self-identification can't much exceed interpellation:

> An intimate public operates *when a market opens up* to a bloc of consumers, *claiming* to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires. . . . [P]articipants in the intimate public *feel as though* it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that *seems to* emanate from their history and their ongoing attachment and actions.[19]

Putting insistent distance between the feeling and its credibility, Berlant seems to shut down not only the marketing apparatus that uses human desire for connection in bad faith but the very connection itself. Mightn't that be unnecessarily dismissive? Does the tendency for a feeling to be exploited mean it surely expressed nothing, corresponded to no social truth? Can a group that, in fact, has core interests, histories, attachments, and actions in common not coalesce like an "intimate public" if hailed by something else—something that does not come by way of product development but nonetheless makes readers recognize themselves as not alone? That media narratives about Azia, informally circulated, have been enough to make perfect strangers blurt, "I've seen that" and "Palo Alto, we have a problem" suggests, if anything, that the commonalities are (like those around gender oppression) truly here to be triggered.[20] If what's key is that such "a world of strangers . . . be emotionally literate in each other's experience of power, intimacy, desire, and discontent,"[21] then I'd say an intimate public is functionally what we have here.

That this kind of social organism can emerge among Asian Americans not by design but by circumstance is thanks to an extreme standardization in experience. And thanks to Jennifer Lee and Min Zhou's *AAAP*, evidence of that standardization is finally more than anecdotal. As they updated and recalibrated model-minority paradigms[22] for the twenty-first century, sociologists Lee and Zhou found young second-generation Asian Americans to be measured by a tightly defined "success frame": "earning straight A's, graduating as the high school valedictorian, earning a degree from an elite university, attaining an advanced degree, and working in one of four high-status professional fields: medicine, law, engineering, or science." Not only is this frame essentially the "model-minority stereotype" circa now, it is also what the children of Asian immigrants *themselves* understand (reductively, problematically) as the definition of Asian cultural identity. Granted, this checklist does not enjoy the same reverence

in all immigrant families and *statistically* has held more sway in the economic-migrant communities of South and East Asia than in the refugee communities of the U.S.-Viet Nam War.* Still, its dominion in Asian America is far-reaching: its believers hailing from an implausible multiplicity of life chances and immigration histories, and where it appears it is unmistakable. Evidence of the success frame is abundant across studies of other Asian American ethnicities, communities, and locales—and its sheer orthodoxy is, in fact, one of the findings Lee and Zhou themselves marvel at: "Most remarkable is that regardless of class background, the Chinese and Vietnamese recounted the same" lockstep elements, and "regardless of whether our . . . interviewees agreed with the constricting success frame, each was keenly aware of it."[23]

Given the saturation of this model-minority "brand," it really isn't much wonder that subjects who have been socialized to measure up to it are quick to spot others doing the same. They are discerning readers of the success frame both because it is exceedingly conventional/legible and because they are emotionally literate members of a common intimate public. Faced with assorted Asian college impostors, readers en masse reacted differently to shammers than to passers, because only the latter are engaged in recognizable racial performance. A quick review from chapter one, in which we pegged those passing for model minority (strictly speaking) by the following indices:

* It's been observed, for example, that even in the high school years, "when Hmong parents come to [parent-teacher] conferences, they are primarily concerned with their children's behavior, not their academic performance"; the community may actively discourage higher education for its girls in favor of family responsibilities (Bic Ngo and Stacey J. Lee, "Complicating the Image of Model Minority Success: A Review of Southeast Asian American Education," *Review of Educational Research* 77, no. 4 [December 2007]: 429). In such a case, were a young woman, say, to make her way into college against her elders' disapproval, or take the MCAT despite the memory of a guidance counselor's dismissiveness—hers would be a different story. Not a wholly unrelated one—no Asian American is immune to model-minority racialization, even if only to be found deficient by its expectations—but not the same as a college impostor's.

- The impostor's deception comes with no upside of material gain or advantage—only opportunity costs, for all the risk of eventual disgrace.
- Her primary audience is at home: family, friends, and community members for whom the illusion of seamless academic mobility is so extravagantly maintained.

Still, what does such passing look like as a daily practice, for eight long months? How did Azia convey herself as the kind of person who, *of course*, belongs at Stanford, despite all the questions her lack of papers would seem to have raised? What details of her story clued readers in, as expressive of model-minority identity? But, for starters, just what is racial performance anyway?

about the performance

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," Simone de Beauvoir famously said. On that distinction has been built radical insights into the nature of social identities—even those that look and feel like biological givens—as actually a matter of practice and presentation. Best known of these theories is Judith Butler's performativity, in which gender might be usefully likened to a show: femininity or masculinity being not set facts but *effects* available only if staged.

> Gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy. Gender is what is put on, invariably, under constraint, daily and incessantly, with anxiety and pleasure, but . . . this continuous act is [often] mistaken for a natural or linguistic given.[24]

Performativity bids us see the perpetual work that goes into being recognizably the things that one supposedly was born. Even for those who are cisgendered, to become a heteronormative woman

(or man) in a given culture is to learn the dos and don'ts of what one says, how one sits, what one wears; to become practiced in the proper replies and the attractive sets of hip or chin; and to habituate oneself to the spaces and tasks befitting a good mother (or father), a potential wife (or husband). It is perforce to *perform* these scripts, movements, and functions from one moment to the next—much like a live show needs the lyrics sung and the choreography danced in order to go on. It is also to risk performing badly with each scene, risk failing at one's presumed identity and reaping the consequences. Finally, it is to rehearse these conventional specifications in hopes of mastery but also legibility: By definition social, a successful identity needs to be an intelligible one. Call them conventions, tropes, or acts of "stylized repetition"[25] . . . they are the code in which social identities are both transmitted and received.

Race here works likewise. One is not born, but rather becomes, a model minority: this being the social identity that American society demands of the biologically Asian subject. For all that heterosexuality is differently done from place to place, the local archetypes feel timeless, inexorable to most practitioners. (See the over fifteen million copies of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* that have sold to date.[26]) Likewise, the model minority is "identity as" what Butler would call "a compelling illusion"[27]—a folding of first the Japanese then the Chinese then East Asians then South Asians then some Southeast Asians and sometimes all Asians in America into a single character type—hardly plausible yet widely embraced as true of the self or reflective of the community. Of course, quantitative social science has shown time and again that said shiny stereotype does not describe the "average" Asian American, much less all of them:

> Main arguments include: 1) The methods of statistics analysis that supports [*sic*] the stereotype are often flawed; 2) The myth fails to recognize the increased evidence of Asian underachievement, dropout, and socio-economic gaps; and 3) it fails to address the vast inter- and intra-group differences.[28]

Debunking arguments generally stop there, on the premise that facts will shame the devil: locate its disparities, its faulty algorithms, and the stereotype will lose its power to deceive. Except that's not how model-minority racialization works. As literary critic Min Song recognizes, its power is less stereotype, more *expectation*: "Expectations are certainly ascribed, but they also require active identification to be made fully into a set of ideas with material meaning in one's life."[29] Expectations of the self (i.e., identities) are not so susceptible to debunking because discrepancies are part of their process.

In one of the few empirical studies so far to ask whether Asian Americans *see themselves* by the lights of the model minority, the finding was "[in] fact" yes. In a survey of 704 university students, researchers found that the 119 Asian Americans generally "perceived themselves as more prepared, motivated, and more likely to have higher career success than whites" (an assessment that their peers across all racial groups endorsed)—even though judging by their actual GPAs and SAT scores, these Asian students' academic performance was no better.[30] There is, in other words, rather a lot of daylight between these students' achievements and the social ideal they nonetheless hold up as their identity: rehearsing it to themselves, presenting it to (each) other(s). And that is perfectly commonplace; it is how normative identities are done. Precursors to Butler, sociologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman characterized "gender [as] a socially scripted dramatization of the culture's idealization of feminine and masculine natures, played for an audience that is well schooled in the presentational idiom."[31] We are none of us the living paragons of our genders, but, even the heteronormative and cisgender of us strive perpetually to mime the part, to *pass ourselves off* as irreproachable, because to do otherwise is to endure mockery or discipline. "Performing one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious

and indirect."[32] Performing one's racial script wrong can be similarly punishing, as Azia's readers intuited: "I am going to guess that [she] was rejected by Stanford but was too ashamed to" admit it, given "the pressure and expectations foisted upon her by her parents and by American society's image of Asian Americans as the super-smart, high-achieving 'model minority.'"[33] This frame highlights the model-minority performance's compulsory nature, as something difficult to stop doing: Much as heteronormativity laminates gender onto sex, dominant American and ethnic cultures consort in naturalizing "Asian" and "model minority" as one. How can you be the former and not the latter? What the hell are you, then?

Understanding this, we may realize that Azia's long deception does not necessarily start with a lie. In the beginning was the impossible truth. And in the short story inspired largely by her, that is just how Vanessa Hua conceives the fateful moment. Narrating in retrospect, Hua's Azia character (renamed Elaine) confides that, while reeling from her rejection letter,

> I hadn't meant to lie, not at first, but when Jack Min donned his Stanford sweatshirt after receiving his acceptance (a senior tradition)—I yanked my Cardinal red hoodie out of my locker. When my AP English teacher . . . stopped to congratulate me, I couldn't bring myself to say, not yet. . . . I didn't want to disappoint her.
>
> Another week passed, and I posed with Jack for the school paper. . . . I showed my parents the article as proof of my acceptance.[34]

Misstep 1: subject performs a conventional action; Misstep 2: subject omits a controverting fact. Active lies come later, but by then she has already been damned by her silent desire not to disappoint.[35] This is the split in the road that will lead Elaine to her compromising position on the windowsill of a dorm room—taken not by veering off track but, ironically, by dressing the part,

saying her lines, and staying true to what she is expected to do: Be the model minority. Make the unattainable look accessible. Pose for public proof of the racial ideal. Make the shared illusion of identity that much more impenetrable.

Though originally trained as a journalist, Hua chose in writing "Accepted" to work as a novelist: She had absorbed some of the news coverage of Azia but declined to do further digging or attempt interviews. In Elaine, she created a composite character, drawing lightly from news accounts of two other Asian American college impostors she remembered having come across—both of them passers (and both reserved for chapter four). Her objective lay decisively not in reportage ("This is not their story," she says, "this is mine, this is my character") but in what she calls "imaginative empathy":[36] finding a way into the backstories of figures dwarfed by their circumstances, such that the foreign or risible can become familiar or relatable. This locates her reading/writing practice on the same epistemological plane as that of the bloggers and commenters mentioned earlier: all strangers alike in the same intimate public. Of privileged information regarding Azia's personal history, they have none; regarding the racial performance they perceive, however, they have insider knowledge and outstanding consensus. In Azia's case, Asian Americans can name the success frame from the first notes of the tune—if and when they are schooled in that "genre" not only as narrative convention but as operating system.

about the plot

This expanded concept of genre comes to us also from Berlant's *The Female Complaint*—together with her later book *Cruel Optimism*, a reckoning with the dark magic of story in social compliance. We know genre in film or literature as horror or fantasy, as mystery or romance . . . each category of narrative ordered by its own unmistakable rules, populated by its familiar cast of characters, obliged to its own concept of what makes an ending good.

Taking it from here, Berlant suggests that the world-building power of narrative logic does as much to shape lives as it does to shape art. After all, science of many stripes says we are a species of inveterate storytellers: Some say it is how our brains are wired (to make sense of experiences is to put them to story); others say it is how our societies are bred (a culture's legends or parables being like its DNA, the code by which it replicates). Often, it is said that storytelling is the thing we do that is qualitatively human.[37] Clearly, if stories do so much more than entertain around the fire, then so do genres, those being the grooves that train not only our cultural plots but our temporal experiences.

As borrowed from Berlant, genre writ large is "an emotionally invested, patterned set of expectations about how to act and how to interpret, which organises a relationship between the acting and interpreting subject, their feelings and impressions, their struggles and their historical present."[38] While all the pieces of that definition are necessary, it may be most useful to start with "organises a relationship." The academic world has no shortage of terms for addressing the notion that socialized subjects filter or interpret information and experiences through culturally patterned, prefab templates of meaning. In fact, it's worth clarifying how the sociological definition of "frame," lightly referenced by Lee and Zhou in "success frame," includes most of the above components, but how genre captures the college impostor's plight more fully. As used in sociology, frames refer to "'schemata of interpretation' that enable individuals 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' occurrences within their life space and the world at large." By providing rules for what is relevant then principles for how elements are strung together, frames tell us what counts as data then what compels as meaning. Classic examples of this include whether the unpurchased items in a purse are deemed a matter of shoplifting or absentmindedness, whether a gynecologist's conduct is experienced as clinical or creepy—depending on "frames" of prosecution/defense, expertise/power.[39] This sense of "frame" is quite compatible with the media studies definition; in either case, genre

is more robust. Whereas frame generates a given reading of a situation, genre dictates *what kind of story this is*, and, therefore, how that reading maps onto points before and after: Tragedy? Revenge fantasy? Where has the subject been headed and what is possible for her from here? That is, genre organizes an ongoing relationship between the subject, her historical/material circumstances, and her patterns of interpretation/response. "Genres also organise conventions about what might be hoped for, explicitly or secretly, and the bargains that can be made with life."[40] To live in a world that a genre has built is to ration one's desires by its math and choose one's path by its formulas for an emotionally satisfying ending. To inhabit a genre with an intimate public is, therefore, to share not only a frame of reference but the very logic that governs what it is to have a life.

What Lee and Zhou call the success "frame," then, I move we consider an instance of genre. Genre, because one does not toggle between operating systems like frames at an eye exam. Genre identifies nothing less than *the kind of story one is striving to live*: what clichés one looks to as protagonist, what lines and character traits, what plot points and in what sequence. In this genre of hyperachievement, we all pretend to be the same superhero, because no one wants the truth, beauty, or possibility of our secret identities. Lee and Zhou are very clear that "for no other [racial] group is [success] defined as getting straight A's, gaining admission into an elite university, getting a graduate degree, and entering one of the four coveted professions: doctor/pharmacist, lawyer, scientist, or engineer"; their interviewees felt strongly that "doing well in school [etc.] not only is the expectation or obligation but also has become racialized as 'acting Asian' and the Asian thing."[41] This racial performance is compulsory, genre reminds us. Those who fall short in any particular—who attend a "lesser UC," say—feel themselves to be not only "failures" or "outliers" but ethnically or racially inauthentic. But, most of all, the work of genre is the cultivation of emotional investment and the neat pruning of hopes, so we need it to make sense of a young woman

so vested in a threadbare plot that she can imagine fulfillment in no other.

about the role

To review, then: Azia's imposture met both key elements of passing. (1) She stood to gain no undergraduate degree from her efforts, making her investment of time and effort irrational in economic terms. Whatever needs it answered are, therefore, also likely to have been irrational—in the dual sense of emotional (rather than material) and illogical (because a genre that funnels every teenager it can into maybe a dozen schools and four professions is illogic itself). (2) Press accounts suggest and interviews confirm that, while at Stanford, Azia took no risks with her stock image as a model minority and staged it mainly not to impress her peers but for the regard of her home-viewing audience. For a young woman who had nothing but free time, and no one anywhere by way of confidant, she displayed a degree of self-constraint baffling except as a continuation of a racial performance she was long accustomed to—and from which she did not now dare deviate.

Item one likely needs no further explication; circumstances speak for themselves. To see item two, however, we could use a little help, which luckily we have by way of a foil. What might it look like to pose innocently as a college student—that is, to sham, not scam—but without any interest in approximating the model minority? Why, it might look something like the story of David Vanegas: a Latinx college-age impostor with no criminal record and no enrollment status, whose caper bore enough parallels to Azia's that I am not the first to think of comparing them. Claiming to be a sophomore transfer from the University of Texas or sometimes a graduate student, twenty-year-old David spent over a year on the Rice University campus, "eating in Rice's dining halls, hanging out with students and attending classes. Some nights,

he crashed in friends' dorm rooms when he was too tired to go home."[42] While he was not able to score his own room, David's run at Rice was of commensurable length to Azia's at Stanford. And when caught out, the reason he gave for his deception "was that his mother was ill and he didn't think she could stand the disappointment of his not being a Rice student." David thus seems to meet both criteria for "passer," which, in fact, prompts an article giving a rundown of four impostors to pause and wonder the following about him and Azia, together:

> But what motivates someone to go to school and attend classes without any prospect of getting credit?
>
> Jerald Jellison, a former USC psychology professor who specialized in the study of lies, said some charlatans take on a new identity to hide a criminal past. But impostors like Vanegas typically begin their charade *to win approval from someone important, such as their parents.*[43]

The conflation of David's and Azia's motives doesn't hold, though. I'd maintain that the situational case where one bends over backward to avoid distressing an ailing parent is different from *trying to win approval from someone important*, period. Context matters. The former reads as a stopgap and the act of a loving (not beleaguered) son. The latter is open-ended, suggesting an ongoing effort that ratcheted up to some rather desperate measures.

Even were we to allow that Azia's and David's deceptions could in broad strokes be identical, their day-to-day performances were nothing alike. Regarding Azia, one article after another reported along these lines:

- Kim tried to keep a low profile—the *Stanford Daily* article does not mention her taking part in any clubs, although she did make friends in the Stanford dormitories and pretended to study for exams.

- Azia Kim, 18, said she was a human biology major and spent many evenings doing homework.
- [Kim] seemed to do her homework, often working late into the night on school papers.[44]

Such consensus makes the following generalizations about David stand out all the more:

- [Vanegas's] schoolmates began to notice odd things about him, like he never seemed to have any homework.[45]
- A lot of [Rice students] could recall seeing Vanegas . . . playing Nintendo in a dorm common area.[46]

This is a juxtaposition not about work ethics but about the great disparity in what these two young people felt to be at stake in lying to every loved one and every stranger. After David was busted, his previous behavior struck some as that of a man with nothing to do, nothing to prove: "You get to go to parties, you get free food, you get to hang out with people that are your age and have fun. Pretty much, [Vanegas] did nothing. He's being a bum."[47] No such conclusion was likely ever drawn about Azia: Having procured for herself nearly nine months of continuing financial support, freedom from parental oversight, and absolutely nothing by way of obligations, Azia spent her free time and disposable income in the campus library, approximating a Stanford freshman's devotions to textbooks and keyboards. There is no mention of her dating, shopping, boozing, or party going (pastimes noted about various other impostors, including Elizabeth Okazaki and Abe Liu). Residents and student staff at her dorm in the spring recall her at no residence hall socials or spirit activities, of which there were many. The press did discover that Azia had joined the Army ROTC at nearby Santa Clara University;[48] more on this later. Aside from that curious military training, I know her only to have joined a Korean drumming group at Stanford for at least

part of winter quarter[49]—so modest a social indulgence it can't have raised an eyebrow had word of it come to family friends, church deacons, or relatives back in Fullerton.

It may seem that one's everyday activities are hardly theatrical, being full of habits taken for granted rather than choices made for viewers, to perform a thing like race. Yet performance scholar Ju Yon Kim reminds us that racial performance *is* mundane, that what we're guilty of racializing is nothing if not these prosaic patterns: from "how people walk, speak, eat, or hold their bodies" to their "daily routines." "Although reading a newspaper in the morning," she explains, "might seem quite different from physical tendencies such as an accent or a gait," both such habits "at the limits of conscious action" are implicated in the everyday of *acting* racially white, say, or not. The day-to-day of *acting* model minority, then, is a matter of "activities like completing one's homework, preparing for exams, and practicing musical instruments"—and doing so, Kim notes, "excessively, automatically, ceaselessly"—in other words, to the exclusion of much else.[50] Between David and Azia, only one is engaged in posing not only as an undergrad at an elite university but, specifically, as an "Asian student," a racial form that circulates in American history as coolies and automatons: "Asian workers and students, maintaining themselves at little expense and almost robotlike, labor and study for hours on end without human needs for relaxation, fun, and pleasure."[51] If she was relatively extreme in performing this to the letter, that is, of course, because without an actual (admissions) letter, Azia's high-wire act had no safety net.

So, she did not call attention to herself. Unlike James Hogue or Adam Wheeler, Azia did not tell increasingly fantastic tales or vie for ever-higher prizes. Unlike Abe Liu or Birva Patel, she sought no social inclusion, risked no intimacies. Whereas indications are that the first two characters were compulsive liars, driven insatiably to elevate themselves above the crowd, by all reports Azia either meant to or was content to blend in. The Human Biology track she claimed—"perceived as *the* 'Pre-Med

major' for Stanford"[52]—ensconced her unremarkably among the campus Asian Americans. So long as she was lying, Azia might have claimed as prestigious a major as she liked; she opted out of the more rarified limelight of any "techier" and more impressive STEM.[53] Neither did she aim to stand out in physical presentation: Azia is said not to have worn makeup, and to have dressed primarily in jeans and sweatshirts, attire described by several dormmates as "nondescript."[54] As for relationships in those nine months, aside from the pair of roommates who eventually tired of lending Azia their dorm-room floor, she is remembered neither by the press nor by interviewees to have had particular friends. She is not said to have dated anyone. Let's think about this, then: The prodigious energy Azia invested in this performance cannot have been for the sake of strangers whose notice she hoped mainly to avoid. Stanford was her stage but not ultimately her audience.[55]

the show must go on

Such a desolate daily life to inflict upon oneself. We have genre to speak to the depth of Azia's commitment to the illusion; how might we understand its implausible success? Assuming her Stanford-acceptance fiction began in spring of senior year of high school, twelve months is a long time to lie and also a long time not to get caught. Did Azia mastermind an airtight story, brilliantly keeping her explanations straight? No, actually. There were inconsistencies, not always minor: to some people, she presented herself as a sophomore rather than a freshman (likely to explain something else that did not fit), leading to conflicting versions of a basic data point.[56] How is it, then, that her stories went so long unchallenged? Takeo, the resident assistant, suggested that for one, Stanford cultivates an exceedingly trusting culture, central to which is a student-authored honor code dating back to 1921. Like most (schools with) honor codes, Stanford prohibits cheating of all kinds. Unlike most (schools with) honor codes, Stanford prohibits proctoring: "The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above."[57] No doubt cultural priming this strong can make people less apt to suspect or investigate. Still, on Azia's part, her imposture may also have been relatively easy to sustain because what she was impersonating was . . . herself.

By any classic understanding, impostors like Azia are hardly "passing" at all. Having stood neither to improve her fortunes nor to upgrade her racial standing, Azia's project fundamentally does not seem to have been about the crossing of social barriers. In what sense, then, is the concept of passing even useful here? On one level, the analogy is simple: if drawn from sociologist Erving Goffman's work on stigma, passing may be succinctly defined as "the management of undisclosed discrediting information about the self."[58] And, sure enough, by deception, Azia sought to hide her rejection by Stanford. But what's more interesting, and hopefully clear by now, is that by keeping her apparently within the "success frame," deception allowed her to "pass" for a second-generation Asian American, *as that racial identity is now defined.* Scholars of historical race passing maintain that "since it is possible to pass only because that thing is already invisible, passing is therefore less a matter of hiding something than of refusing or failing to acknowledge something."[59] In practice, "race norms work through assumptions of" the privileged category, so, where whiteness is that category, "subjects are immediately assumed to be white in the absence of any telling marks of 'color.'"[60] But likewise, in the absence of any disclosed discrediting information, Azia is assumed to be a full member of her own visible, privileged racial set. Indeed, to consider Azia's ruse as passing is to understand a key difference in racialization and hierarchy in schools today versus in 1966—both in the United States and (importantly for the next chapter) in Canada: *Maclean's* published an infamous essay decrying the University of Toronto as "Too Asian," by which they mean a school "that is so academically

focused that some [white] students feel they can no longer compete or have fun."[61] In "ethnoracially diverse contexts," where Asian immigrant families have reached a critical mass, Lee and Zhou find that Asian American students "looked not to native-born whites but to high-achieving coethnic peers or siblings as their reference group when measuring their success" and, indeed, that other racial groups concur with this new academic hierarchy. That study of the new second generation thus jettisons the map on which whiteness is the destination for upward mobility—making a fundamental break from both classic assimilation and segmented assimilation models.[62] In other words, the traditional prototypes for assimilation and passing are inadequate and inaccurate to the social models and personal stakes of the hard-driving immigrant's child. For Azia, racial masquerade is not a matter of trading up for whiteness but of preventing the loss of her identity as model minority. Her mechanism is, thus, not the calculated pursuit of gain but the rather more primal avoidance of ruin.

This is to say that Azia's long lucky streak at Stanford may have had something to do with her project of "passing" or impersonation being not entirely different from the next Asian American's—who is, therefore, only "passing" in a looser sense. Here I borrow elements of "impersonation" from Tina Chen, to explain a claim much less sensationalistic than it may sound. In *Double Agency: Acts of Impersonation in Asian American Literature and Culture*, Chen draws a distinction between imposture and the subtle thing she wants us to see. Per that distinction, the impostor is an identity thief of sorts: "adopt[ing a] public identity that is understood to belong to someone else." Imposture is an act of deception, "the object [of which] is to fool others." What impersonators attempt, by Chen's contrast, are public identities that are *supposed* to be their own: They "perform themselves into being as persons recognized by their communities and their country," a kind of performativity with emphasis on duress and inauthenticity. Impersonation is about donning one's assigned racial "mask"—

externally imposed, often stereotypical, and ill-fitting though it may be—in order to have a place at the table. So, all of us who are Asian and would-be American muster shows of commonality and unthreatening relatability to reassure anxious observers that we belong—even as the very need to sing for our suppers reinforces the hierarchy that makes us at best guests (not family, much less hosts) at this table. I perform second-generation acceptability as I shop for groceries each week: smiling at other shoppers, bantering in perfected English about wine, standing politely in line. Likewise, however "confined, lonely, and defeated" she may feel there, a Chinese American undergrad conducts herself through Harvard thus:

> Surrounded by people who only told success stories, I felt that my stories must only reflect success, too. I became a performer in all aspects of my life. I performed roles as an Asian American, a premed, a Harvard student. Running around from class to lab to extracurricular activities, doing all the things I should be doing, I felt as though I had become an actress in someone else's play.[63]

As racial subjects forced to impersonate our own authenticity, Asian Americans are not liars . . . but we are all caught in the act. Chen's sympathy for impersonation comes, however, at the expense of imposture: "To be identified as an impostor is to be named a fake, to be called out as a pretender who doesn't belong to whatever group is evaluating the performance in question, to be somehow found inauthentic."[64] Yet, this opposition crumbles poignantly in Azia's situation: *Consider that her performance of self the day* before *she received her rejection letter and that performance on the day* after *she opened it may not have changed in any specifics*; it's just that a distant committee had since reclassified her a fake. Azia was, indeed, "pretending" to an identity writ small (as a Stanford student) but writ large as "model minority," this is also the *only* racial identity assigned and allowed to her—and it

is the identity that was formerly as much hers as any other Asian American impersonator's.

behind the curtain

Why, then, Azia? If her circumstances were so common, how did she come to make a choice so extraordinary? Admittedly, what answers I have for this question are far less definitive than I would have liked. When the story broke, and to this day, members of her intimate public have been sure of one thing: It was high-pressure parenting that drove her to it. As myself a member of that intimate public, I was tempted to agree—but, as a researcher, it's a theory I have been careful here not to endorse absent real corroboration. Proof (or disproof) would most likely have entailed my interviewing people close enough to the family to speak to their domestic life: the Kims themselves, of course; barred that, someone from their circles of confidants during Azia's high school years. But, in the decade since she became a human-interest story, Azia and her family seem to have vanished. To make an internet presence go so utterly dark, she has most likely changed her name. Those former contacts I have been able to interview, she hasn't communicated with since her exposure, and it appears her family likewise does not want to be found. As a scholar rather than a reporter, it is not my place to smoke them out of hiding. Despite the years since the press coverage did its damage and my best attempts to convey honorable intentions, many of those I've approached—key players and bit players alike—have been skittish to reply. Whatever their cost-benefit calculations, such reserve even now hints that this debacle carries a long half-life.

The broad reticence has been disappointing to me, yes; debilitating, I think no. Maybe even the opposite. Being held to observation points outside the home has helped keep this chapter mindful of its case study not for the plot—a mystery whose culprits we may or may not have guessed correctly[65]—but for the genre. Aside from Takeo, one of the two student staff tasked with the

actual packing and removal of her things from the dorm room, and her youth pastor at Cornerstone Church during her high school years, the people I've interviewed about Azia and cite here include:

- The Okada dorm resident assistant who brought up questions about Azia at a morning staff meeting; that very night she was escorted off campus. This resident assistant wishes to remain anonymous.
- Trent, then-freshman and resident of Okada. Trent also participated in the Korean drumming group that Azia joined Winter quarter.
- Anne, Okada staff resident fellow, supervisor to the resident assistants. Anne handled the administrative back-and-forth that established the facts of Azia's stay at Stanford.
- Hannah, a high school classmate for four years at Troy High School and two years at Parks Junior High School previous to that.

Their observations made possible some important fact-checks—while nonetheless holding us at enough of a remove from the story's center that its truth still contains multitudes. For instance, though he worked closely with Azia on multiple projects before she graduated, her youth pastor could not speak to the particulars of her family dynamics, not having received such confidences from her, her younger sister, or her parents. However, he did push back strenuously against attempts to characterize her parents as having pressured Azia too much, or having caused all this. "I think that's too much simplified," he said, more than once, and declared from experience that "when teenagers [are] having a family problem with their parents," observers can tell; such tension is visible. But in Azia's manner to her parents he saw no sign of that.[66] As they say, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence—but it should give a researcher pause. For Azia's story,

it serves as a reminder that there's more than one possible route to this ending, well within the genre. Sifting hypotheses proves meaningful only after we have taken full stock of our givens, however. So let's begin with what is known, then what can be extrapolated, to see where it all leaves us.

The burning question about Azia's family: Did she have Tiger parents? Answer: Unknown. Knowns about her family are as follows: Indeed immigrants, her parents owned a small business, in the vein of a dry-cleaner or garment factory. Azia spent junior high in a section of Fullerton with a large enough working-class Korean population to have something of an ethnic gang problem. The Kims were members of a Korean church, where her father was a part-time associate pastor.[67] What might be deduced: That the Kims lived well inside a community of immigrant social norms, assumptions, and values—the very kind of demographic to have a mind-meld around the success frame. That as small-time entrepreneurs, Azia's parents worked hours well before nine and after five. And as working-class immigrants, they may have had no higher education themselves; if any, it was likely in the old country. Their grasp of the educational machinery here would have been spotty and sourced heavily in "hearsay from friends and family members . . . rather than social science evidence" or research.[68] Drawing parallels between Azia's parents and her own small business–owning Korean immigrant mother, Hannah remarked, "My mom pushed me to all these things, but at the end of the day, if she saw an acceptance letter, she probably wouldn't even really understand if it was real or not."

The burning question about Azia's schooling: Was she a success-framed student? Answer: Yes, though not necessarily by the measures that come most immediately to mind. The classmate who vouched for Azia to reporters as a "brilliant person even though she didn't get into the Ivy Leagues"[69] fit the bill in much more obvious ways: Huy Nguyen was well-known at Troy as among the best of that senior class. He and a partner had

taken third in the national finals of the Siemens Westinghouse Competition in Math, Science and Technology, per write-ups in the *Orange County Register* and the Troy yearbook.[70] Voted "Most Likely to Succeed," he followed up Harvard undergrad with Harvard medical school, and, eventually, a career in ophthalmology. To compare Huy's yearbook footprint to Azia's is to realize that their respective college applications were more than a little different—and yet, the dreams that governed them remained very much the same. A genre accommodates infinite variations on its themes; we look at two here, because to know a genre is to heed its variations and still recognize its core.

For holistic views of a student's life at school, yearbooks are terrible; for capturing the lives of any but a school's stars, they are next to useless. But, because the kind of content they document is also the sort of thing colleges ask for, Troy's yearbook staff have essentially compiled for us trace evidence of their classmates' model-minority performance. In 2006, the yearbook indexed Huy as a member of the school paper, vice president of the Math Club, and copresident of the following clubs: Ocean Science Bowl, Medical Science Club, and French Club. Counting his senior portrait, as well as the popularity vote and Siemens write-up mentioned above, this totals eight mentions. Azia does not seem to have sat for her senior portrait, and so, counting her listing as copresident of the Refuge Christian Club, she appears once. The paucity of extracurriculars doesn't seem to have been a fluke; in junior year her sole appearance is her class picture. Sophomore year proved only slightly more active; that edition lists her as a member of the school orchestra and Junior Varsity swim team, even including a brief interview:

> Reflecting by the pool deck, Azia Kim remembers her 2-year struggle to improve in swim. When she joined Swim last year, she wasn't the best athlete. If asked, she admitted, "I pretty much stunk." But through encouragement from a friend to join a private team, her swimming

> improved, which gave her motivation to do better. "I didn't want to be as bad as I was before," she commented. Her progress had opened up social doors, also. "The best part is at meets when I have free time and get to talk to friends," she stated.[71]

The interview is endearing, but not the narrative of an overachiever. Truth be told, this is overall a strikingly slender high school profile, especially considering that, instead of ramping up for college applications, it seems to have gone dormant in the critical years. I admit I was surprised by the data, having expected to find evidence of diligent box-checking according to the King James Guide for Getting into College. I had anticipated a record something like Huy's. How else to explain Azia's apparent inability to unfix her sights from the Promised Land?

Well, once again, context matters. Picture your stereotypical American high school with its storied social hierarchy: the jocks, the burnouts, the nerds. . . . Local terminology may vary, but as anthropologist Sherry Ortner observes, "These social categories have been found in most high schools in most parts of the country for virtually the whole of the 20th century."[72] On one end is a "'leading crowd,' who enthusiastically participate in, and receive the sponsorship of, the school"; on the other, a "'rebellious crowd,' who reject the hegemony of the school and in turn feel largely rejected" by it;[73] and milling about the sidelines, those either "singled out for their superior academic performance" or "viewed primarily as having low levels of social skills."[74] Classically, students sort into a small set of identities by a combination of class background and individual temperament, and, like at Hogwarts, race or ethnicity play little role in the sorting calculus. Or, at schools with just enough Asian students to cluster, their racial dispensation is, of course, as nerd: "while images of all groups [have] a component of academic orientation and/or performance, the group image of Asians focuse[s] on their academic achievement"; other students think of them "as 'short' and 'wears glasses,' . . . quiet and not athletic."[75]

Neither of these configurations describes Troy. What we know about American high schools has only started to account for public schools like that or San Marino High, jewel of the wealthiest of suburbs in Southern California's San Gabriel Valley: student population 24 percent White, 58 percent Asian.[76] These are top-performing schools, and the kind that Lee and Zhou have in mind when they say that, there, the new hegemony is Asian American.[77] In such places, the *nerds* are Asian kids, yes: ethnically Asian names crush the honor rolls (and that's even granting that mixed-race kids may not have identifiably Asian surnames). But in such places, the *jocks* are Asian kids, too[78]—and, moreover, they are often the *same* kids. On the "Senior Standouts" pages, Asians have claimed all but a few spots, including everything from "Class brains" to "Best dressed."[79] My point here is not that such students have "broken" a stereotype; nothing so tired or blandly contrarian. Rather, as sociolinguist Penelope Eckert defines the jock figure, his essence is actually "an attitude—an acceptance of the school and its institutions as an all-encompassing social context, and an unflagging enthusiasm and energy for working within those institutions." This opens up the possibility that an "individual who never plays sports, but who participates enthusiastically in activities associated with student government, unquestioningly may be referred to by all in the school as a Jock." So, my point is that in aiming for the Ivies—pursuing their racial role to their utmost ability—Asian American teens have ironically *redrawn* the social categories. The Asian faces pictured in the Fullerton or San Marino papers for winning academic contests and sports championships alike—"seen as serving the interests of the school and the community, representing the school in the most visible areas"[80]—become the actual definition of jocks *by way of being nerds*. In a minority-modeled school like this, the implicit bar (or even norm) is not to specialize—not to be the best jock *or* nerd you can be, much less to embrace one's burnout identity—but to excel at everything.

As brutal as that standard sounds on the whole, I suspect that at Troy the pressure was worse. To say "Troy High School" is

Table 2.1 Troy High School Student Demographics by Program (2005–2006)

Program	Black	White	Latinx	Asian	Total students	% API
Regular	26	379	245	203	853	23
TT	3	129	28	153	313	49
IBT	6	183	29	652	870	75
IB	1	20	1	63	85	74

actually not enough information; Troy is three schools in one: an International Baccalaureate (IB) program, a magnet school called Troy Tech (TT), and the regular/"college prep" track, with graduating classes of about six hundred per year.[81] Eighth-grade hopefuls to the magnet school must undergo an examination that its website describes as "similar to the SAT I Math and Critical Reasoning exam,"[82] along with an equivalent English portion. Teens admitted to TT may, if they have successfully completed enough honors coursework in their first two years, be permitted to attempt the IB Diploma Program (those on that track are designated IBT in the table above; those successfully admitted, IB). The stratification is stark (it is public knowledge who falls where) and a kind of de facto segregation: According to Hannah, it was painfully obvious that kids who (like her and Azia) tested in from all over the region were nearly all Asian; the ones from the neighborhood, taking the regular track, were basically everybody else. In their graduating year, for instance, the school-wide demographic breakdown can be seen in Table 2.1.[83]

To grow up Asian here was, to the nth degree, to have racial identity ingrained as inseparable from model minority. To grow up Asian here was to live inside a success frame as artificial as a Hunger Game and, in its own way, vicious—because, of course, only one of the tributes can claim valedictorian each year, while the honor roll of 4.0+ GPAs runs three columns wide, fifteen pages long.[84]

So, it is certainly possible that Azia's parents forced her to apply to TT, that they would accept nothing less than the most-prestigious case scenario, or that they would not hear when she struggled, doubted, missed the mark. It is possible, say, that they often lectured her about their sacrifice, the family honor of certain colleges and the unacceptable shame of others. And, certainly, that would explain her seeming inability to say aloud that the thing required of her would not come to pass. But what if they had taken a less active role than that—not steering the slow disaster, but more complicit and complaisant in its course? Supposing Azia had simply been privy as relatives and community elders gushed about one teen's achievements or jeered about another's, and overheard as her parents clapped or laughed along. How would the message land differently? Would their standards sound meaningfully more optional? Suppose that, being unsavvy consumers of American education, Azia's parents had no real idea what TT life would be like for her when they bade her apply—and no real resources to support her when the curve began to stretch beyond her reach. Would its tracks seem any more yielding or its rankings feel any less total a judgment of her value? And, what if, a watchful daughter, Azia had known her parents sometimes skip meals, juggle their bills to keep the lights on both at home and at their very small business, but always they feed their children? Suppose that the family sometimes spoke of Stanford in wistful daydream, as the kind of game changer that would redeem these aches and pains. Sometimes, Bert Yun insisted to me, a parent may say something in a whisper but the child hears it as a roar. "How the children receive [it can be] bigger than how the speaker . . . who has authority" intended it, he said, and I can imagine this: the message amplified by the echo chamber in which it travels.

There are many routes, in other words, by which Azia might have arrived at that moment of finding her new truth impossible. Remember, after all, that the success frame is remarkable precisely for its ability to "make sense" to Asian immigrant families of amazing assortments—across class backgrounds, immigration histories, educational and cultural capital, countries and cultures of origin. What would seem to be insurmountable demographic

distinctions are no hindrance to those who would gladly align their personal and familial histories to model-minority plots.[85] Moreover, the fact that Azia's route does not necessarily chart with our most blithe guesses actually teaches us more about the power of the genre than a more rote example would. Had her parents clearly been Tigers of the worst stripe, had she herself been an impeccable student, we would need worry only about kids like this—those scaling the highest heights of the success frame, under threat. But Azia's story is made of experiences far more basic and widespread. Murmuring in one ear, a gratifying sense of inclusion in this status group, which allows one to move through school and community life as if anointed by model-minority logic: *You are one of the gifted or industrious*, it purrs, *who will go far in life.* Shrilling in the other, a nerve-racking sense of precarity—*Not good enough*, it hisses, *What a fraud*—as one is acutely aware in every encounter that one may be exposed for one's slips or mediocrities and disqualified. To be clear, I think it is the nature of the success frame to keep even its best and brightest feeling like impostors. Perfection by definition demands a facade, because it is humanly impossible: "even those who earned GPAs of 4.0," Lee and Zhou note, "pointed to others whose GPAs were even higher."[86] My point here, though, is that this corrosive cocktail of feelings is standard-issue to success-framed students, wherever on the hierarchy they may fall—and so long as they are trapped within the logic of this operating system, it primes them for variously desperate measures.

And this, finally, is what I've come to believe about Azia: that the decisive factor in her desperation wasn't which path, in particular, delivered her to that split in the road, but how many paths she could make out before her, to choose from. I believe that she saw only the single road through the success frame—which she had been walking all these years among her friends and peers—or a cliff. (And like Wile E. Coyote, she stayed her course until the one became the other.) After all, this was not someone in the habit of pushing her boundaries or making end-runs around them. What

her peers saw in classes and hallways at high school—Azia with hair in a ponytail or worn straight in a blunt cut, face presented without makeup, attire innocent of fashion trend or sex appeal—was someone "probably really respectful, obedient to her parents," who wants to "keep them happy."[87] This is a theme in her racial performance: Azia's rendition of the model minority included no donning of props or artful cosmetics, no acquiring of contraband. She did not attempt to signal one identity to one audience, a different version to another. She played the script straight.

So straight, you might say, that it is downright ironic to call her an impostor—she who was not self-inventing really at all. Once at Stanford, simultaneously impostor and impersonator of her own identity, Azia performed a singularly unlayered deception. Returning to Tina Chen, we learn that, even though a cultural "mask," the image of self that the impersonator assumes daily is "one that doesn't necessarily fall away to reveal some inner, essential truth of personality."[88] For Azia, this seems to be true even though the mask wasn't merely metaphorical; it was also operational. Behind her pretense, there are no indications of an alternate self, a different aspiration. This gets us to the heart of that otherwise baffling vacuum of rational motivations: What did Azia mean to gain from her ongoing pretense? She neither stood to receive a degree (from *any* college, and so opportunity costs are high), nor was she doing what teenagers are generally understood to do when lying to their parents. Of her known activities, the only one to bear explaining is ROTC: it alone seems more than stock model-minority. But whatever other attractions that program might have held, it did entail this:

> In her self-assessment [required by ROTC] . . . Kim reported earning A's in Stanford English and Humanities classes, an A- in economics and a B in chemistry.
>
> She reported that she earned an 86 out of 100 on her Feb. 5 economics midterm and a 94 on her Feb. 1 math midterm.[89]

For these grades, the ROTC "awarded her a special Dean's Award ribbon for her uniform,"[90] allowing her to live out her dream more fully: to be *reputed* not only as a Stanford student in a STEM major (ostensibly on track for one of the four approved professions) but as one on the honor roll. Floating inside a bubble she wrought at great cost, Azia held in her hands extraordinary freedom to reinvent herself. But the buttoned-down and unimaginative existence she chose seems to have been, quite literally, her fantasy life.

There's a story her youth pastor tells that encapsulates what he knows to be true of Azia, her goodness, and her value. It's actually not much of a story: no drama, no conflict whatsoever. Youth in their church were encouraged to help out with retreats or other projects, and Bert figured out quickly whom he could entrust with growing responsibilities, whom he could not. While some clamored to lead praise or join the media team—jockeying for glory in front of the camera or for power holding the mic—Azia volunteered for the paperwork, to organize retreats and other events. In rooms full of hormonal teens, she did not fuss and required no management, emotional or otherwise. "Let's say I give her the work, and then that's it. It's done. Others, I give them the work, it's not done, and then I have to go talk [to them] again, or sometimes they reject the work." To Bert, Azia is someone "you know you want to work with"; "Someone like her, maybe three or four around you, then it will be very smooth" when important things need doing. Her pastor saw her regularly as "very good mannered to her parents," being considerate and kind to others, such that "her joy was others' happiness, you know?" To hear her jeered in the press as a con artist hurt him. He tried to defend her then and gave an interview with me mainly to do so again, even though, granted, he had not managed to make any more sense of things. "I don't know what happened there, because Azia is [a] faithful, dependable, stable and good person, like through the Bible study she takes notes, even though you don't have to."[91]

Dear faithful notetaker, wherever you are in the world now, I hope you are well.

chapter three

Limit Case

Six months after Jennifer Pan was found guilty of first-degree murder in her mother's death and attempted murder on her father's life, *Toronto Life* magazine published the definitive profile piece on her case. It included the following passage:

> The more I learned about Jennifer's strict upbringing, the more I could relate to her. I grew up with immigrant parents who also came to Canada from Asia . . . with almost nothing . . . My dad expected me to be at the top of my class, especially in math and science, to always be obedient, and to be exemplary in every other way. He wanted a child who was like a trophy—something he could brag about.[1]

Written by a business reporter and former high school classmate, that July 2015 profile radically transformed the conversation around a daughter's heinous crime. Early coverage of the trial had echoed the prosecution's presentation, that Jennifer "planned

66. David Samuels, *The Runner: A True Account of the Amazing Lies and Fantastical Adventures of the Ivy League Impostor James Hogue* (New York: New Press, 2008), 155.

67. Also Tonica Jenkins, whose mother was arrested for attempted cocaine trafficking alongside her, and Esther Reed, described by friends to the *New York Post* as "once an obese teenage dropout so abused by her loved ones that she wanted to scrap her entire life" (Marianne Garvey, "Ivy Gal Fled Her Past," *New York Post*, January 12, 2007, available at https://nypost.com/2007/01/12/ivy-gal-fled-.her-past/). But each of these instances stands alone as true exceptions rather than forming a meaningful variant.

68. Christine Yano, and Neal Akatsuka, *Straight A's: Asian American College Students in Their Own Words* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 193–194.

69. Shapiro, "Harvard-Stanford Admissions Hoax"; Ashcraft, "Harvard + Stanford Genius Story."

70. "Father of 'Math Prodigy' Issues Apology," *Korea Times*, People, June 11, 2015, available at http://www.koreatimesus.com/father-of-math-prodigy-issues-apology/.

71. Chris Gabel, "Nevada Lineman Comes Clean: He Made Up Recruiting Story," *USA Today*, Sports, February 7, 2008, available at http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/sports/preps/football/2008-02-06-reno-confession_N.htm; Chris Gabel, "Football: Fernley's Hart Commits to Cal in Late Switch," RGJ.com, February 2, 2008, available at http://blogs.rgj.com/preps/2008/02/02/football-fernleys-hart-commits-to-cal-in-late-switch/; Josh Barr, "This Recruit Is Unreal," *Washington Post*, February 6, 2008, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/02/05/AR2008020503672.html?sid=ST2008020600092.

72. Mitch Albom, "This Is What Happens When We Turn College Sports Recruitment into Entertainment," *Jewish World Review*, February 11, 2008, available at http://www.jewishworldreview.com/0208/albom021108.php3.

73. Tom Friend, "The Boy Who Cried Cal," ESPN.com, March 10, 2009, available at http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/eticket/story?page=kevinhart.

74. Ibid.

75. Lee and Zhou, *AAAP*, 149.

76. Shapiro, "Harvard-Stanford Admissions Hoax," emphasis added.

77. Martin Conboy, *The Language of the News* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 38.

78. van Dijk, *News as Discourse*, 121, 122.

79. Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 4.

80. Duschinsky and Wilson, "Flat Affect," 179.

81. Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 18.

82. Ibid., 19.

83. See John Morreall, *Comedy, Tragedy, and Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

chapter two: Exemplary

1. Daniel Novinson, "Impostor Caught," *Stanford Daily*, May 24, 2007, available at https://www.stanforddaily.com/2007/05/24/imposter-caught/.

2. Takeo Rivera, "Takeo Rivera—Azia Kim: An RA's Reflection," *communicASIANS* xii, no. 1 (Fall 2007), 14, available at http://www.scribd.com/doc/2369461/CommunicASIANS-Fall-2007.

3. John Coté and Jill Tucker, "Wannabe Freshman Outwits Stanford," *SFGate*, May 25, 2007, available at http://www.sfgate.com/education/article/Wannabe-freshman-outwits-Stanford-2591998.php.

4. Lisa M. Krieger, "Stanford Impostor Fools ROTC, Too," *San Jose Mercury News*, May 30, 2007, available at http://www.mercurynews.com/news/ci_6018365?nclick_check=1. The sole exception to a decidedly unpathological portrait of Azia also comes from the *San Jose Mercury News*, which reports rumors of prior misconduct—but without benefit of attribution or apparent corroboration: "[Some f]ormer classmates at Fullerton's Troy High School . . . allege that she was disciplined for dishonesty while at Troy, and that her parents were informed." This loose end was, however, neither repeated nor corroborated elsewhere; my own interviewees had no knowledge of such incidents. Though such a history would certainly be pertinent, given its status as gossip it is perhaps best set aside.

5. In a "DC Moms and Dads" forum on (admittedly) Sara's case (but the point remains), one participant's succinct, if partly mistaken, response minced no words:

> "Anonymous: An Asian student got into Harvard and Stanford? This is news? Like, happens every day.
>
> Next."

("Amazing Story: Korean Student Gets Chance to Attend Both Harvard and Stanford," DCUrbanMomsandDads.com, June 7, 2015, 21:06, available at http://www.dcurbanmom.com/jforum/posts/list/15/476545.page.)

6. Harcup, *Journalism*, 30.

7. Novinson, "Impostor Caught."

8. Meyers, *News Coverage*, 22.

9. Because of this industry standard (the more "reputable" the publication, the more likely to practice this reticence), a number of our impostors must be presumed non-Asian by name and lack of other indicators, but cannot be definitively identified here by race. It is most likely that Patrick

McDermit, Lon Grammer, and Edward Meinert are white, if only because articles tend to find *some* fashion of signaling racial otherness. It is mentioned, for example, that Kenneth Foster hung around the African American theme floor at the USC dorms. This is, of course, not definitive information, but it is an example of the kind of oblique referencing that traditional journalism is given to.

10. Coté and Tucker, "Wannabe Freshman."

11. Jay Mathews, "Overachieving Students under Pressure," *Washington Post*, August 16, 2006, available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/discussion/2006/08/11/DI2006081101178.html.

12. Jay Mathews, *Harvard Schmarvard: Getting Beyond the Ivy League to the College that Is Best for You* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009).

13. Conboy, *Language of the News*, 38.

14. Catherine Squires and Daniel Brouwer, "In/discernible Bodies: The Politics of Passing in Dominant and Marginal Media," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no. 3 (2002): 285.

15. Daniel Novinson, "Imposter Caught," *Stanford Daily*, May 24, 2007, available at https://www.stanforddaily.com/2007/05/24/imposter-caught/.

16. "A Sad Charade," Mothertalkers, May 25, 2007, available at http://www.mothertalkers.com/2007/05/25/1726/a-sad-charade/.

17. C. N. Le, "Asian American Pretends to Be a Stanford Student," *Asian-Nation* (blog), May 31, 2007, available at http://www.asian-nation.org/headlines/2007/05/asian-american-pretends-to-be-a-stanford-student/; Jen Wang, "Oh Azia I Hate to Say Goodbye," *Disgrasian* (blog), May 29, 2007, available at http://disgrasian.com/tag/azia-kim/; Mike Lee, "Push to Achieve Tied to . . . Deception?" *8Asians* (blog), May 26, 2007, available at https://www.8asians.com/2007/05/26/push-to-achieve-tied-to-deception/.

18. Berlant, *Female Complaint*, viii–x.

19. Ibid., 5, emphases added.

20. "Asian Girl Pretended to Be Stanford Student for 8 Months," Polykarbon Art Forum, available at http://www.polykarbonbbs.com/archive/index.php/t-19027.html; Wang, "Oh Azia." Palo Alto being, of course, the location of Stanford and ground zero of Silicon Valley, with an Asian American population of around 27 percent in the late 2000s.

21. Berlant, *Female Complaint*, 5.

22. Lee and Zhou call the field's stance "antiquated": stalled at the 1960s. I agree that scholars who "flippantly [reject] the model minority" trope as political fiction (*AAAP*, 118, 11) must then ignore material realities that *accompany* discursive racialization and also the internalization of those realities and discourses as normal. See Ellen Wu's *The Color of Success: Asian Americans and the Origins of the Model Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014) and Madeline Hsu's *The Good Immigrants: How the Yellow Peril Became the Model Minority* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015) for more historically calibrated accounts.

23. Lee and Zhou, *AAAP*, 56, 61.

24. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 531.

25. Ibid., 520.

26. *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: How to Get What You Want in Your Relationships*, Amazon.com, available at https://www.amazon.com/Mars-Women-Venus-Communication-Relationships/dp/0007152590.

27. Butler, "Performative Acts," 520.

28. Guofang Li, "Other People's Success: Impact of the 'Model Minority' Myth on Underachieving Asian Students in North America," *KEDI Journal of Educational Policy* 2, no. 1 (2005): 72.

29. Min Song, *The Children of 1965: On Writing, and Not Writing, as an Asian American* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 43.

30. Paul Wong et al., "Asian Americans as a Model Minority: Self-Perceptions and Perceptions by Other Racial Groups," *Sociological Perspectives* 41, no. 1 (March 1, 1998): 113.

31. Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender," *Gender and Society* 1, no. 2 (June 1987): 130.

32. Butler, "Performative Acts," 528.

33. C. N. Le, "Asian American Pretends."

34. Vanessa Hua, "Accepted," in *Deceit and Other Possibilities* (Detroit: Willow Books, 2016), 82.

35. A Harvard senior whose visiting relatives insult her plans to pursue something other than medicine relates being told to "Just nod and smile." Rather than insist on defending what they disparage as her failure, she acquiesces, and "perform[s] the silence that was expected of me." Yano and Akatsuka, *Straight A's*, 141.

36. Vanessa Hua, interview with author, May 5, 2018.

37. See, for example: Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012); Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, "Cognitive Adaptations for Social Exchange," in *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture*, ed. J. H. Barkow et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 163–228; Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012).

38. Duschinsky and Wilson, "Flat Affect," 179.

39. George Ritzer and Douglas J. Goodman, *Sociological Theory* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 376, 377. Admittedly, "success frame" as it appears in *AAAP* does not necessarily do all this. Though Lee and Zhou (53) refer to

Erving Goffman's use of "frame" as an analytical, interpretive tool, syntax usually suggests a much more modest function: as an inflexible set of requirements. For example: "Even those Asian Americans whose outcomes *match the success frame* do not feel as successful as they would like" (8, emphasis added), or "Not only was a specific educational track critical to the success frame from the perspective of immigrant parents, but parents also strongly disapproved of and admonished *any deviation from it*" (56, emphasis added).

40. Duschinsky and Wilson, "Flat Affect," 179.

41. Lee and Zhou, *AAAP*, 112, 61.

42. Ruth Samuelson, "Faking College," *Houston Press*, October 12, 2006, available at http://www.houstonpress.com/news/faking-college-6576745.

43. Richard C. Paddock, "Living a Lie on Campus," *Los Angeles Times*, col. 1, June 13, 2007, 1, emphasis added, available at http://articles.latimes.com/2007/jun/13/local/me-impostor13.

44. Ian Lamont, "College Imposters, Part II: Azia Kim Exposed at Stanford," *Harvard Extended* (blog), May 26, 2007, available at http://harvardextended.blogspot.com/2007/05/college-imposters-part-ii-azia-kim.html; CS Staff, "Non-Student Lives at Stanford Dorm for 8 Months," *Campus Safety*, May 29, 2007, available at http://www.campussafetymagazine.com/article/non-student-lives-at-stanford-dorm-for-8-months/technology#; Jennifer Delson and Richard Paddock, "California Woman Fakes Her Way into Elite Stanford," *Seattle Times*, Education/Nation and World, May 27, 2007, available at http://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/california-woman-fakes-her-way-into-elite-stanford/.

45. Paddock, "Living a Lie," 1.

46. Samuelson, "Faking College."

47. Ibid.

48. An arrangement for Stanford students, who have no ROTC on campus.

49. Takeo Rivera, interview with author, March 31, 2018; Trent Walker, interview with author, May 7, 2018.

50. Ju Yon Kim, *The Racial Mundane: Asian American Performance and the Embodied Everyday* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 10, 3, 12. Per one premed Harvard undergrad, she spent high school going "through the motions. I took notes in class, I aced tests, I joined clubs, I became a leader on campus." At college? More of the same. Yano and Akatsuka, *Straight A's*, 138.

51. Gary Okihiro cited in Ju Yon Kim, *Racial Mundane*, 179.

52. Frosh FAQs, Program in Human Biology, Stanford University, available at https://humanbiology.stanford.edu/academicsadvising-declaring/frosh-faqs; emphasis added.

53. Rivera, interview.

54. Walker, interview; Rivera, interview.

55. Like Sara's charade, Azia's implies the kind of remote and extensive audience characteristic for Harvard undergrads, whose achievements yield "bragging rights" for "immediate and extended families that can go all the way back to Asia, schools and school districts, hometowns and counties, even friends and acquaintances." Yano and Akatsuka, *Straight A's*, 20.

56. Resident assistant, interview with author, October 5, 2018.

57. Rivera, interview; "Honor Code," Office of Community Standards, Stanford University, available at https://communitystandards.stanford.edu/policies-and-guidance/honor-code.

58. Valli Kalei Kanuha, "The Social Process of 'Passing' to Manage Stigma: Acts of Internalized Oppression or Acts of Resistance?" *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 26, no. 4 (2015): 28.

59. Pfeiffer, *Race Passing*, 7.

60. Catherine Rottenberg, "Passing: Race, Identification, and Desire," *Criticism* 45, no. 4 (2003): 438, 439.

61. Stephanie Findlay and Nicholas Kohler, "Too Asian: Some Frosh Don't Want to Study at an Asian University" [retitled "The Enrollment Controversy: Worries That Efforts in the U.S. to Limit Enrollment of Asian Students in Top Universities May Migrate to Canada"], *Maclean's* (November 10, 2010), available at http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/too-asian/.

62. Lee and Zhou, *AAAP*, 63, 60, 62, 53.

63. Yano and Akatsuka, *Straight A's*, 183.

64. Ibid., 6, original emphasis removed.

65. A blind reader for an early version of this chapter was so confident of the culprits to Azia's story that she dismissed the prospect of interviews as pointless: Why bother when such could uncover nothing surprising about the family, nothing we did not already "know."

66. Bert Yun, interview with author, May 18, 2018.

67. During her time at Stanford, he may have found his own ministry elsewhere; they were no longer at Cornerstone Church when the news broke. Yun, interview; Hannah Kim, interview with author, June 15, 2018.

68. Vivian S. Louie, *Compelled to Excel: Immigration, Education, and Opportunity among Chinese Americans* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 57.

69. Delson and Paddock, "California Woman."

70. Erica Perez, "O.C. Teens Win $40,000 at Science Contest," *Orange County Register*, December 6, 2005, available at https://www.ocregister.com/2005/12/06/oc-teens-win-40000-at-science-contest/ and https://www.linkedin.com/in/huy-v-nguyen-bb21a22/.

71. *Troy High School Yearbook 2004*, 245. I was not able to access the 2003 edition and, though these are public materials, I have elected not to delve into Huy's yearbook records beyond his senior year, in order to limit his exposure.

72. Sherry B. Ortner, "'Burned Like a Tattoo': High School Social Categories and 'American Culture,'" *Ethnography* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 2002): 117.

73. Penelope Eckert, *Jocks and Burnouts: Social Categories and Identity in the High School* (New York: Columbia University, 1989), 2.

74. David A. Kinney, "From Nerds to Normals: The Recovery of Identity among Adolescents from Middle School to High School," *Sociology of Education* 66, no. 1 (January 1993): 27.

75. Grace Kao, "Group Images and Possible Selves among Adolescents: Linking Stereotypes to Expectations by Race and Ethnicity," *Sociological Forum* 15, no. 3 (2000): 417.

76. "San Marino High School," GreatSchools.org, available at https://www.greatschools.org/california/san-marino/2917-San-Marino-High-School/.

77. Lee and Zhou, *AAAP*, 60–64.

78. Twenty of the twenty-four varsity sports teams at Troy in 2006 included Asian American athletes; nearly every extracurricular club (barring the very liberal-arts leaning ones) had all but exclusively Asian American memberships. *Troy High School Yearbook 2006*, 94–129.

79. *Troy Yearbook 2006*, 400–403. For a quick snapshot of San Marino High's "leading crowd," see the local paper: "San Marino High School" tag, *San Marino Tribune*, available at https://sanmarinotribune.com/tags/san-marino-high-school/.

80. Eckert, *Jocks and Burnouts*, 3.

81. Average size of an entire public school in the United States in 2018 was 503; in California, 596. "Average Public School Student Size," Public School Review, accessed November 10, 2018, available at https://www.publicschoolreview.com/average-school-size-stats/national-data. These numbers have stayed fairly flat nationally since 2005. "Enrollment trends," Fast Facts, National Center for Education Statistics, available at https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=65.

82. 2018–2019 Troy Tech / International Baccalaureate Programs Applicant Instructions for Current Eighth Grade Students available at https://www.fjuhsd.org/cms/lib/CA02000098/Centricity/Domain/235/Application%20Instructions%20and%20FAQ%20January%202019.pdf.

83. William Mynster, email message to author, December 3, 2018.

84. "Honor Roll," Troy High School, available at https://www.fjuhsd.org/Page/408.

85. See Lee and Zhou, *AAAP*, 4; the present "Introduction"; and my book *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 3–15.

86. Lee and Zhou, *AAAP*, 59.

87. Kim, interview.

88. T. Chen, *Double Agency*, 4.

89. Krieger, "Stanford Impostor Fools ROTC."

90. Lauren Smiley, "Elite College Hoaxer Showdown: Stanford vs. Harvard," *SF Weekly*, May 20, 2010, available at https://archives.sfweekly.com/thesnitch/2010/05/20/elite-college-hoaxer-showdown-stanford-vs-harvard.

91. Yun, interview.

chapter three: Limit Case

1. Karen K. Ho, "Jennifer Pan's Revenge: The Inside Story of a Golden Child, the Killers She Hired, and the Parents She Wanted Dead," *Toronto Life*, July 22, 2015, available at http://torontolife.com/city/crime/jennifer-pan-revenge/.

2. Alyshah Hasham, "Murder Trial Opens for Daughter Accused of Planning Parents' Death," *Toronto Star*, Crime, March 19, 2014, available at http://www.thestar.com/news/crime/2014/03/19/crown_outlines_case_against_daughter_accused_of_planning_parents_death.html.

3. Rosie DiManno, "Pan's Unspeakable Crimes Done for Love and Lucre: DiManno," *Toronto Star*, December 14, 2014, available at http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/12/14/pans_unspeakable_crimes_done_for_love_and_lucre_dimanno.html.

4. Ho, "Pan's Revenge," emphasis added.

5. DiManno, "Pan's Unspeakable Crimes," emphasis added.

6. Gordon Pon, "Importing the Asian Model Minority Discourse into Canada: Implications for Social Work and Education," *Canadian Social Work Review* 17, no. 2 (2000): 283.

7. Eleanor Rose Ty, *Asianfail: Narratives of Disenchantment and the Model Minority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 5.

8. The "decoder ring" section of the present "Introduction" and my book *Ingratitude*, 3–15; see also Lee and Zhou, *AAAP*, 4.

9. The two are noted as twin causes here, for instance: "intense parental expectations . . . as well as the extremely high standard set by the 'model minority' stereotype . . . contribute to students' psychological distress and alienation from parents and peers." Catherine Costigan et al., "Living Up to Expectations: The Strengths and Challenges Experienced by Chinese Canadian Students," *Canadian Journal of School Psychology* 25, no. 3 (September 2010): 223.

10. Duschinsky and Wilson, "Flat Affect," 179.

11. Tim Kelly, "York Crime Reporter Jeremy Grimaldi Wins National Book Award," YorkRegion.com, May 29, 2017, available at https://www.yorkregion.com/whatson-story/7340360-york-crime-reporter-jeremy-grimaldi-wins-national-book-award/.

12. "Jennifer Pan's Revenge," Toronto Life, Disqus, July 22, 2015, available at https://disqus.com/home/discussion/tlife/jennifer_pans_revenge_the_inside_story_of_a_golden_child_the_killers_she_hired_and_the_parents_she_w/.